

# SPECIAL? VERY...



Special Editions are nothing new in the world of audio, but the serious upgrades involved in the „SP“ecial edition of Avid’s Diva II mean this version of the successful British design more than lives up to the name.

**C**areful! These things are slippery! We are, of course, talking about the two short drive-belts used on the DivaIISP turntable, the latest model from British analog specialists Avid. And you’re going to need nimble fingers: only if you can thread two belts on top of each other on its flat inner platter can you even get started.

You should wear thin gloves for this exercise because you still want to be able to feel the belt but also protect it from

sweat and grease, otherwise it may slip and affect the evenness of the drive.

The rubber bands are pulled over a pin placed on the outer edge of the platter which is then slipped over the bearing sitting on the stiff, skeletal metal chassis of the turntable Diva, so that the spindle of the free-standing motor block locates directly into the open triangle formed by the pre-tensioned belts. Then carefully spin the 6.3 kg platter with your hand so that the flexible bands fall into place

## TEST COMPONENTS

RECORD PLAYER: Transrotor Rondino nero, Clearaudio Ovation / Clarify / Talismann V2 G.

PICKUP: Benz ACE SL, Brinkmann Pi, Clearaudio Maestro V2

PHONO PREAMP: Brinkmann Edison

PREAMP / POWER AMP: Accuphase C-3800/P-6100

SPEAKER: DALI Epicon 6, Focal Sopra No2, T+A Solitaire CWT-1000-8 SE

RACKS: Finite Elemente, Time Table

correctly around the motor pulley. Finally, remove the pin and turn the turntable one or two revolutions so that the belts align nicely on the sub-platter and don’t jump off as soon as the motor starts up

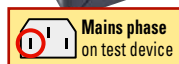
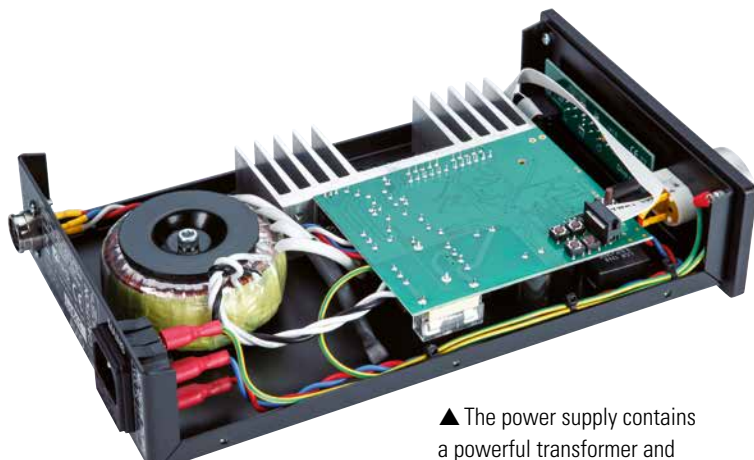
### Precise control per DSP

By this point you may get the feeling that this “super-Diva” is going to be demanding to use, but far from it: the delicate-looking but robust turntable turns out to be a sophisticated but fuss-free vinyl player (at least after the above-mentioned finger exercises).



◀ The normal Diva II, with which the „SP“ only shares its basic aluminum chassis.

High-quality materials form the inverted bearing with the center of gravity on top for a favorable mass distribution. ▶



▲ The power supply contains a powerful transformer and a quartz-controlled electronic motor control.

While the base version already has a powerful power supply, the “P.S.U.” supply used here is in a completely different class. Not only does it offer an electronic switch between 33.33 and 45rpm, it also controls the motor via a DSP-based switch which creates a precise 50 Hz sine wave for accuracy, these electronics being taken directly from Avid’s rather more upmarket Volvere SP.

The same is true for another “central” but invisible item: the bearing itself. While the shaft of the standard Diva is aluminum, the DivaIISP again follows the more expensive model with a hard stainless steel shaft. A stainless steel ball is placed into a small indentation on the top of the bearing shaft and then the platter with its extremely smooth and durable sapphire plate placed on top.

This forms a “inverted bearing” combines a high tilt point and low center of gravity: the mass of the table hangs from the bearing instead of being supported by it, as is the case in lesser designs, this

construction being engineered to aid the stability and steadiness of the playback process tremendously.

### The right arm: SME M2

To support all this, a stable backbone is needed, and the Divas provide this in the form of an extremely stiff one-piece aluminum skeleton with no resonance-prone cavities, and offering a minimal surface area to avoid reflected energy. In order to eliminate vibrations it sits on three feet damped with Sorbothane, with three different thicknesses and viscosities of the material used to achieve damping over a wide bandwidth.

Good-quality tonearms – such as the Rega RB301, which at the time was our weapon of choice – suit the standard Diva

II, but the SP demands more, and top-notch arms won’t be wasted on it. Avid CEO Conrad Mas recommends SME’s entry-level model, the M2, and supplied this arm with the review sample. It was a great choice, as we soon discovered: so equipped – and here it makes no sense to beat around the bush – the Diva II SP is the bomb!

Immediately impressive is the way this fleet-footed turntable combines grandeur with concentrated energy and gnarly, organic bass which doesn’t soften even in the lowest registers. The powerful, vibrant “Exactly Like You” from the inspired “Soular Energy” album by the Ray Brown Trio was never at risk of losing its form or softening, while the acoustic bass driving “Wake Me Up...” on the

The aluminum skeleton is made from one piece for optimal stiffness. The motor is freestanding to avoid any contact with the chassis. ▶



▲ The two drive belts are pre-tensioned with a small pin, and a slight bit of spinning moves them onto the pulley. Sounds more complicated than it is, fortunately!



**AVID DIVA II SP**



approx. € 5,290 (drive ca. € 3,590, pickup arm SME M2 ca. € 1700)  
 Dimensions: 45 x 15 x 39 cm (WxHxD)  
 Warranty: 5 years (with registration)  
 Contact: Avid, Phone: +44 1480/869900, www.avidhifi.com

The more expensive „SP“ version of Avid’s Diva II is a definite step up from the already first-rate base model. Out simply, you can’t find a better motor unit for the money and SME’s M2 arm is a perfect fit.

**EQUIPMENT**

External motor with DSP control and rpm fine-tuning, record clamp, power cord, illustrated manual.

**STEREO-TEST**

**SOUND QUALITY 94%**

PRICE/PERFORMANCE



**EXCELLENT**

STEREO listening test LP was vivacious and crisp but never interfered with the singer. This makes listening fun!

While the ‘basic’ Diva II displayed a very concentrated, musical timing, the SP was incomparably more versatile in its rhythmical expression and even snuck up very close to our reference turntables, only lacking just the last iota of composure. However, the assuredness which it staged fleet-footed Baroque concerts, and just seconds later let the wide-ranging melodies of Beethoven’s “Pastoral symphony” breathe freely, is deeply impressive.

This is where the complex control electronics implementation pays off, although it must be connected to the power grid in the right phase (see diagram below) unless it’s to lose its gentle touch and push the energy into the upper mid-range at the expense of balance.

Dynavector’s € 730 DV-20X2L MC cartridge (see images) created a tremendously harmonic combination, which completely lives up to the refined sound of the turntable. It’s a great match for the dry, defined presentation of the Avid/

SME M2 combination, and plays to the pairing’s tight, controlled sound: any sign of a smooth or slightly rough sound immediately makes clear the effect of the screw-down record clamp, provided to press the disc onto the standard cork mat and ensure the record, mat and platter move as one.

**Suitable for MM and MC**

The effect of switching to Clearaudio’s Virtuoso V2 MM cartridge (about € 750), which we mounted while searching for further perfect matches, was a matter of taste when. The livelier cuts from Diana Krall’s “Live In Paris” album sounded tremendously loose and lively, with the bass possibly a hint more rounded than with the Dynavector, but fantastically three-dimensional.

The more we got to know it, the more we fell in love with Avid’s DivaIISP: once set up it’s a fuss-free record player, yet really offer sup “SP”ecial qualities in terms of its electro-mechanical and sonic performance.

*Matthias Böde*

**AVID – DRIVEN BY DISSATISFACTION**

Like many other HiFi developers, Conrad Mas began his career as a hobby: a music enthusiast, he read every book he could find about electronics, mechanics and manufacturing, but his impatience made it hard for him to wait until others improved their products, so he decided to implement his theoretical knowledge into practice.

Avid is based in Kimbolton, near Huntingdon, and here Mas develops his products and ensures the company’s workmanship is constantly at the highest level, with a very deep vertical integration which may be astonishing to a layman. Mas, as an admitted perfectionist, detests assembly machines.

When discussing the benefits of his products, you can question him for hours without the 54 year-old getting bored of answering, one of his favorite subjects being power supplies: he offers various qualities, always matched to the motor it is designed to supply. „In principle, power supplies are power amps – just in different performance classes“, he explains.

Mas has preserved his enthusiasm over the



**Conrad Mas, 54, is the founder, owner, and chief developer of Avid.**

years and consistently expanded his knowledge, even after initial success at the „Penta Hi-Fi Show“ in England and an order of 18 record players. However Mas is not just a tinkerer who turned his hobby onto a profession: he is also a salesman. So it no wonder that this company, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary, presented its first phono preamp a few years ago and since then not only carries a whole series of turntables but also a complete electronics line. Just in time for the last „High End“, Mas and his eleven-man team surprised the audio

world with a reference series consisting of preamp and mono blocks, crowning his striving for perfection. The price is also regal at £ 80,000 pounds sterling.

Word spread quickly in the UK that Avid produces precise and constant high quality, even reaching the ears of Aston Martin, who took advantage of Mas’ know-how for a while. The self-taught Mas sees his strength as supplier in his reliability: „We deliver

the ordered units on time and at the required quality level – so we accomplish about 20% of our sales with German virtues“, he laughs.

Lately, the passionate music fan has rediscovered his love for old mono recordings, which he feels have less hiss and where crackles are less conspicuous.

We wanted to know what his plans were for the near future: he says that within a year or so, there will definitely be a new headphone amp, designed to be universally usable. In the medium term, it would not be surprising if Mas, whose calm exterior hides a restless soul, came out with his own tonearm, to further enhance his record players.

*Michael Lang*



▲ The inconspicuous company headquarters of Avid – bursting at the seam. A move is impending.