

Döhmann Audio Helix Two Mk3 turntable

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This review can be summed up in a simple phrase; “the apple never falls far from the tree”. In Issue 221, we reviewed Mark Döhmann’s excellent Helix One Mk3. To recap, this large statement piece of a turntable from Australia is one of the ultimate ways to hold two tonearms and play vinyl to perfection through both. We also pointed out that if you wanted a smaller turntable and are content with just the one tonearm, then the Helix Two Mk3 makes a strong case to meet those needs. And now, having tested that smaller turntable, we can confirm that on-paper assessment. The Döhmann Audio Helix Two Mk3 is less than a dingo’s whatsit from the Helix One Mk3 in performance terms.

As suspected, the Helix Two Mk3 has all the sophisticated isolation and precision of the Helix One Mk3 in a smaller plinth. The ‘Two’ takes just the one arm and delivers better than 95% of the performance of the ‘One’ at a far more manageable cost. Give it the best arm and

cartridge and you are transported to the same ultimate vinyl performance landscape the Döhmann Audio Helix One Mk3 takes you. Basically, unless you have both side by side or lie awake at night gnashing your teeth over extracting the last scintilla of musical information, the Helix Two Mk3 is all anyone would ever need.

Refer back

For the rest of the review, I refer you back to Issue 221. Like the Helix One platform, the Helix Two is built around a negative stiffness isolation base. This, built on a Minus K platform from the world of electron microscopy provides isolation from just below 1Hz to around 100kHz, placing any nasties outside the bandwidth of LP replay. While the ‘full-on’ Minus K integrated into the Helix One takes that isolation to even greater levels, the Helix Two system is an order of magnitude more than ‘good enough.’ And, like the Helix One the turntable doesn’t rest on a negative stiffness isolation base; it’s an intrinsic part of the design. »

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» The negative stiffness platform is functionally the subchassis in a suspended turntable. Like the One, the Helix Two Mk3 also includes a “mechanical crossover” that creates a ‘least harm’ mechanical pathway to dissipate very high frequency vibrations. However, in the Helix Two Mk3, this uses tuned constrained layer damping and pre-stressed tuned mass dampers within the chassis itself. This arrangement is used to attenuate any vibration in the chassis caused by the Swiss-made three-phase AC motor or the inverted bearing. As these are engineered down to a fine degree, that’s not doing much in the way of attenuation, but this turntable shares the same uncompromising stance as its bigger brother so the phrase ‘not much’ does not exist on the Döhmann play-book.

It’s difficult not to start almost every sentence with “Like the Helix One Mk3...” because the two share so much in common. For example, like the upgradability from the original Helix Two to Mk3 status in a ‘no man left behind’ way. Or like the belt arrangement, which uses two clear polymer bands and is entirely hidden from view. While the installation is largely performed by someone else at this level, the belt is sited through the high-tech arrangement of ‘using a bit of string’.

The Helix Two also uses a lightweight and rigid ‘Advanced Composite’ fibre/polymer laminate floating armboard in place of the alloy one used on the previous edition. And, yet again, the One Mk3 has the same Advanced Composite armboard for both the main and secondary armboards.

The Helix Two Mk3 also uses a special record clamp with ‘RSA’ resonance control, which is found in the Helix One Mk3. This oversimplifies a record clamp that has been the subject of years of R&D, but everything that carries the Döhmann name comes with years of R&D.

Then, the HF and RFI absorption and power filtration found on the Helix One Mk3 trickled down to the Helix Two Mk3 power supply. And even the vacuum hold down option and upgrade is on the cards for both turntables.

So, there must be some differences between the Helix One Mk3 and Helix Two Mk3. Well, yes. Where the Helix One Mk3 is a fully integrated unit, where the turntable resides within the ‘PowerBase’ power supply, on the Helix Two Mk3, that power supply is a separate unit that sits below the turntable. And... It’s smaller and can only sport one tonearm.

Sound quality

Like its bigger brother, I’ve never played so many records and made so few listening notes. Every album led to another album, and still no listening notes because I was enjoying the performance so much. Tracks I hadn’t played in years came out for a session, not to ascertain what the Döhmann Helix Two Mk3 was doing, but simply because I wanted to hear them again and hear them played so well.

I could fluff this and simply refer the listener back to the previous issue almost entirely for the Helix Two Mk3’s sound quality, but that’s as lazy as it is unfair. So, let’s start the listening at the lead-in groove. It’s quiet, so insanely quiet »





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» that you have an 'is this thing on?' moment. Self-noise from the phono stage is way more noticeable than the Helix Two Mk3's impact on the groove. It's like the entire system took a deep breath and calmed down before playing the music.

That absence of noise is matched by a total adherence to fidelity. That sounds trite as it's the supposed goal of all things 'hi-fi' by definition, but the Helix Two Mk3 shows how rarely that adherence is observed to the ultimate degree. The sound has master-tape levels of control and accuracy. This is coupled to a bold and powerful sense of dynamic range and both a sense of staging and presence, and a wicked sense of rhythm. In short, the turntable is so damn good that its contribution to the sound is tiny, and makes you realise just how much most other turntables contribute... and not in a good way.

This is the sort of turntable that, pitched even slightly the wrong way, would be a hyper-analytical look into the rest of the system. It's even-tempered enough to make you hear the difference between solder in cables, but not so musically bereft that it makes listening a soulless experience. It shows that arm and cartridge are the prime movers in 'musicality' but does so by removing any impediment to hearing those parts of the system.

If that sounds like faint praise, guess again. The absence of character means an absence of bass attenuation, an absence of slurring and blurring of bass notes, and a precision to the attack of those bass notes that borders on the preternatural. This means bass precision, range, depth and authority that shines through on every piece of music, from the majesty of the tympani, through the swing and precision of a jazz bassist right through to the sheer 'oomph' of synths and dub reggae.

One record sums this up perhaps better than any other is the 12" 'Annihilation' mix of Frankie Goes To Hollywood's 'Two Tribes' [ZTT]. It's never going to be anything less than exciting; it's Trevor Horn at his overproduced best, throwing early samples, impersonators and the voice of the UK's accidentally horrific 'Protect and Survive' nuclear civil defence videos into the mix. It's a dynamic and powerful maelstrom of a record, underpinned by a savage bass line and a deep, synth bass drum synced to the click-track at a disco-beat pace. It's easy to overawe many record players and while some of that comes down to tracking, a surprising amount of that performance stands or falls on the ability of the turntable to get out of the way of the music, providing a neutral backdrop for the music to play. And that's what the Döhmann 'brothers' do so well.

I haven't been this impressed with a turntable since the Döhmann Helix One Mk3! This gets within a whisker of that top performance in all the right ways. Yes, 'Two' is smaller and only takes one arm, but it costs about two thirds the price of 'One'. 'One' is slightly better than 'Two' but unless you are listening side-by-side, you'll probably never notice. Yes, there is always that ultimate performance from the 'One' that the 'Two' might miss under extremely careful listening sessions, but for me at least, the Helix Two Mk3 is the no-fuss sweet-spot.

More extraction

So, the apple really doesn't fall far from the tree. The Döhmann Helix Two Mk3 comes so close to the Helix One Mk3 that they perform like identical twins. The Döhmann Audio Helix Two Mk3 is all the turntable you'll ever need. +

Technical specifications

Type: Belt-driven turntable

Operation Two push buttons on the table top plate for speed selection/on/off

Speed Control Speed is constantly calibrated over 130,000 times per second to deliver precise 33.33 or 45.15 rpm (factory default). Default factory set speeds are 33 RPM and 45 RPM. Please note that 78 RPM and other custom speeds are available by request. Simple user-adjustable speed control is accessible via two intuitive push buttons on the rear of the main chassis

Drive System Fully integrated Swiss-manufactured high torque motor (de-coupled). Dual-belt platter drive designed to reduce static electricity and vibrations

Tonearm facilities One armboard to facilitate the mounting two tonearms up to 12" (305mm) simultaneously. All Helix Two Mk3 turntables come with two Mk3 Advanced Composite Armboards. The armboards are removable and allow simple interchange and calibration

Finish Titanium, silver or black. All Helix Two Mk3 turntables can be fitted a carbon fibre top plate

Dimensions (without clamp or tonearm, WxDxH)
48 x 40 x 20cm

Base/PSU: 48x39x5.5cm

Weight 38kg (deck), 5kg base

Price £46,000

Manufacturer DöhmannAudio  www.dohmannaudio.com

UK distributor Absolute Sounds

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