
ORIGIN LIVE SILVER TONEARM

by Steve Davey (excerpt)

Although I am a supporter of the theory that the most important part of a Hi Fi system is the front end, as you can't replace information in the signal that wasn't extracted from the source material no matter how good the rest of the components, until recently I hadn't appreciated the influence of the tonearm.

I had been intrigued by reports of a super arm at a real world price from Origin Live - it's Silver 250. And as a company with quite a reputation for modifying the Rega tonearms to improve upon an already legendary design, I felt I ought to investigate. Having been impressed by their DC-motor upgrade for my LP12 I was expecting good things but I was totally taken aback by the sonic performance of the Silver 250...read on.

How does it Look and Feel?

One of the key design features of this product is the armtube that sits within widely spaced horizontal bearings, atop the black Rega base and vertical bearing. The design aim being to dampen vibration set up in the arm and prevent reflection of acoustic waves back into the cartridge.

Internally, high grade Litz wire is hard-wired to the rather thick inter-connect cables terminated by substantial high conductivity phono plugs. At the cartridge end of things, PTFE silver plated flying leads are terminated with gold plated copper beryllium cartridge tags.



The arm comes with excellent fitting instructions. Overall once set up the Silver 250 looks and feels like a quality item, especially when coupled with modern open-style turntables such as the Orbe - but that's a matter of personal taste!

I tried a number of cartridges with the arm including my usual MC AT33 as well as some MM whilst testing a phono stage, and at first I thought set up might be a bit tedious due to the VTA adjustment method. But no it was fine and if there is no requirement to frequently change the cartridge (which is likely to be so for the vast majority of potential customers) then a couple of hours installing and setting up the arm really isn't an issue. I can now change cartridges in a matter of minutes and in all other respects this arm is a reviewer's dream...let me explain.

So How Does it Sound?

To begin with I found this arm both a revelation and a frustration. The instant I lowered the arm onto Led Zeppelin's Whole Lotta Love - set spinning on the LP12 - I realised that this arm was special. This track is not one of my normal „killers“. I simply fancied listening to it while I played around with the tracking force and VTA - to get a feel for the arm.

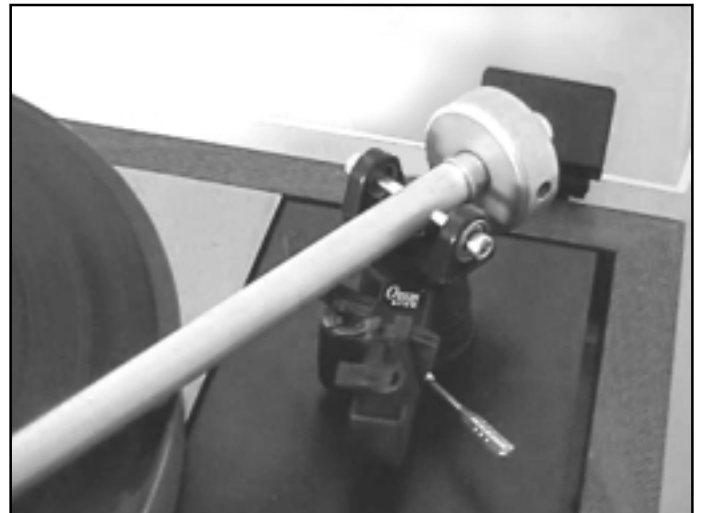
But the shimmer on the cymbals, the power of the drums, the tightness of the bass, the ambience of the recording, the vibrancy of the guitars and sheer emotion of Robert Plant's performance came flooding out of the 'speakers. Before proceeding any further with the set up I sat down and listened to the whole of Led Zep's second album.

This arm invites you just to listen and not to fiddle in search of a better sound. But after a little bit of adjustment the top end performance was improved somewhat but I had just about hit the sweet spot straight out of the box! There then followed an evening of pulling out record after record just to hear what they sounded like with this arm in place.



Everything I play was so improved. The low frequencies on Leftfield's *el cid* just went deeper and deeper, and as a whole I could play the track at ear-splitting volume before harshness set in, which I can only attribute to there being a very pure signal indeed being conveyed to the amplifiers. One record that was a real surprise with the Silver 250 in place was *Out of Control* by the Chemical Brothers. The urgency and flow of the songs construction was laid bare and so cleanly rendered that yet again the volume control was wound further and further clockwise to create that nightclub feel.

The arm conveying delicacy just as brilliantly as it did raw power. Having enjoyed listening to the arm the frustration came when writing this article. I could not pin down why I liked the arm so much - what was it doing to make such an impact? I suspected that it had no sonic signature, that is to say it was as near as makes no difference simply conveying the signal from the record to the amplifiers. But how does one assess such an idealistic quality? Even comparing it with others arms, perhaps much more expensive than the Silver 250, would only show up differences and maybe flaws in their performance. I concluded, therefore, that since I was expecting the Orbe, some speakers and a phono stage to review, one approach would be to listen to the performance of these components and try to spot any invariance in the sound that might be ascribed to the arm. OK this is not precise science but who could claim that Hi-Fi ever is?



Next up was the Orbe, replacing the LP12. **Having heard the Orbe before equipped with an upgraded SME IV I was delighted to hear the improved imaging, much tighter bass coupled with a sweet and open top end.** AND the Orbe/OL250 combo really rocked ... But all I could conclude from exchanging the LP12 with the Orbe was that the Silver 250 was equally at home with both turntables.

Conclusion

Referring to the Silver 250 as a tool may sound rather damning with faint praise but it is not intended to be. Indeed I can think of no other component that I have heard that deserves this accolade because it provides such excellent transparency that it imparts no discernible sonic characteristic on the music that I could hear. The fundamental requirement of a test tool!

There may be better value propositions around to upgrade your system but if there is I haven't heard them - for 840 euros (980 EUR d.A.) you get a component that lets your system realise its full potential. **fully anticipate this product remaining at the heart of my system for many years to come.** A fantastic product then from Origin Live and this particular audiophiles dream review tool.