



The DPS3 Turntable

by Jason Kennedy

Willi Bauer, maker of the dps turntable takes 'does what it says on the tin' product naming to new heights of clarity, or at least he does when you realise that dps stands for der plattenspieler or the record player. Willi is a Bavarian from Munich, home of Europe's finest high-end show and blokes who wear leather shorts. Willi as far as I know, does not wear lederhosen, but he does have a fascination for turntables, setting up his first one at the tender age of 15, culminating in 1999 when he started producing der plattenspieler.

The path that led to this result started with a Linn LP12 in 1978, replaced by a Pink Triangle Anniversary that arrived some fifteen or so years later. When PT went out of business he made a new bearing for the turntable but also invested in Bill Firebaugh's radical Well Tempered design, with its tonearm suspended on fishing line and a bearing that was propped in a box of oil. Looking at the dps you can see how Willi combined ideas from both of those designs. You have a similar approach to the WT plinth in the dps sandwich, along with a PT style acrylic platter.

But look a little closer and you will find there is plenty to distinguish the dps. The inverted bearing is composed of a tungsten shaft supporting an engineering plastic sleeve and uses a ruby ball to take the weight of the platter. The bearing shaft uses rubber O rings and a high viscosity oil/silicone mix to provide a specific and high level of resistance to the efforts of the motor. The idea here is to combat dynamic wow. This is the notion that variations in the signal create variations in drag

at the stylus/vinyl interface, supposedly because friction varies with signal. Others get around this by making the platter very heavy so that its inertia can overcome this issue, but there are those that dislike mass because of its ability to store energy. Acrylic platters are also extremely stiff and have a relatively high resonant frequency, something which the heavily

primarily intended to act as an energy sink for the motor that sits upon it, but it also supports three foamed elastomer pucks which sit in cups that can be adjusted for height. You don't use them



to level the plinth as this changes the angle of the platter relative to motor, but rather to bring the top plate up to the same height as the top of the motor body.

damped bearing on the dps attempts to control or at least ameliorate.

Acrylic platters of yore have often produced a highly dynamic and exciting sound but one can't help feel that this is due to resonance within the material being transmitted through the vinyl into the stylus. Listening to the dps 3 it seemed that the combination of bearing design, the threaded plastic record clamp and plinth design managed to retain the speed associated with acrylic without the associated resonance, it's still a more lively deck than my SME 20 reference but then again, most things are.

The plinth is made up of four layers although the first, a dense foam matt in a fetching shade of green, is so slim that it's not visible. It is important however as it forms a constrained layer sandwich between the supporting surface and the turntable base proper which is a granite slab. This slab is

Next up is the layer with the wooden surround, this contains a laminate of wooden and damping foils topped with a layer of cork which should have the effect of stopping high frequency resonances from getting into the black acrylic top plate. This top layer is where the tonearm and main bearing are supported and like the rest of the plinth is held in place by gravity and friction alone. In fact there are no real fixings as such on the turntable, the bearing housing slots into the plinth and the motor sits on the granite slab. If you decide you'd like to save on dusting time the optional lid also just sits on the top of the deck, with small transparent feet stopping it from sliding off.

The top plate and the next layer need to be made to accommodate your arm of choice. dps markets its own reworking of the Rega RB250 which has Incognito cable and a tungsten stub and counterweight

▶ as well as waxed-paper damping in the tube. This arm just slots into a hole in the black acrylic and is fixed by a grub screw from the side, thus allowing adjustment of VTA. The SME arms being somewhat bulkier require a larger hole in the wood layer to accommodate the cable outlet.

There are two dps turntables or, to be precise, there is one turntable with two alternative power supplies for the AC motor. The dps 2 has a single-phase supply with switching and adjustment for 33/45, while the dps 3 considered here has a synthesised three-phase supply which offers the same facilities but is twice the size. These power supplies are made by Willi's cohort Lawrence Martensen whose MPS phono stage I got quite excited about a few issues back. They share the same style casework with (beautiful) blue LED pinpricks to indicate status. The benefit of three-phase operation according

to Martensen and Bauer is that each phase is spaced from the next by 120 degrees, which forms a virtual rotating magnetic field within the motor's windings. This is said to result in much smoother rotational forces when correctly set up. Which is where the many slot head bolts in the front of the PSU and the sockets in the back

come in. They change the relative angle and amplitude of each phase and are factory set. So, in practice there are only two controls of relevance, neat little toggle switches that control speed and on/off. Given the threaded clamp, you need to make sure the switches are readily accessible.

Listening started with the dps arm carrying a van den Hul

that is so real it could be in the room. But there is also a hint of hardness to the sound which I decided to counter with a plastic bodied van den Hul Colibri cartridge. This went a long way to providing a better balanced result, the sound being less incisive but more relaxed, tonally richer and even more enjoyable.

Bringing the SME V and matching plinth components into play not only improved the appearance



Condor cartridge and a comparison between the single-phase and three-phase supplies, the larger, more expensive box delivering greater resolution of acoustic space, more subtlety and higher levels of detail alongside a calmness that allowed higher volumes without discomfort. But as the listening progressed other qualities became apparent, not least phenomenal

dynamic range thanks to an incredibly low noise floor.

The acoustic signature of the Pointer Sisters' backing vocals on Taj Mahal's

Sweet Home

Chicago is so utterly

different to that on the

lead vocal

that one wonders whether the same studio was used on this 1972 recording (*Recycling The Blues & Other Related Stuff*). On Richard Thompson's more up to date but not entirely dissimilar *Old Kit Bag* the higher recording quality has a visceral solidity and presence

of the dps but also took the bass in particular into another league. Whether it was over \$1,500 of extra league depends on the resolution of the accompanying system but in the context of a Trichord Delphini phono stage, Russ Andrews HP-1 pre-amplifier and ATC SCM150A active speakers it seemed a fair price for the increase in analysis offered. That said, the dps RB250 is remarkably good and if budget limits you to the choice between a dps2/SME V and a dps3/dps RB250, the latter would be my choice. Having said that I do love the way that the Series V produces such richness of detail and solidity of sound, especially in the all important nether regions, an underpinning which affects everything you play. Take *Newport Rebels* on Candid from the early sixties. There's no real, deep bass on this superb recording but there is a heck of a lot of life and energy coming from instruments that have grittily real timbre. ▶

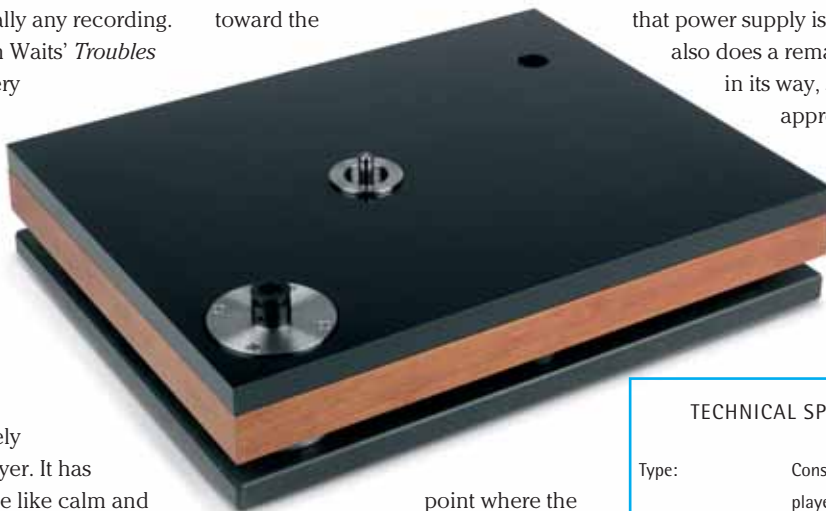


► I also listened to the dps 3 in the more neutral environs of an Audio Zone Pre-T1, Gamut D200 power amp and B&W 802D speaker system. This set-up suggested that any hardness encountered previously was not coming from the turntable and perhaps that the RA pre-amp is not as well matched to the ATCs as I'd hoped. It also revealed more of the space that the dps 3 finds around acoustic instruments on virtually any recording. So much so that Tom Waits' *Troubles Braids* expanded every which way and delivered dynamics that were surprising in their vivacity, the double bass and percussion being unusually unfettered for a commercial recording.

This is a supremely analytical record player. It has an almost master tape like calm and precision that allows every nook and cranny of each recording to be heard. Some might find this approach a little short on thrills, speed or whatever you want to call it but they should really be looking to their record collection for these qualities. A lot of that excitement comes from colorations introduced by less sophisticated turntables, noise on the power supply, vibrations in the turntable etc. The dps 3 cuts out more of that hash than most designs I've heard and to be frank I'd be intrigued to hear what its power supply and motor could do for my SME Model 20. But I found plenty of thrills in my record collection thanks to the remarkable transient response of the plattenspieler.

As with all the turntables I've tried that have low compliance (stiff) suspension the dps 3 was improved by placement on one of Max Townshend's highly isolating equipment supports. Willi recommends solid stands or wall

brackets but he clearly doesn't have his turntable less than a metre from a 150 litre active loudspeaker! The move to the Townshend stand brought about an increase in bass weight and a drastic improvement in three-dimensionality. Even the background seemed to get quieter, allowing Gidon Kremer's violin on Arvo Pärt's *Fratres* to create unnerving tension as it builds in volume toward the



point where the piano joins in. The dps3 has an almost digital noise floor; I say almost though because it has all the beauty, depth and vibrancy of analogue, so in truth it probably sounds more like analogue tape but I've not heard enough of that (outside of cassette) to say for sure.

If you go to Willi's Bauer Audio shop in Munich you are more likely to find his turntable equipped with a Schröder, Graham or Tri-Planar pick-up arm and it would be fascinating to try any or all of those. I don't think however, that you would change the innately calm and resolute character of the turntable. You would just get a more or less neutral or revealing result depending on the quality of the arm used. The fact that such revealing results can be achieved with a revamped Rega is testament to the intrinsic quality of der plattenspieler. It's perhaps a little inconvenient that changing the arm

requires replacing the acrylic top plate (and sometimes the next layer down as well) but I don't imagine that a new plinth top will break the bank to the same extent as a Linn Kee!l

The dps 3 is the most composed and purposeful acrylic-plattered turntable I've heard. In fact it's one of the best I've heard, full stop. Its levels of neutrality impose stiff demands on accompanying components and whilst that power supply is very expensive it also does a remarkable job. Which in its way, sums up the dps approach perfectly. ►+

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type:	Constrained plinth record player with standalone motor
Bearing Type:	Inverted with ruby ball
Speeds:	33/45
Power Supply:	Single-phase or three-phase AC
Dimensions (HxWxD):	180x450x350mm
Weight:	23kg
Finishes:	Maple, cherry, walnut
Number Of UK Dealers:	1
Guarantee:	5yrs
Prices –	
dps 2:	£4,800
Lid:	£150
dps3 upgrade:	£2,050
dps RB250 tonearm:	£450

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Manufacturer:

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