

This is Origin Live's stab at building the finest pick up arm possible. The fundamental design objectives were good old-fashioned strength and rigidity. A static balanced design with bias compensation applied via a weight supported by a fine thread, its arm tube is machined from a solid billet of very high-grade alloy. Effective length is 240mm, with an effective mass of 14 grams. Very low friction comes courtesy of bearings of the highest order, sat in an extremely wide yoke made from highly specified material. The Illustrious's arm bearing casing has been designed to offer high mass in the horizontal plane, whilst the mass in the vertical plane is commendably low for good tracking ability.

Headshell design has had the same precise attention to detail lavished on it, with minimal flexure. Arm wiring is similar to the OL Silver, except that the wires have been cryogenically treated and consequently require a longer running in period than normal. The lead out wiring is terminated by Eichman bullet phono plugs. Finish of this pick up arm is exemplary – up there with SME Series V standards, which is no mean feat. It has the strong but precise feel of the very best manual SLR camera or

shooting pistol. Detail has been attended to - even the arm lift lever has been ergonomically designed – although I can't say I thought the finger lift was long enough!

SOUND QUALITY

After the recommended forty hours burn in time (for the arm cables) this arm produced an almost immersive sound experience. All dimensions of the stereo image were clearly described, depth being tremendous. Height of the image was one of the most realistic I have been privileged to hear. The apparent width of the perceived image was enormous, as the image was so large that my living room walls seemed to melt away. This was complemented with a precision of spatial characteristics that made listening to the Illustrious an absolute pleasure. Oh, and surface noise was almost non-existent!

Pink Floyd's 'The Wall' had a character that I have not experienced before. The mixing on this album is such that lesser arms make it sound flat and two dimensional, but the top OL revealed it as vast and panoramic. Moreover, the extra dynamic range over all the other arms here was simply stunning. As a consequence, the level control was set at about a third possible volume and the

system still portrayed this piece of work as, quite possibly, the finest multitracked rock album of the 1970s. Along with firecracker dynamics, something SMEV users will know, it possessed a seamless rhythmic ease and flow which SMEV users will not! This is a beautifully fluid listen, yet gives nothing away to any other arm in terms of grip, detail and focus.

Ry Cooder has an awe-inspiring delicacy of play, and this arm had the ability to transfer this into my living room. I can hear his band working very hard behind him, the rhythm section driving the music along. Likewise, James Brown came over with a precision that is very rarely heard from any hi-fi component. Image transparency and transient recovery were without doubt very special, while timbral qualities and the breadth of its tonal palette are amongst the very best I have ever heard. This is the big league, where the equipment isn't just 'self-effacing' or 'uncoloured', but literally dissolves before your very ears. It has very little character of its own and presents the music as the musicians really intended. The Illustrious's performance befits its name all right, bringing almost all of the fluidity of the best unipivot with vastly improved grip and incision – the best of both worlds, if you like.

