



From Zero to hero

Looking for an alternative to the big name players in £1,500 turntables? **Ed Selley** thinks this might just be the answer

▶ **DETAILS****PRODUCT**
Analogue Works
Zero+**ORIGIN**
UK/Japan**TYPE**
Belt-drive turntable**WEIGHT**
11kg**DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
468 x 108 x 369 mm**FEATURES**
• 33 & 45rpm
• Jelco SA-750DB
arm with detachable
headshell
• Audio-Technica
AT440MLB
cartridge**DISTRIBUTOR**
Divine Audio**TELEPHONE**
01536 762211**WEBSITE**
analogueworks.
co.uk

Fresh from the news that the best-selling item in the Amazon US home electronics category over Christmas was the turntable, it looks increasingly likely that the vinyl boom is set to continue into 2016 and beyond. Unsurprisingly, the popularity in the analogue format means a greater number of decks hitting the market, which is great for both new and old vinyl fans alike.

One new arrival is the Zero turntable from British newcomer Analogue Works. We have already sampled the company's Turntable One, which was highly Recommended when reviewed in issue 388. The Zero is the smallest of three new models that the maker claims further evolve the design principles of the original and look set to offer improved performance as a result. The Zero is available as a basic model for £1,000 or as seen here in Zero+ form, which upgrades the arm and cartridge supplied for an extra £500.

The Zero+ is an unsuspended, belt-drive design that is in Analogue Works' own words a combination of "best engineering practices, common

There is a sense of life to voices that makes any recording a pleasure to listen to

sense, careful listening and a marriage of materials". This might be seen as a slightly long-hand way of saying that the design is not an especially radical one, but it does include some impressive features given its price.

The plinth is constructed from layers of Finnish birch ply selected for its relative density and resonance control. This contains the main bearing, which is a very substantial piece of engineering indeed and has been designed in conjunction with the plinth for the absolute suppression of mechanical noise. The good news is that they seem to have succeeded. This is aided by feet made from weight-dependent damping material that offers a useful degree of isolation.

The platter that drops into the bearing is a high-mass steel type that is seriously weighty for a model at this price point. One unusual aspect is that as well as having a groove for the drive belt to sit in, it additionally has a larger groove at the top of the platter for the fitting of a rubber damping ring which quells resonances that can cause the belt to strum ▶



during rotation if it isn't present. The belt itself connects to a motor sited within a hold at the rear left corner of the plinth and the motor housing is as solid as the accompanying turntable and also impressively well damped.

Spin it to win it

The nature of this motor provides a clue to the origins of some of the design ethos of the Analogue Works. It is a low-torque design and the result of this is that if you flick the switch on the accompanying 'Black Eye' power supply to start the deck, nothing will happen. Due to its weight and low torque, the platter needs to be started by hand after which the motor will spin it to the correct speed (and a strobe test suggests it is impressively stable once there). After a bit of time, this feels entirely second nature, but it does take a little getting used to.

Finishing off the Zero+ deck is a Jelco SA-750DB tonearm and Audio-Technica AT440MLB cartridge. The Jelco is a talented arm and looks and feels extremely impressive. Fitting it to the Zero+ is fairly straightforward and thanks to the use of a removable headshell, it means that the body of the AT440 cartridge can be easily fitted to the detached headshell and simply slotted into place. A Cardas-wired tonearm interconnect completes the package.

As a package, the Zero+ is a genuinely handsome turntable. It looks clean and simple without appearing overly basic and the build quality is extremely good for the asking price. Where Analogue Works has been extremely clever is that nothing about the design screams low production volume. All of the details are well implemented and it feels like a product that has been designed

from the ground up rather than assembled from parts to hand. There is also the possibility to upgrade performance further at a later date with the optional WM One Power Supply, which will set you back an additional £745.

Sound quality

You shouldn't feel the need to rush into trying to squeeze more performance out of the Zero+, though, because there is a great deal to like about the way that it behaves. Connected to an Avid Pellar phono stage (HFC 363), Naim Supernait 2 integrated amp and Neat Momentum 4i speakers, it demonstrates a number of distinctive and likeable traits from the outset. The first is that it is a genuinely quiet turntable. Mechanical noise is almost completely absent and this contributes to a low noisefloor on the deck itself.

As a result, with the wonderful *Spaces* by Nils Frahm, the Zero+ excels itself. The increasingly frantic piano work of *Hammers* rises from near total silence and the scale and power of the instrument is captured perfectly. The Zero+ is able to get out of the way of the music and let it happen in a way that is unusual for a deck at this relatively sane price. There is a clear perception of the space on the stage and the mass of the audience in front of it, which combines to give a fine sense of realism to the performance.

At the same time, there is also a sense of force to the Zero+ that is extremely likeable. With the more boisterous *Art Angels* by Grimes, there is a clear sense of drive and attack that gives the deck an enthusiastic quality without



The Zero+ makes an interesting comparison to the Avid Ingenium (HFC 379). The Avid can be ordered with the same Jelco arm and fitting an AT440MLB cartridge will bring it in a little under the budget of the Zero+ – although features like the Avid's clamp will start to eat into that advantage. As the Avid has a higher torque motor and lighter platter, it starts without assistance and it remains one of the most accurate, revealing and neutral decks available at the price. On the other hand, the liveliness and fluidity of the Analogue Works makes it a more beguiling performer with many styles of music, and it does a better job of flattering poorer-quality recordings. Ultimately, you have the interesting personal choice of deciding between accuracy and fun if you are shopping at this price point.

sounding forced or relentless. Instead, the punchy bassline of *California* is rendered in an unapologetically joyous fashion. The relatively high mass of the Zero+ seems to make itself felt in consistently deep and controlled bass that has plenty of impact without sounding sluggish or dominating. It can't produce the same relentless accuracy of the Avid Ingenium (HFC 379), but it is rather happier having a bit of fun when the occasion demands.

The upper registers are also well presented. Claire Boucher's striking vocals are crisply and clearly defined from the accompanying instruments, but remain well integrated with the music as a whole. Vocals seem to be a particular strength. While the deck doesn't tend to over emphasise the midrange – it is very even from top to bottom – there is a genuine sense of life to voices and stringed instruments in particular that makes any recording with them a pleasure to listen to.

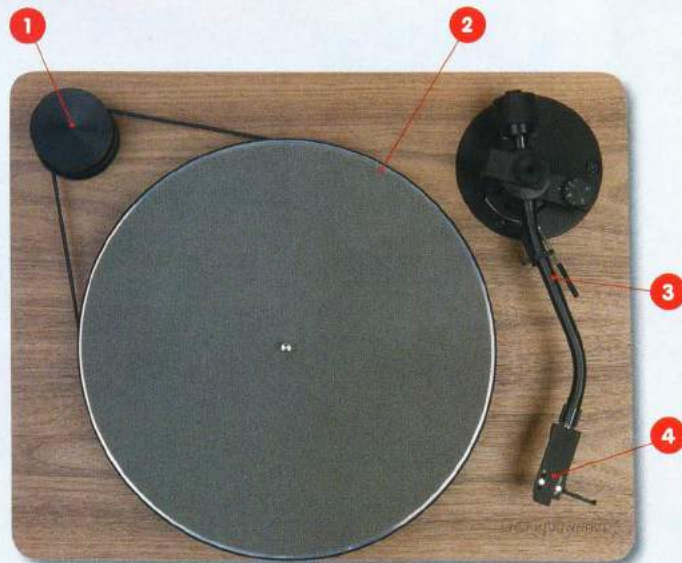
The Zero+ is unfazed even by extremely complex arrangements and this sense of control is consistent across a wide variety of material. Past experience with the AT440 cartridge suggests that it is slightly on the bright side of neutral but it combines with the Zero+ and Jelco to excellent effect, sounding lively without tipping over into being thin or bright. The

It's handsome, beautifully made and capable across a variety of music

presentation also holds up well with less than stellar recordings. The Audio-Technica is a little susceptible to surface noise but congested and confused records like Placebo's *Meds* still sound listenable and fun where many rivals can all too often reveal the many and varied flaws that are in the mastering.

The synergy of the deck, arm and cartridge and this peppy and evenhanded nature means that it is very hard to wrong-foot the Zero+ across a huge variety of music. It seems just as happy with the delicacy of the Cinematic Orchestra as it is powering its way through the more chaotic clatter of *Underworld*. On occasions, sources with a fundamentally lively presentation can sound a little ill at ease with music that doesn't require the same get up and go. Where the Zero+ is particularly impressive is that while it never stops sounding powerful and

IN SIGHT



- 1 Motor & pulley for speed selection
- 2 High mass steel platter
- 3 S-shaped Jelco tonearm
- 4 Audio-Technica AT440MLB cartridge

WORKS SERVICE

Analogue Works might be a relatively young company when compared with some more established rivals, but that doesn't mean that it is lacking in experience. Boasting a partnership of Tim Chorlton and Mark Groom, the company is also able to call on the services of power supply guru Martin Bastin, who is responsible for both the bundled and upgraded power supplies that come with the current range.

The design ethos itself borrows heavily from the late Tom Fletcher (of Fletcher Audio fame). Most famous for the Nottingham Analogue range of models, prior to his untimely death, Tom had been looking into new designs

and features and some of these are key design aspects of the Audio Works models. As noted, the low-torque motor is a classic characteristic of his designs but so is the use of the rubber damping ring on the platter.

It should be noted that the Zero+ is not simply a rehash of his work, though. The choice of a full-size plinth and the clever use of weight-dependent damping material on those isolating feet are different again from other designs associated with Tom, and reflect the requirements of users buying a deck at this price point. Analogue Works is so pleased with the performance of the feet that it can retrofit them to pre 2015 models as well.

engaging, this never seems to unduly interfere with music that really doesn't benefit from this. Anthony and the Johnsons' hauntingly lovely *I Am A Bird Now* is as delicate and soulful as you could hope for and never sounds like the Zero+ is forcing the issue.

Neither is it terribly fussy about partnering equipment. As the main source used in this month's phono stage *Group Test* (page 26), the fundamental qualities of the deck are present with all of the test models while being sufficiently revealing to highlight the differences between them and it suggests that partnering it should not be too demanding a process. Equally, those clever feet do a fine job of keeping the deck isolated and while a dedicated platform will provide a further boost, the performance when positioned directly on a Quadraspire rack is extremely good.

Conclusion

Vinyl boom or not, there is no hiding from the inescapable fact that there is no shortage of models to choose from at this key price point and that includes some very well-known brands alongside some deeply

accomplished rivals. Analogue Works has been clever in putting the Zero+ together and has avoided particularly radical design aspects and exotic components. Instead it has focused on using the best materials it can get its hands on and sound engineering practise to deliver a turntable that is handsome, beautifully made and exceptionally capable across a very wide variety of music. We loved the Turntable One, but in this second-generation of turntable models it has a genuine star, and the Zero+ should be on your shortlist if you're seeking a deck at this price ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Controlled, powerful and involving sound; build; looks

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Odd start-up procedure; very slight lack of fine detail

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: A well thought out and brilliantly implemented deck that delivers a superb performance

FEATURES



OVERALL



Q&A

Tim Chorlton

Director, Analogue Works



ES: Does the Zero have much in common with the preceding Turntable One that we reviewed in HFC 388 or is it a completely new design?

TC: All of our turntables have a commonality. We like what the materials are doing so if we need a less expensive deck we use less of the same materials. This also works the other way for the current TT One and TT Two. The original One had a phosphor bronze bearing, we are now using leaded bronze throughout the range as it sounds even smoother.

What are the advantages of the low-torque motor used in the Zero and other Analogue Works models?

Low-torque motors produce less noise. The motors can be used from 110V to 250V, but they have a sweet spot – our standard power supplies re-volt effectively making the motor even quieter. For even better results we offer a fifth-generation Martin Bastin Wave Mechanic, which is a direct swap out.

The Zero also appears in pictures with a Rega arm fitted, is the Jelco a better match or are there pros and cons to both?

We test our turntables with all sorts of differing arms and carts to make sure we are providing the most stable platform for the cart and tonearm to do its job properly. They are both very good for the money – the Jelco offers easier headshell and cable loom upgrades.

Does Analogue Works have any other products under development that you can tell us about?

Yes we do. I am a great fan of Tom Fletcher's work and we have a basic design for a multi-tonearmed turntable for those who like differing carts and arms. We are also testing several motors, power supplies, sub plinths and platter materials to go with this new variant. We may have something to show at the High End Show in Munich in May.