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& Record Review

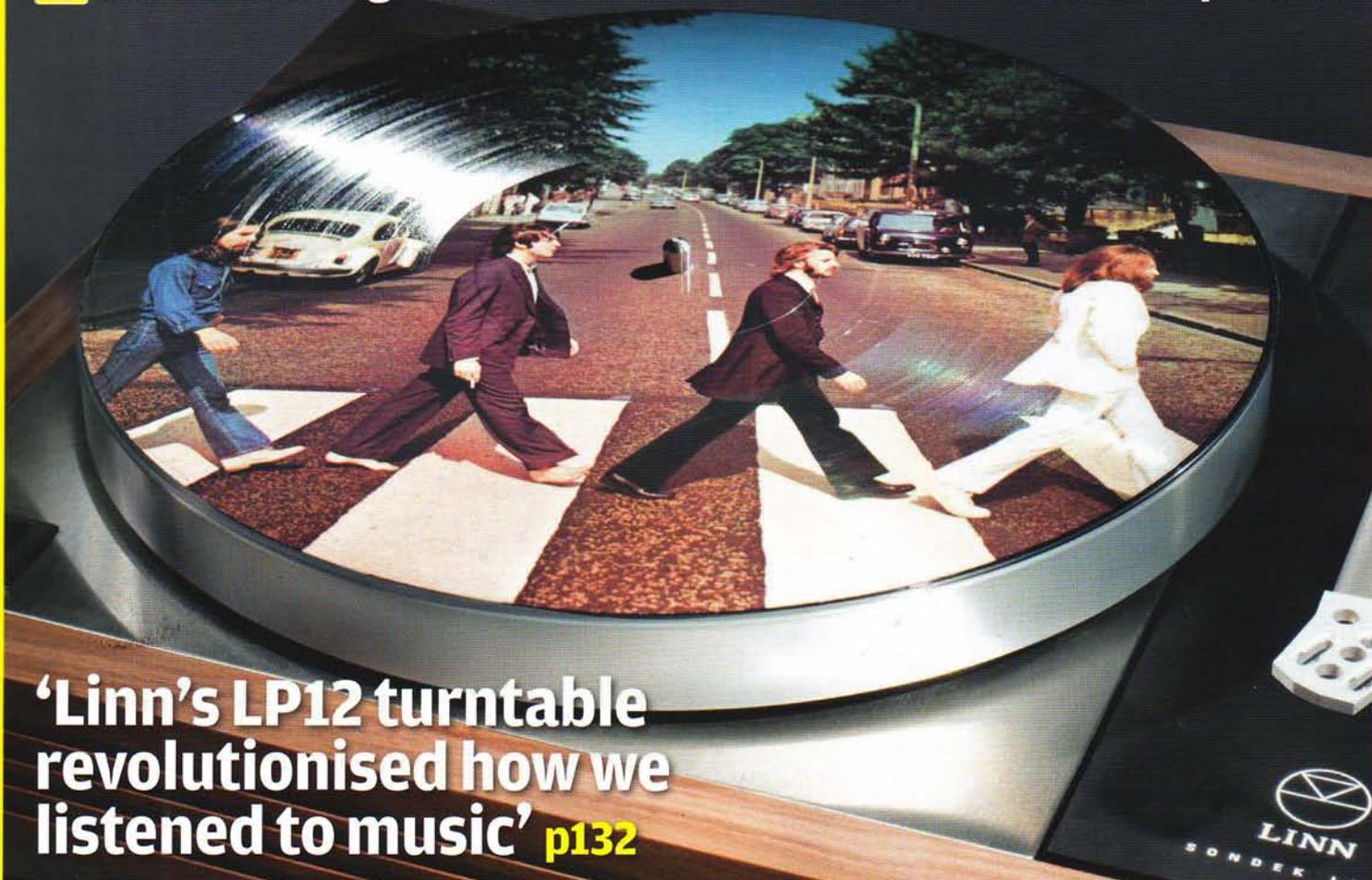
ULTIMATE HI-FI 2009

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'Linn's LP12 turntable revolutionised how we listened to music' p132



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UK £4.00 US \$9.50 Aus \$9.95



**AUDIO
FILE**

Medium output moving coil cartridge
Made by: Koetsu, Japan
Supplied by: Absolute Sounds
Telephone: 020 8971 3909
www.absolutesounds.com

hi-finews
EDITOR'S
CHOICE



Koetsu Red K Signature (£3300)

Few western audiophiles can speak or read the language, but there are a couple of Japanese pictograms familiar to all. They have appeared on every Koetsu cartridge since the 1970s, and they tell you that you're looking at one of the hi-fi world's most enduring objects of desire.

The £3300 Rosewood Signature is described as having 'a more closely matched core and coil

page 21] and other turntables, but principally an SME Model 10. A starting point was to find out how big a step up the Rosewood Signature would be from the basic Koetsu Black. It didn't take very long to find the difference was huge!

CRISP AND URGENT

With the classic direct-cut *The King James Version* [Sheffield Lab], compared with the Black there was

just more of a true brassy snarl to the leader's trumpet; all the instruments in the brass had this realistic edge too. On the drum

'Compared with the Black there was just more of a snarl to the leader's trumpet'

set' than the Rosewood Standard version. Like all models further up the Koetsu range, it takes the classic rectangular shape with flat base, and is in aged rosewood, making it slightly darker in colour. Silver-plated copper wire is used for the moving coils, rather than just high-purity copper.

For our review we tried the surprisingly capable Kuzma Stabi S-12/Stogi Reference 313 [see

feature, 'Cherokee', there was a great sense of freedom, Les DeMerle letting fly with tremendous swing, while the saxes and brass sounded crisp, fast and urgent.

Listening by way of contrast to some Julian Bream from 1962, *Popular Classics for Spanish Guitar* [RCA], you could almost see the sunlit bookshelves in the library at Kenwood House in Hampstead, where these tracks were recorded.

With the Rosewood, you felt that the artist was revelling in the contribution of an explicit and characterful room acoustic as he extracted an unbelievable range of colour and scale from his six strings. The Rosewood Signature's warm and mellifluous midrange suited this recording so well...

And Clapton's fabulous slide guitar workout 'Motherless Children', from *461 Ocean Boulevard* [RSO], really sizzled with the Rosewood. Right from the start, and the repeated riff, it conveyed excitement and anticipation, then release as Clapton soared. Carl Radle's great bass line thumped along, although maybe the bass itself could have been tidier – you could perhaps fault this Koetsu cartridge for being more passionate than analytical at times.

Koetsus are a bit like the great soloists of classic jazz. They'd be stunningly brilliant when they had the best accompaniment and favourable conditions, but even when surrounded by mediocrity, they'd know how to rise above it and do themselves justice. Quality always shines through.

VERDICT

There's no doubt that this current Red K Signature maintains the great Koetsu Rosewood tradition. Other cartridges may offer more analytical detail, may sound more neutral or more spacious (or airy), perhaps even appear more dynamic, or track better. But the Koetsu still offers an ear-catching solid and coherent sound with the right combination of warmth and sheer guts, simply leading you to play disc after disc. Sheer enjoyment. ☺

ABOVE: The classic Koetsu body, clad in a clear lacquered rosewood with an inscribed, gold-coloured baseplate, silver-plated cartridge pins and reinforced alloy lugs for firm mounting

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Generator type/weight	Moving-coil/9.0g
Recommended tracking force	1.8-2.2mN
Sensitivity/balance (re. 5cm/sec)	420µV / 0.10dB
Compliance (vertical/lateral)	15cu / 15cu
Vertical tracking angle	26 degrees
L/R Tracking ability	76µm / 70µm
L/R Distortion (-8dB, 20Hz-20kHz)	0.5-12.9% / 0.2-9.3%
Frequency resp. (20Hz-20kHz)	-0.7dB to -1.8dB
Stereo separation (1kHz / 20kHz)	35dB / 19dB