

MISSION 770

The 'revival' version of a classic design of decades ago is true to the original – but better!

iFi AUDIO ZEN STREAM

This slender network player/DAC is fully capable of taking the fight to the big boys

VERTERE DG-1S

Newly improved version of the radical record player raises the game on looks and performance

NEAT PETITE CLASSIC

There's nothing small about the sound of the latest version of Neat's first speaker

GRIMM MU1

Highly-accomplished – and flexible – network player has real studio heritage

HAVE WE BEEN GETTING DSD WRONG?

Keith Howard challenges the online criticisms

PLUS

Cyrus Classic AMP; headphones from Focal, Bowers & Wilkins and more; valve power from Australia; plus views, comment and music

AND THAT'S MAGICO!

The all-metal A5 floorstander is, Martin Colloms says, 'clearly one of the world's finest-sounding loudspeakers'





Dynamic refinement

THE FIRST RUNG OF THE VERTERE PRODUCT RANGE RECEIVES UPDATES LOOKING TO BOOST BOTH PERFORMANCE AND FUNCTIONALITY. ED SELLEY PUTS IT THROUGH ITS PACES.

The original Vertere DG-1 was something of a surprise both in terms of what it set out to do and how it did it. To produce a turntable that was significantly less expensive than the MG-1 – up to that point, the most affordable model in the range – founder and designer Touraj Moghaddam employed some wholly original engineering principles, most notably in the arm, to create a turntable that adhered to his philosophy but that cost significantly less.

The original DG-1 – the name means ‘Dynamic Groove’ – was reviewed by Chris Kelly in the Jan-Mar ’20 edition of HIFICRITIC, and his comments were enormously positive. I looked at it for another publication at about the same time and I was very nearly as effusive in my praise there, but where we differed slightly was how the DG-1 felt to live with. Chris was completely happy with this aspect of the Vertere, whereas I found myself thinking that some parts of its operation were sufficiently quirky that I felt it might not appeal to some would-be customers.

Now the £3550 DG-1S has appeared: it’s still recognisably the same turntable as before, albeit now in a choice of black or white gloss finishes, but Vertere has focused on improving performance and dealing with some of the operational quirks that the original possessed. As well as these two aims, the DG-1S also makes more use of the ecosystem of Vertere components that has come into being since the original was launched.

At its core, the Vertere is still an unsuspended, belt driven turntable that makes use of an integral tonearm. From there though, the details begin to

change significantly, quite literally from the ground up. There are still three feet, but they are now more compliant than the originals and improve the levels of isolation on offer. The construction of the DG-1S plinth has been tweaked too. The basic design is a simplified version of the bigger models, in that layers are separated with isolating couplings, with a sub chassis in the top plinth. In this latest version, the coupling has been revised with a view to further improving the isolation and resistance to resonance.

In the centre of this subchassis is the bearing which has a new, higher quality polishing arrangement and tighter tolerances, dropping the noise floor and improving measured performance. The platter which sits on it is unchanged from before and is a relatively thin device made of aluminium alloy with an integral PETG record mat. The importance of this surface has declined though because Vertere would now like you to use the Techno Mat, a £150 (AUD\$295) composite of cork and polymer layer with a randomly fibrous upper section.

The motor that acts on the platter is unchanged from before and it still moves on its axis while



66 *Build quality is extremely good and the new optional white finish works well, retaining enough black detailing to set the white plinth off nicely*

accelerating the platter up to speed before returning to upright once this has been reached. The power supply has been modified for this new version: revised Motor Drive software allows separate adjustment in two steps, initially the sine wave voltage and then the cosine wave adjustment at the final stage, for the absolute lowest noise and vibration. As standard, all DG-1S models ship with a simple wall-wart PSU but there's now the option of using the Challenger linear PSU that also works with the Tempo motor drive of the higher-specification models.

Newly armed

However, it's the arm that's received the most attention. The premise is unchanged: there are no bearings in the conventional sense, but rather bundles of nylon thread on the vertical and horizontal axis to suspend an 'armtube' that's actually a flat PCB and laminate sandwich. The suspension has been tweaked to improve its tolerances, and this has the effect of making the arm feel much more 'normal' in terms of cueing – it will also drop onto the same point on the record if the arm-lift is used, which the original DG-1 I tested couldn't do. VTA adjustment is also much easier, and you can now adjust azimuth, too.

The revised arm is constructed from a five-layer polymer laminate bonded to a second five-layer polymer laminate. The PCB flex signal carrier is bonded in-between the two laminates. Something else that isn't explicitly mentioned but does seem to be the case is that the PCB tracks that serve as the cartridge tags are easier to bend and fit to a

cartridge. When combined with the front and rear counterweights and the easier adjustment, these revisions go a huge way to nullifying the quirks issues that I felt affected the original.

Three specification options

All DG-1S models have these refinements but there are now three 'levels' that vary the specification around the basic turntable. For that £3,350 (AUD \$6695) basic price, you get the DG-1S as described and fitted with the Magneto moving magnet cartridge that so impressed on the original. You can then choose to add the Techno Mat, Iso Paw feet and a Redline interconnect with ground cable in your own time or you can buy a DG-1S with them included (but no cartridge oddly) for £4,100 (AUD \$7995). There is then a £4,995 (AUD\$9795) 'Sabre Pack' version that has all these refinements and adds the Sabre moving magnet cartridge tested in HIFICRITIC Oct-Dec '21. None of these packages include the Challenger which is a further £395 (AUD \$725).

The appearance of is largely unchanged from the original, which is no bad thing. The angular styling is striking but – aside from the position of the power and speed control switch which remains far too close to the belt – the DG1S completely painless to use and live with, and the inclusion of a lid is a welcome touch too. Build quality is extremely good and the new white finish works well, retaining enough black detailing to set the white plinth off.

Vertere supplied both a DG-1S and all the parts to test it in every permutation between the base and the Sabre Pack. Something that did make itself apparent from the start of testing is that the Redline interconnect might well be something you choose early on as connecting the Vertere to a selection of phono stages using a few different cables resulted in hum with a fair few of them. The Redline ensured complete silence however and was in place for most of my testing.

All the other updates might be something you are content to wait for though. Even in its 'base' form, the DG-1S represents a step forward over the original. The combination of revised power supply and bearing result in a turntable that manages to come commendably close to my resident Vertere MG-1 Mk2 in terms of background noise levels and pitch stability. These qualities serve as the underpinning for what Vertere seeks to do with their turntables which is largely to get out of the way of the music you are playing on them.

Even-handed music-making

This might sound slightly underwhelming but the reality is an utterly even-handed approach to making music. The sensational live performance of *Rakim* on Dead Can Dance's *Towards the Within* rises from silence and possesses enormous weight and

REVIEW

scale. The Magneto cartridge is unchanged from before, being and is based on a relatively humble Audio-Technica design, and there's still a palpable force both to the huge instrumental swell at the start of the track and the percussion when it arrives. At this price there's a variety of different opinions regarding the value of the cartridge in the total cost of the turntable and the Vertere is one of the lower ones, but the way that the DG-1S performs is absolutely competitive with anything else I have tested at the price.

The more time you spend with the Vertere, the more sense it makes. Once you stop trying to wrongfoot it and accept that, aside from truly gruesome pressings which tend to unsettle the Magneto a little, you become more at home with the Magneto a little, you become more at home with the incredibly unforced way that the Vertere makes music. What I find so impressive about this is that it has no bearing on the intensity of the music itself. *Hyper Dimensional Expansion Beam* by The Comet is Coming is still a massive, visceral wall of sound; a film score for a science fiction film that hasn't been written yet. In the hands of the Vertere, though, it is presented in a manner that gives you time to appreciate the sophistication of the arrangement. Shabaka Hutchings' saxophone stands out as the 'real' instrument in the mix and his extremely distinctive tone is effortlessly recreated.

Upgrading steps

Embarking on testing the upgrades quickly reveals a truth I discovered when testing the two Vertere cartridges and the SG-1 HB tonearm. The basic presentational balance of the DG-1S does not change from the most affordable iteration, all the way through to the Sabre pack with the Challenger added. If you like what it does at the start, you won't be unhappy with anything the upgraded models do. Instead, the additional parts further fix and focus the abilities of the record player package.

Yet the effect of the updates isn't always completely proportionate to their price. The Techno Mat, for example, is a huge leap forward over running the DG-1S without a mat (this effect is no less pronounced on the MG-1 MkII), lending an increased three-dimensionality to the way the DG-1S recreates the recent repressing of Bruce Springsteen's *Nebraska* and helping the feeling of immersion in the pared-back songs. The Iso Paws are a similar price but, with the review sample placed on a fairly hefty Quadraspire QAVX rack, the differences are rather less pronounced.

It's the Sabre that makes the most sense and it lifts the virtues of the 'Sabre Pack' by its inclusion. If you have a decent, moving coil phono stage already, there are plenty of other cartridges you might want to consider, and you can do so knowing

that the revised arm will work well with almost all of them. I used a Goldring Ethos for a portion of testing and the results were exceptional: the Sabre keeps the Ethos entirely honest while working with the moving magnet phono stages present in many integrated amplifiers.

A great deal of testing took place with the DG-1S in Sabre Pack configuration running into the Cyrus Classic AMP's very good moving magnet phono stage, impressing me with how much of the quality of the DG-1S is apparent used this way compared to a Cyrus Phono Signature costing almost as much on its own. This is where Vertere has been very clever: even though practicality is not a quality we readily associate with vinyl, the DG-1S is a more practical device than most others at this price point – even ones we associate with being 'plug and play'. It is an exploitation of an evolutionary niche from which the company deserves to do very well.

None of this would matter if the Vertere wasn't an excellent record player but – given that the original model was no slouch –, the performance of the improved version was never in doubt. The DG-1S manages to build on the performance of the original in every respect, and does so while also going a long way to alleviating my concerns over user-friendliness. This is still a striking – and decidedly unconventional – record player, but it asks very little of its owners in day-to-day use, then goes on to deliver a performance that gives a significant taste of what the larger and more elaborate Vertere models can do. And it does so at a rather more terrestrial price point, accessed by a moving magnet phono stage. This is a brilliant revision to an already strong turntable, and should win many new admirers.

HIFICRITIC
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Specifications

Vertere DG-1

Type	Belt-drive record player
Price	£3550 with Magneto MM cartridge; various options up to £4950 including Redline cable, Sabre cartridge, Technomat, and Iso-Paws
Arm	Groove Runner S flat profile laminate, thread bearing
Plinth	Three-layer cast acrylic
Motor	Low-voltage 24-pole synchronous, with Motor Drive power supply
Speeds	33.3/45rpm, touch selector
Platter	Alloy, with bonded PETG mat and cork/neoprene/nitrile bonded underside plus resonance control disc
Accessories supplied	Clear polycarbonate dust cover
Dimensions (WxHxD)	46.9x13x38.4cm (inc. dust cover)
Weight	8kg

vertereacoustics.com

