

Silver Machine

ACOUSTIC SOLID MACHINE SMALL (£1300)

It may be dubbed the 'Small' but the baby in Acoustic Solid's Machine range of turntables is big on detail, body and bass. And as for that soundstage...



Tested by Tony Bolton

Over the last couple of decades turntable design has come a long way from being just a rectangular box with an acrylic lid. In a lot of designs, form has followed function and the Acoustic Solid Machine Small under review here is certainly one such example.

The plinth follows the shape of the 50mm-thick platter, with the arm being supported on a pedestal that is bolted to the underside of the plinth. The whole unit sits on adjustable cones that sit in felt-based casters.

All of Acoustic Solid's Machine range has similar fundamental technology. This includes separate motor housings, nylon drive strings (aka 2lb breaking strain fishing line) and substantial platters and plinths machined from solid aluminium billets. Two finishes are offered: the polished one seen here, and a shot peened surface that costs £100 extra on all models.

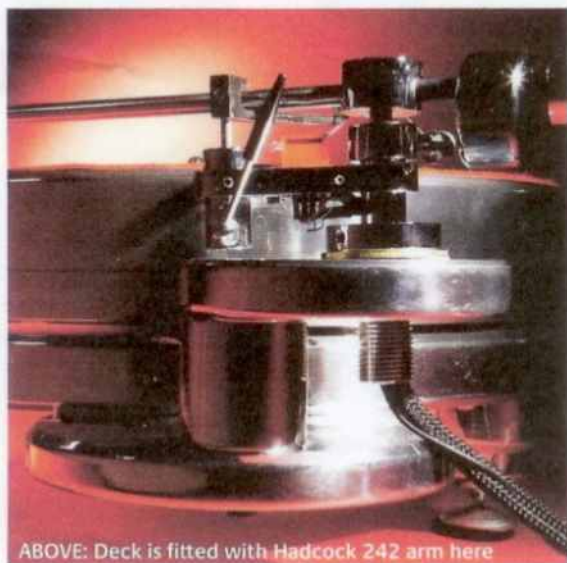
There are five models in the Acoustic Solid range, starting with the conventionally-shaped Classic Wood model. The Machine series start with this model, the Machine Small retailing at £1300, and finishes with the massive Royal model that sells for £5500.

The assembly and set-up instructions provided with the Machine Small were detailed and easy to follow. Since the deck is not supplied with a tonearm, a variety of arm boards is available to suit most models, and up to three arms can be fitted, on separate boards around the plinth. In this instance I used my reference Hadcock 242 Cryo, fitted with the MusicMaker Mk III cartridge (these cost £918 and £625 respectively).

For such a large mass, the deck proved surprisingly sensitive to what it was placed upon. I had better results with wall-mounted supports than on anything floor-standing. However both types benefited from the installation of a Spiralex platform instead of my usual Voodoo Airtek, which uses air to isolate components.

TUNEFUL DOWN LOW

My first listening impressions were of a big soundstage and a very tuneful bass line. As I worked my way through records I began to notice a consistent increase in the texture and detailing of the bass compared to what I am used to. In the case of the Morcheeba recording, I found myself hearing a plethora of tonal colours that were not



ABOVE: Deck is fitted with Hadcock 242 arm here



BELOW: Like all models in the Machine range, the platter and separate motor housing here are made from solid aluminium billets

'Gene Krupa's drumming was revealed in full sonic Technicolor, each beat and crash flowing precisely'

necessarily new to me, but which I'm not used to having displayed in as detailed a manner from my Sondek. Although the Origin Live DC power supply provides the impression of more body and speed than a standard AC motor LP12, the Acoustic Solid demonstrated a more capable and detailed bottom end, with more obvious textures and shape.

Moving onto Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa's drumming was revealed in full sonic Technicolor, each beat and crash flowing precisely and seamlessly, driving along Goodman's and Wilson's melodic interludes on clarinet and piano. These instruments were also very well presented; the piano especially displaying the multiple harmonics and attack of a hammer striking a set of strings.

I would sum up the overall presentation of the sound from this deck as bold, slightly forward and vivacious. As well as being big, the soundstage was also well detailed and lit. Images of performers were rock solid and stable enough that a solo singer's movements around a microphone were noticeable.

The only drawback to an otherwise very good sound was a sensation of clutter in the upper midrange ☹

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when strings or female vocals massed in a crescendo. The effect was fleeting and superficial, but noticeable when compared with the lyrical sounds I enjoy from the same arm and cartridge when fitted to my Sondek. I was also left with a slight sensation that the extreme top end stayed a bit grounded compared to the airiness of my LP12.

POWER SUPPLY

A two-speed electronic power supply is available as an optional extra for £799. For this you get a substantial cylindrical casing containing the electronics, topped with push buttons for speed selection and fine-tuning, and a digital display. There is also a toolbox, containing a strobe disc and light, bubble level, digital scales, a drill bit to ream out tight record holes and a very well made alloy alignment protractor. This operates by having fixed points on the arm bearing and the platter spindle to ensure correct cartridge geometry.

The sonic benefits of the optional power supply were immediately apparent. The soundstage seemed to increase to encompass an area a couple of feet either side of the speakers, and soloists appeared to have stepped a foot further

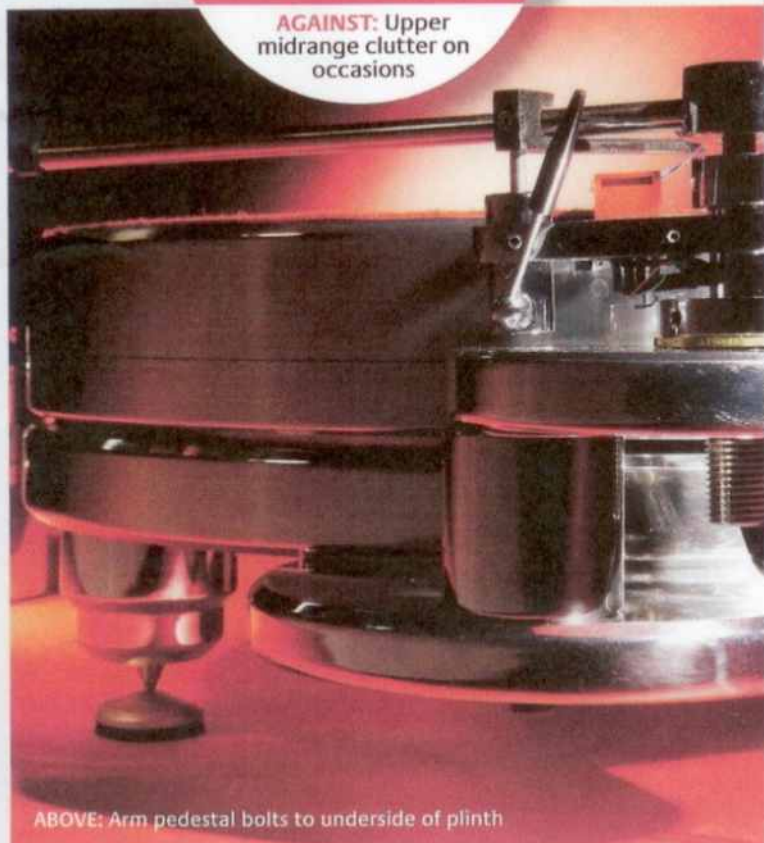
into the room, while the rear musicians had moved back a little way. Tonally there was a similar expansion in the perception of the richness and solidity of sounds, as well as better extension to the frequency extremes and a smoother progression across the range. The upper midband seemed smoother and more open, and the very high frequencies had a more positive presence.

The other big benefit was in the timing of music. With the standard PSU I would describe the timing as meticulous, but a little upright and overly precise at times. Adding the electronic control gave the rhythms more of a sensation of being played by a person rather than a well-animated machine. It made the difference between jazz being a pleasant listening experience and becoming a physically involving sensation that got feet and fingers moving.

Overall this was a very satisfying turntable to listen to, across most genres of music. It proved particularly beguiling with beat-driven music, causing me to ransack the '50s and '60s sections of my record collection for the first time in ages. It also delivered the scale to convincingly portray classical music. ☺

FOR:
Bold with
tuneful,
foot-tapping
bass

AGAINST: Upper
midrange clutter on
occasions



ABOVE: Arm pedestal bolts to underside of plinth

Hifi news
Verdict

ACOUSTIC SOLID MACHINE SMALL £1300

The Acoustic Solid Machine Small seemed very well made and finished. It is heavy and needs substantial support underneath it; the more solid the support the more solid the sound. Running off the standard wall transformer power supply gives a good sound with a little upper midband compression and clutter. Adding the optional electronic power supply remedies this, as well as adding greater dimension and dynamic to the sound. A very good turntable that I recommend for an audition shortlist.

SPEC/FEATURES



SOUND QUALITY



BUILD QUALITY



VALUE FOR MONEY



Hi-fi news
OVERALL RATING **16/20**

Manufacturer's specifications

TURNTABLE	50mm-thick platter made from a single billet of aluminium
MAT	leather
MOTOR	synchronous 24V AC motor
DRIVE	string-drive from separate housing
PLINTH	25mm-thick aluminium body
DIMENSIONS	w/o motor unit, 430 x 430mm
WEIGHT	20kg

Contact numbers

UK DISTRIBUTOR: HiAudio
TEL: +44 (0)8450 525259 WEB: www.hiaudio.co.uk

Review system breakdown

SOURCES Origin Live-powered Linn Sondek LP12, Hadcock 242 Cryo, The Cartridge Man MusicMaker Mk III
AMPS Icon Audio Stereo 60 integrated, LA4 pre-amp, 2 x Quad 303, CSP Audio Jazz Club phono stage
SPEAKERS Chario Ursa Major and Kelly KT3
CABLES all cables and interconnects by Atlas and Philosophy Cables. Mains purification and leads by Isotek.

We listened to

MORCHEEBA
Big Calm
Decca Records
LX 3029 195

BACH
Brandenburg
Concertos Nos.
2 & 3
Decca Records
LX 3029 1950

VARIOUS ARTISTS
16 Big Hits Vol 5
Tamla Motown
TAM 11050 1966

