

GOING FOR GOLD

Origin Live's Silver 250 tonearm is the company's best product to date, says David Price.

Roy Gandy designed probably the world's finest pickup arm in history - it's just a shame he didn't finish it. Forget SMEVs, Naim AROs, Linn Ekoses (great though they all are, in their way) - it is the RB250 that has given the most happiness to the most people. At this point we should credit someone for having the sense to realise this, and to take the design a step forward to finish the job. Was it inspiration or perspiration? We don't know, but whatever, Mark Baker from Origin Live take a bow! What he's done is effectively re-engineer the original 1983 Rega design, with all the bugs ironed out. Early on in its life, though, a number of folk got out the soldering iron and started rewiring it (with good results), but it wasn't until Mark Baker's counterweight mod - which addressed the arm's mechanical (as opposed to electrical) deficiencies - that the Rega arm really shone.

The OL Silver 250 is a synthesis of Rega tonearm base and OL arm tube, wiring, plugs and counterweight (and probably more, which Mark won't tell me about). At £599 it's a pricey piece of kit, but all tonearms are. Essentially you're paying for the development and build time.

Why pay six hundred sponds for this when £300 (for an OL RB250) already monsters the so-called 'best pickup arm in the world'? I have to say this thought crossed my mind once or twice as I set it up on my Michell Orbe, and installed an Ortofon Kontrapunkt B.

Well now I know - it's stunning. That's as in amazing, awesome and gobsmacking. As in the difference between CD and DVD-Audio. As in night and day, good and evil, chalk and cheese. The Silver 250 is a stonkingly

good product and the very best tonearm I've ever heard. No, it still doesn't do unipivot-style 'liquid midbands', but comes oh-so-close, and you also get SMEV levels of bass grip and Ekos levels of foot-tapping musicality too - and more!

The 'more' bit comes from this pick-up arm's incredible tonal and timbral realism. It isn't something you're going to notice if you play dodgy club 12 inchers, because that's all digital, but delve into the depths of your pre-eighties vinyl (before digital got anywhere near anything important) and you'll be gobsmacked by how it sounds.

To kick off, it has an awesomely tight bottom end - oh-so-close to the acknowledged guvnor, the SMEV. In fact it's probably within a whisker. Then there's the midband, which is a quantum leap from the already superb standards of the OL RB250 - glass clear, incredibly liquid, fantastic image precision, walkaround soundstaging and incredible timbral realism. It really is like 'being there'.

The treble is also transformed - the arm is shockingly open and airy up top. Female vocals (packed with harmonics, obviously) just soar up to the skies. It's incredibly smooth, natural, organic (unlike the frigid SME and the Ekos with its poor tonal colouring), and just cuts to the quick.

I could go on for ever about its



new levels of insight, its incredible liquidity, its amazing grip, its stunning low level detail and resolution, but I won't. Suffice to say that - on balance - this is probably the best tonearm in the world right now, and the £599 price tag is laughably low. If Mark Baker put this in a fancy box and hired a flashy PR, he could probably charge five times this amount. But he doesn't, and it's to his credit. The only cloud on the Silver 250's horizon is ye olde humble OL modded Rega RB250, which sounds duller and a noticeably less musical. The trouble is that until you've got a top turntable, serious cartridge, high end phono stage, preamp, power amp and speakers, you probably won't hear much of a difference. ■ ▲

Origin Live Silver 250 £599

87 Chessel Crescent
Bitterne
Southampton
SO19 4BT
Tel: 02380 442183
www.originlive.com

World Verdict



Words can't express how good this is - for vinyl junkies, this is one of the designs of the decade.