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JANUARY 2010

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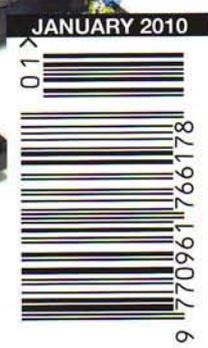
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11 PAGES OF LETTERS - THE BEST WINS A PAIR OF KEF IQ30 LOUDSPEAKERS! (UK ONLY)





TURNTABLE: EAT FORTE/IKEDA it-407

Everything about the £12,400 EAT Forte is bold; its giddy price, the imposing physical size, its not inconsiderable weight. The EAT simply takes the best practice from just about every superdeck made since the mid nineteen seventies and puts it together in one package. And to underline its evolutionary approach, it comes fitted with a tonearm that epitomises this same design philosophy, the flawless but unflashy Ikeda it-407.

What's special about this design is the way it packages good ideas together to such a high standard. To obviate the many problems of suspended decks, the Forte simply doesn't use springs, relying on its

vast weight, including a 20kg platter, to take it out of the loop. To reduce noise to vanishingly low levels, it uses twin low torque motors, generating 2,700Kj of torque via twin pulleys and long diamond cut string belts to spin that massive platter. This delivers superlative wow and flutter figures. To accommodate its massy platter, the inverted main bearing, with a ceramic ball mating to a Teflon cup, is vast - and augmented with neodymium magnets to lower the pressure on the bearing. The Ikeda arm is a superbly damped 12" with exquisite bearings of almost no friction.

At first listen, the Forte sounds underwhelming, with nothing particularly distinct about it to hook on

to. But get past the first few bars of the music however, and you find yourself being carried off into the music. The deck simply lets you lock on to what's going on in the groove, making no attempt whatsoever to editorialise. The only way to describe it is 'mastertape-like'; there's simply no sense of listening to recorded material, as the music itself shines through so strongly. All of which is to be expected if you're spending the equivalent of a Ford Focus on a turntable, of course. But however you look at it, this is a very special record player. Imposing on the eye it may be, but there is immense strength in depth here. Subtle and unshowy it sounds, but sublime also.

E.A.T. FORTE/IKEDA 12"
Absolute Sounds
www.euroaudioteam.com
tested:

£12,400
+44(0)208971 3909

May 2009



TO NEARM: SME 312S

This past year has seen a procession of new tonearms, all attempting to advance the black art of vinyl in one way or another. And as the last decade has progressed, we've seen ever more attempts to make the world's best arm, using a number of different approaches from air bearing designs to unipivots. Sassy, headline grabbing stuff, but given that some of the best pickup arms we've ever heard have been of conventional design, you sometimes wonder if the hype is justified. SME obviously don't think so, as they've stuck with their time-honoured formula pioneered in the late nineteen eighties with the remarkable Series V, for the new 312S, and

with dramatic results.

Whereas the 312 was essentially a 'long wheelbase' 309, the new S variant sits rather closer to the Series V in the family tree. It features the same superlative bearings as the aforementioned tonearm, and the same ultra light, non-resonant magnesium alloy arm tube, but this time with an effective length of twelve inches instead of nine. The new £1,750 arm retains the 300 series counterweight system and detachable headshell, making it able to easily accommodate most cartridges between 6 and 15gm of average compliance. Effectively then, the new SME 312S is an exceptionally useable twelve inch arm, offering much of the Series

V's superlative build with the all important (for users of big turntables) extra three inches for reduced tracking distortion.

The result is an uncannily stable sound; if ever there was a tonearm that could be labelled 'transcription', this is it. Smooth and svelte is how the new design performs; with almost any cartridge you care to put in it, gone is the nervous, fidgety sound that most nine inchers provide. Even the nine inch SME V, brilliant as it is, cannot quite offer the stability and ease of this, with its expansive, deep soundstaging and inky black tonality. Given the right platform, the new SME 312S shows just what high end vinyl replay can do nowadays

SME 312S
SME Ltd.
www.sme.ltd.uk
tested:

£1,750
+44(0)1903 814321

October 2009