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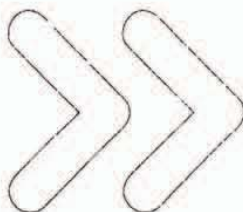


Thorens TD810 turntable

Dynavector DV20X cartridge

Dynavector P75 phono stage

THE VINYL COUNTDOWN



This month's System Virtue finds a German turntable partnering with a Japanese cartridge and — in an Antipodean twist — a phono stage designed by an Australian and manufactured in New Zealand. One of the truly iconic hi-fi brands, Thorens was founded in Switzerland by Hermann Thorens in 1883. The company originally manufactured musical boxes and movements, but in 1903 Thorens introduced its first Edison-type phonograph. When it comes to vinyl replay, it's fair to say that no one's been doing it longer than Thorens and despite some tough times over the last few years (including bankruptcy and a subsequent management buyout), when this company introduces a new range of turntables, the hi-fi world sits up and takes notice.

Based in Tokyo, Dynavector's history stretches back a little over a quarter of a century. Its phono cartridges enjoy a worldwide cult following and range from the "if you have to ask then you can't afford it" DRT-XV1s down to the "entry-level" 10X4mk2 (a snip at \$500). Although chiefly known as a cartridge maker, Dynavector also produces a futuristic-looking tonearm and a range of electronics, including the new P75 phono stage.

EAST MEETS WEST

The TD810 sits in the middle of Thorens' new, three-strong 800-series range of turntables (the other models being the TD800 priced at \$2499 and the TD850 at \$3200). The TD810 is a handsome unit available in either black or aluminium finishes — the very model of what a 21st century turntable should look like (at least as imagined by German audio engineers). The TD810 is a non-suspended design that relies on three polymer-damped adjustable feet for isolation from external vibrations. Additionally, the chassis — made from a sandwich of 19mm-thick high-density wood flexibly bonded to a 5mm-thick steel plate — is decoupled and isolated from the mounting surface.

If the TP 250 tonearm looks familiar, it's because it's an OEM version of the Rega RB 250, the biggest selling tonearm of all time. As with all Rega arms, there is no provision for adjusting VTA (vertical tracking angle), but a Thorens-designed VTA adjuster is available as an optional extra for \$180.

The bearing is a self-lubricating, maintenance-free design, while the 4kg, 24mm-thick aluminium platter is coated with a damping compound on the reverse side to reduce resonances. Motive power is provided by an AC synchronous motor fixed to the main plinth. A rubber belt couples the motor to the platter, while an external power supply, the PS 800, provides power to the motor. The PS 800 also offers electronic speed control (switchable between 33 and 45 RPM) and an on/off switch. A further AC/AC adaptor takes the raw 230V feed



TECH SPECS

Thorens TD 810 turntable

Speeds: 33 and 45 RPM (electronic speed change)

Arm: TP 250

Dust cover: Yes

Drive type: Belt

Isolation type: Non-suspended with adjustable polymer damped feet

Dimensions (w/h/d): 420x135x350mm

Weight: 12kg

from the wall socket and connects to the PS 800 via a three-pin lead. A pair of RCA output sockets are located on the rear underside of the turntable and while a pair of decent sounding phono leads were supplied, cable-heads will be able to indulge in all manner of cable tweakery.

It all sounds pretty complicated — and there are quite a few parts to get your head round — but set-up was remarkably straightforward and I had the turntable up and running within half an hour of opening the box.

The TD810 review unit came supplied with a Dynavector DV20X cartridge. Denco Audio, the local distributor for Thorens, also handles the Dynavector range in New Zealand (see "United Nations of Audio") and it suggested the mid-market DV20X would make a good sonic and price match with the TD810. Like all cartridges from this esteemed Japanese manufacturer, the DV20X is an MC (moving coil) design. The DV20X comes in two versions — a traditional low output version and a high output version (the model supplied) that's suitable for use with MM (moving magnet) phono stages.

GET INTO THE GROOVE

There's a certain irony that in our digitally enabled age, Dynavector continues to increase cartridge production, yet demand still exceeds supply. If further proof was needed that there's still life in the old dog, the past year saw sales of vinyl top the combined sales figure for SACD and DVD-A discs.

If claims of vinyl's demise have been greatly exaggerated, that hasn't stopped many amplifier manufacturers from removing the phono inputs from their products, which in turn has meant a booming market in third-party, standalone phono stages. The P75 is Dynavector's latest offering, a compact box made from grey powder-coated steel. The rear panel sports the bare minimum of socketry; there's an input to take the DC power from the "wall wart" power supply, a small earth-binding post and two pairs of RCA sockets (input/output). The minimalist approach continues on the acrylic front panel, which is blank, save for a Dynavector logo that glows red when the unit is powered up. Matching the capacitance and gain settings of the P75 to your chosen cartridge is a job best left to your dealer, due to the fiddly, tightly compacted nature of the jumper links that reside inside the P75's casework.

With the turntable set up and connected to sundry associated boxes, its platter levelled with the help of a

spirit level and the tracking weight dialled in on the tonearm, serious listening began. Supplementing the components in my regular system (Sachem monoblock power amps, Totem Tabu loudspeakers, Audio Pro Sub Bravo subwoofer and associated cabling by Slinkylinks, Kimber and Nordost), was an early production sample of Dynavector's new L-300 pre-amp (supplied courtesy of Soundline Audio in Auckland).

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

Right from the off I was struck by the almost uncanny absence of surface noise. No hiss. No crackles. So long as the vinyl was in good nick, notes emerged from an absolutely silent background. For a test, I lifted the cartridge from the groove, wound up the gain on the L-300 pre-amp and glued my ear to the speaker. Nothing. Okay, there was a faint, almost imperceptible hum, but I basically had to hold my breath to hear it and even then I can't be sure it wasn't just the sound of blood being pumped around my body.

Such preternatural background silence made listening to intimate recordings an absolute spine-tingling treat. The Velvet Underground's underrated 3rd album (MGM) has an intimacy that borders on the claustrophobic (I seem to recall Lou Reed once referring to the engineering on this album as "the closet mix"). Through the Thorens/Dynavector combo, 'Pale Blue Eyes' had Moe Tucker's tambourine suspended before you in space, while Sterling Morrison's sensitive guitar licks on 'Some Kinda Love' and 'Jesus' were positively goosebump-inducing. To paraphrase Reed from his later *Berlin* album, "It

VERDICT

Thorens TD 810

Dynavector DV20X

Dynavector P75

SOUND

Thorens TD 810 ★★★★★

Dynavector DV20X ★★★★★

Dynavector P75 ★★★★★

BUILD

Thorens TD 810 ★★★★★

Dynavector DV20X ★★★★★

Dynavector P75 ★★★

VALUE

Thorens TD 810 ★★★★★

Dynavector DV20X ★★★★★

Dynavector P75 ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★½

CONTACT: Denco Audio, 03-379 0743, www.thorens.com,
www.dynavector.co.jp,
www.dynavector.com.au



TECH SPECS

Dynavector P75 phono stage

LOW OUTPUT MC — STANDARD

Input sensitivity: 0.2mV or 0.15mV

Gain: 60-63dB

Input impedance: 30, 100, 470 ohms

LOW OUTPUT MC — PHONO ENHANCER

Input sensitivity: as above

Gain: as above

Input impedance: zero ohms

HIGH OUTPUT MC AND MM

Input sensitivity: 2mV

Gain: 40dB

Input impedance: 47 kOhms

Dimensions (w/h/d):
132x43x86mm



TECH SPECS

Dynavector DV20X cartridge

Type: High/Low output moving coil cartridge with Flux damper and Softened magnetism

Output voltage: 2.5mV/0.25mV (at 1KHz, 5cm/sec.)

Frequency response: 20–20,000Hz (± 2dB)

Stylus: Nude diamond, Perfect elliptical

Cantilever: 6mm length, hard aluminium pipe

Recommended load impedance: 47 Kohms/30ohms

Tracking weight: 1.8–2.2 grams

Weight: 8.6 grams

was very nice. It was paradise".

Leaping forward to 1982 and XTC's seminal *English Settlement* (Virgin), the acoustic guitars on 'Yacht Dance' emerged from the speakers as fully formed instruments, while the thrum of Colin Moulding's fretless bass in the same song was superb — deep, well-timed and laden with subtle tonal colours.

Okay, so the Thorens/Dynavector combination can do intimate, but how does it cope with something a little more complex and propulsive? For a real low-end workout I spun *The Compact King Crimson* (EG Records); tracks such as 'Three Of A Perfect Pair', 'Discipline' and 'Thela Hun Ginjeet' will test the mettle (and tracking ability) of any cartridge. The DV20X proved unflappable with a pitch stability and sure-footed sense of timing that bordered on the obsessive. If there was a negative, it was that proceedings sometimes sounded a little too buttoned down and under control. On occasions there was a certain dryness to the sound, as if music had been robbed of a little "air" and some natural reverberation.

Despite this minor caveat, there's no doubt that the Germanic control exerted by the TD810 coupled with the finesse of the Japanese-sourced DV20X was able to deliver the sonic goods on disk after 12-inch disk. Equally, I have no doubt that the P75 phono stage brings out the best qualities

of the TD810 and DV20X.

In his review of the P75, *Hi-Fi's* Jason Hector wasn't so much taken with what the P75 did, but rather what it lacks. "Firstly it lacks noise: background noise is impressive by its commendably low value. Instruments materialising on a low-noise background strike you as more realistic even if the genuine recorded ambient noise is high.

"Secondly it lacks a constrained dynamic range: from large transients (just listen to a well recorded drum kit like the one on Kings of Leon — *Youth And Young Manhood*) to the gentle caress of a whispered voice, the range contrast and speed of attack are exemplary.

"Thirdly it lacks mechanical timing: the P75 fails to impart or impose any false sense of timing on the music and this means a wider gamut of emotions are presented to you irrespective of genre."

If that's not impressive enough (and my experience with the P75 suggests that Hector's comments are bang on the money), the P75 has a further trick up its sleeve — a "Phone Enhancer" mode. This mode is a reworking of a technique invented by Dr Tominari of Dynavector Japan, which removes the input resistor, found in almost all other phono stages, and configures the P75 to act as a "current amplifier". The result is that the coils of the cartridge see an effective short circuit as load, the ideal condition.

I was unable to test the Phono Enhancer mode due to the high output impedance of the supplied DV20X cartridge. But according to Hector (who uses a low output Dynavector TeKaitora cartridge), the Phono Enhancer takes the already impressive performance of the P75 "to new levels". The sound is "still characterised by the great dynamics, neutral rendition and ease of listening shown in the other mode. In other words, it's still the same phono stage, but it is simply a better version."

Listening to Suzanne Vega's *99.9F Degrees* or Holly Golightly's *Truly She Is None Other* in Phono Enhancer mode made Hector "more aware of their vocal intonation". "In both cases the frequently complex backing instrumentation made more sense because of the ability to resolve and integrate the music into a whole. There is no greying out of the richness of acoustic instruments and the differences between guitar amps, for example, are plain to hear".

Playing Lloyd Cole's *Mainstream*, Hector was seduced by "effortless emotional involvement from a sound that just flows into the room. This really highlights what the Dynavector P75 is all about — musical neutrality."

Oh, and one more thing. The P75 is priced at £475 in the UK (approx \$NZ1400). For local shoppers, the P75's New Zealand RRP of \$699 must make it the phono stage bargain of the century.

Martin Bell

UNITED NATIONS OF AUDIO

Type "Dynavector" into Google and amongst the screeds of results, you'll find two different references for Dynavector home pages — one for Dynavector Japan (www.dynavector.jp) and one for Dynavector Australia (www.dynavector.com.au). To further complicate the national identity crisis, one of Dynavector's top cartridges sports a Maori name, TeKaitora (or "The Discoverer"). What gives? Well, Dynavector cartridges are distributed in New Zealand by Denco Audio, an association that goes back many years. When Denco principal Frank Denson suggested to his long-time friend Dr Tominari of Dynavector that his company should produce a new range-topping cartridge, Tominari (who passed away in 2003) felt it appropriate to turn to the country of inspiration when it came time to name the newly-minted cartridge. In a final local touch, each TeKaitora cartridge is hand signed and numbered by Maori artist John Bevan Ford. But the cross-cultural, pan-Pacific audio odyssey doesn't end there. When Denson wanted a brand name for some new amplifiers he was developing with Australian Jonathon Davies, Tominari was happy to lend the Dynavector name. So as well as Japanese-designed and manufactured cartridges and a tonearm, the Dynavector range now includes several amplifiers designed by an Australian and manufactured in New Zealand.