



# Signed, sealed and delivered

**Tony Bolton gets in a spin with the new entry level turntable from Acoustic Signature.**

**A**coustic Signature have been making turntables for 15 years in their factory in Eislingen, to the East of Stuttgart in Southern Germany. The UK range, distributed by Air Audio, consists of six decks, starting with this model, the Ecco, priced at £1000 without an arm. The top of the range is the £18,000 Ascona.

This entry level deck is quite substantial, with a 50mm thick MDF plinth that is finished in matt black spray paint (a piano gloss version is also available for £400 more). The front is gently curved and chamfered across the top edge, which results in a pleasingly understated look to the turntable. On top of the plinth sits a solid machined aluminium platter that is 24mm thick and weighs 4.3 kg.

The underside of this is coated with a resonance reducing material which seemed quite effective when I gave it a sharp rap with my knuckles. Instead of the usual ringing from a metal platter there was just a dull thunk.

This platter contains the hardened and polished steel shaft of the bearing assembly. It rests in a housing that uses sintered bronze inserts which are claimed to be self-

lubricating. The base of the bearing is coated in a proprietary material called Tidorfolon. This was specially developed by Acoustic Signature and consists of a combination of vanadium, ferrite, Teflon and titanium. It is designed to run dry. The bearing carries a ten year guarantee.

The motor passes through a hole in the back lefthand side of the plinth where it drives the square section drive belt that fits around the outside of the platter. Power for this is provided by the Alpha-S power supply unit. This uses a crystal quartz oscillator to regenerate a perfect sine wave to ensure that the rotation of the platter is as smooth as possible. Speed change is controlled by a switch on the front of the rather neat brushed alloy fascia, as is the on/off function.

The deck is designed to accept any Rega tonearm, or any arm based on that design and geometry. The decks usually leave the factory with a Rega arm fitted, however customers can specify their own choice of arm. The review sample was fitted with an Origin Live Silver arm (see box-out for more details).



**The 24V AC motor is encased in a heavy alloy casing. It has non slip feet underneath.**

would advise reading the instructions for the Origin Live arm, since a couple of points, such as the very small hex-bolt used to secure the anti-skate weight support, are not immediately obvious.

I started off playing the Fun Lovin' Criminals first LP from 1996. The opening track, 'The Fun Lovin' Criminal' opens with the beat described on a guitar, which is then joined by the rest of the band. The sound was quite sprightly and immediately got my feet tapping away. The rhythm of this track is very hip-hop flavoured and the Acoustic Signature seemed to do quite a good job in reproducing the

bounce in the beat.

However, I did feel that there was a slight lack of attack to the leading edges of it. I suspected the rather thin and flimsy felt mat that is supplied with this deck of possibly being the culprit, so put a couple of pieces of double sided sticky tape between the platter and the mat. This had the effect of adding a little more impact to the beat and making it feel a bit tighter and snappier.

I also tried an Origin Live Platter mat (£39.95) which is about the same thickness as the felt one, and found major improvements in

"this had the effect of adding a little more impact to the beat and making it feel a bit tighter and snappier."

every aspect of the sound, from bass depth through to separation of the instruments. It was a very worthwhile upgrade, and if I was buying one of these decks then I would budget for this as well. I returned to the standard felt mat, taped to the platter, for the rest of my listening.

Later that evening I found myself lost in other complex rhythms, this time from Latin America. The bass and conga drums of 'Shirley's Guaguanche' had a very persuasive swing to them. The flute, and doubled up vibes and pianos appeared in front of me,

**The large bearing housing, counterweight and stub are Origin Live's development of the original Rega design.**



**The motor can be seen in the far corner of the deck. It passes through a hole in the plinth and is free standing.**

sitting squarely between the speakers. It appeared to my ears to be a well defined soundstage, with the left and right edges very firmly marked out. Some decks allow the sound to fade into the shadows, but this one gave the impression of a firm cut off between the stage lighting and the inky blackness beyond.

The next day was spent playing classical sounds starting with Berlioz's 'Le Corsaire' Overture. I found the LSO neatly framed and well described, although I did feel that there was a very slight tendency for the strings to be a little too obvious on occasion. It was nothing major, but I found myself having another fiddle with the arm set up to see if I could tune it out.

In the end I swapped to the Clearaudio Concept MC cartridge which normally resides on the Sondek. This has a slightly richer tonality than the Ace, but even after this change I still felt that the string sound of this and other LPs was not quite as well balanced as the rest of



**Origin Live fit an aircraft grade, alloy arm tube and head-shell which are considerably stiffer than the original components**

the sounds that I was listening to.

I finished the evening with Chopin's Nocturnes and Etudes. The piano sound was very good, with no undignified wobbles to the notes. As the record played I realised that this deck had a very subtle way of imparting emotion. I had, up to this point, been thinking that this was a Four Globe review. I liked the deck and arm combination, but had felt while it did wonderful things with rhythms, and produced a wide tonal spectrum in a very detailed and generally accurate way, that it was a bit more emotionally reserved than I like to hear.

This record altered that perception. By the third track, 'Nocturne No. 2 in E flat major', I realised that I had been drawn into the music, rather than listening to, and analysing the sound. I was relaxed, and instead of focussing the direction of my attention, it was being naturally drawn to the music.

With some decks, such as the Linn Sondek LP12, this is an obvious part of their appeal, but with this one, the immediate appeal is more beat and image driven. The emotional aspects of music are dealt with in a less obvious, rather more understated way, which will hold a lot



**The Alpha-S quartz crystal regenerative power supply unit**

of appeal to some listeners. So with this combination of timing, imaging and a dignified emotional presence, I decided that it was good enough to

receive Five Globes.

The finish and presentation are very good with one exception. I did not like the rather clumsy looking countersunk screws securing the arm.

#### SYSTEM USED:

Benz Micro Ace L and Clearaudio Concept MC cartridges.  
Luxman E200 phono stage.  
Townshend Allegri passive pre-amp  
2 x Quad 303 power amps  
Kelly KT3 loudspeakers.

### ORIGIN LIVE SILVER ARM

The Silver arm, from Southampton based manufacturer Origin Live ([www.originlive.com](http://www.originlive.com)) retails at £675. It uses the standard Rega fitting and shares its geometry with all Rega 9-inch arms. Origin Live first introduced this arm in 2002 and now offer the Silver in Mk 3A form. The specification includes an arm tube that is made from aircraft grade alloy and Origin Live's own design of stub for the counterweight. This is fitted into the arm by a thin, high tensile bolt. The shape of the stub reduces the contact area with the back of the arm tube, thus causing it to be better decoupled, and, at the same, more rigid than the standard Rega fitment.

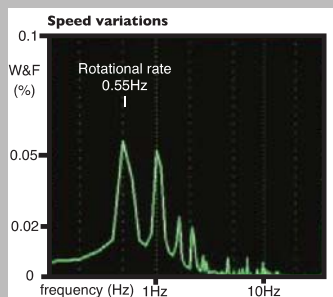
The arm bearings are Origin Live's own, with low friction bearings mounted inside a floating bearing housing. The internal wiring consists of Litz cable and the phono plugs at the other end are what is described as "high conductivity RCA plugs".

Other improvements over the conventional Rega unit include an integrated VTA adjuster fitted to the shaft below the bearing housing.

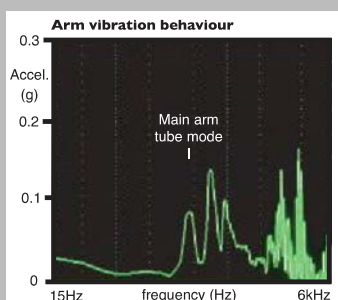
### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Acoustic Signature held basic speed very well, producing a steady 3165Hz reading from our Wow&Flutter meter that

#### SPEED VARIATIONS



#### ARM VIBRATION



Domed head screws would have been more in keeping with the style and neatness of this turntable

I think that the Acoustic Signature Ecco! is an easy deck to live with, although fans of the airier, more holographic suspended subchassis sound may find this a little unromantic for their tastes. The sound is satisfying, and extended listening reveals it to be a more complex presentation than it first seems. Definitely worth an extended audition.

#### MUSIC USED:

Berlioz. 'Berlioz Overtures'. London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Andre Previn. EMI Records Ltd. ASD 3212. 1976.

John Ogden 'Plays Popular Chopin'. EMI Records Ltd. HQS 1189. 1969.

Various Artists. 'Latin Jazz Dance Classics Volume 2'. Cubop/Ubiquity Recordings Ltd. CBLP 010. 1997.

Fun Lovin' Criminals. 'Come Find Yourself'. EMI Records Ltd/Chrysalis. CHR 6113/7243 B 37566 1 2. 1996.

**ACOUSTIC SIGNATURE ECCO! £1000 (WITH ORIGIN LIVE SILVER ARM £1675)**



#### VERDICT

Precise and level-headed sounding entry-level turntable from Germany.

#### FOR

- excellent sense of rhythm.
- precise soundstage.
- subtle emotional presence.

#### AGAINST

- odd choice of arm mounting screws
- very occasional firmness to string sound

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Wow 0.2%  
Flutter 0.05%  
W&F, DIN Wtd 0.15%  
Speed +0.5% fast