

Slovenian soul

Kuzma's new Stabi S turntable proves that simple is not only beautiful, but cost-effective too, according to **Alan Sircom**.

Imagine a turntable stripped of all decoration, then remove any suspension or speed control. Chances are that the new £700 Kuzma Stabi S from Slovenia will match your mental image. However, despite its pared-down specification sheet and low price, the sound of this deck remains uncompromised.

Though it resembles a prototype of the Mir space station, the basic Kuzma S design is simple in the extreme. Unlike Mir, it isn't made from old tin-cans and recycled bicycle wheels. The basic turntable comprises just four main parts: chassis, motor, alloy sub-platter (with the spindle bearing) and main platter. The chassis is a solid-brass, tubular T-bar, with a Linn arm-cut out at one end and the bearing structure below the point where the T-bar crosses. This structure is decoupled from its surroundings by three rubber rings.

The motor also resides within a brass case, and has no contact with the rest of the turntable save for the drive belt. A solitary green push-button operates this standard AC synchronous motor. At present, the 45rpm speed is unavailable, although there is talk of an electronic power supply which would offer such an option.

The spindle bearing shaft is a conventional (non-inverted) structure, but there is a non-metal ring to prevent vibration between two metallic sliding surfaces. Last but not least, the heavy, solid-aluminium main platter rests upon the inner platter, and is damped by two elements: a rubber insert on the underside, and a butylised-fabric compound mat to support LPs.

Arms and needles

Any deck is only as good as the tonearm it carries, and the isolation support it rests upon. Fortunately, Kuzma distributor Audiofreaks can offer potential purchasers a complete package including a completely new Kuzma unipivot tonearm, and a Shun Mook isolation platform. The new arm is expected soon, and the whole caboodle is expected to retail for less than £1,000 (excluding cartridge). For our test a Kuzma Stogi tonearm stood duty. This well-respected pivoted arm, priced at £1,000, is



The Kuzma's aluminium main platter (right) rests upon the inner platter (above), producing an overall effect not dissimilar to a prototype of the Mir Space Station (top).



no newcomer, but remains one of the better choices at the price — and certainly its characteristics are more in line with those of the Kuzma S than the Rega RB300 arm which was also suggested.

Audiofreaks supplied the player with the Benz Micro Glider cartridge (£650). The turntable was compared directly to my trusty modified Linn-LP12/Armageddon/Naim-ARO/Sumiko-Sho LP rig, supported on a multi-tier Mana table. This was an especially valuable comparison given that the output of both cartridges is similar. Both decks were played through a DNM 3B/Twin pre-amplifier into a Meridian 557 power amplifier, driving Rehdeko RK115a speakers on their own stands. DNM cable was used throughout.

Catching up with Linn

Though less expensive than the Linn component, the Kuzma did not exhibit a marked discrepancy in sound. Both players interpreted sound very differently, but in many respects they were equals. The Kuzma offers a typical high-end sound: rich and warm,

with loads of information, and a precise, walk-in soundstage. By contrast, the Linn was more finger-snappy and rhythmic.

The Kuzma has a sense of 'right' that only the very best platter-spinners can muster. Only a handful of decks can achieve this without affecting the sound in one way or another. Save for a couple of home-grown exceptions, other 'right' sounding decks invariably cost several times as much as the Stabi S, which makes it a bargain in my opinion. What constitutes 'right'? The ability to sound musical and honest, and to integrate with ultra-high-end systems without clamouring for attention.

Like a child ignoring the toy and playing with the box, I find myself most impressed by the Benz-Micro Glider. Its sheer precision and focus is refreshing, yet it is substantial enough to outperform more costly devices with reputations beyond their performance. Paradoxically, this highlights just how good is the Kuzma turntable. If it can highlight the performance of an excellent cartridge and arm, no further investigation is required. ▲
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