

FURUTECH

HiFi+ (UK) – demag & Destat II

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VPI and Furutech products that uncover the sound of your discs!

by Roy Gregory



As a group we spend a huge amount of time and effort (and not a little money) on optimizing the performance of our systems. First comes selecting the equipment: then placing, adjusting and leveling it: and that's before we consider what's supporting it, the cables employed and the route by which power reaches it. Look at front-ends in particular and that behaviour starts to stray well into OCD territory. From visiting gurus who'll breathe on your turntable to coloured lights that wash the CD as it plays; you really couldn't make it up. But what about the discs themselves? With all that effort expended on the replay chain, how much care are we devoting to our software, ensuring that it too is in tip-top shape? One side effect of the rise and rise of file replay systems is a new concern with the actual nature of the software itself. When is a high-res file really high-res and when are the numbers nothing more than a marketing smokescreen.

It's not just about the original file, it's about what's been done to it since – and how it was done. But why should physical formats be any different.

Just as a file can change, from analogue to digital or RedBook to something glitzier (and not necessarily better) so vinyl and optical discs can 'change' – although in this instance, these physical formats suffer rather more physical issues. Not that the sonic and musical results are any less audible...

Muck you can see...

Let's start with the most obvious and most easily understood example: cleaning vinyl records. With more and more listeners, old and new, appreciating just how much musical value record replay can still deliver, there's been an upturn in both record sales and sales of the equipment to play them. In fact, in terms of physical ▶

► music media, vinyl is just about the only area showing real, sustained growth. But the sales of new albums only represent the tip of the iceberg and it's the availability of huge numbers of affordable secondhand records that is no small part of the resurgent interest in LPs. These records are a potential musical goldmine, especially for all those wanting to buy back the record collections they once had – or their kids getting into fossil finds; they are plentiful, generally cheap – and nearly always filthy. Which is where record cleaning comes in.

Nowadays there are nearly as many ways to clean a record as there are to play it. In the simplest and most affordable forms, they are represented by various solutions that are applied and rinsed by hand. Perfectly effective these are also laborious to use and in my experience that acts against them. The more involved and tedious the (optional) process, the less likely it is to get done. After all – hi-fi is supposed to be fun and all about the music. Hand washing records doesn't really qualify...

Which is why you need that great, 20th century invention, the labour-saving device – or in this case, a record cleaning machine. These come in all shapes and sizes, with increasing complexity the more you pay. Top models come from VPI, Clearaudio and Keith Monks, costing well into four figures, but the benchmark is set far lower. It's the VPI HW16.5, a machine that has been in production for over 30 years. It's mix of motorized turntable, manual fluid application and vacuum drying offers just the right balance of cost and complexity, making cleaning records fast and effective. Fast enough in fact, to clean each new record as you come to play it. Each new record? Yes, because it's not only secondhand records that benefit from a pre-play bath. Brand new pressings are often infested with Mould Release Agent (MRA) which lurks in their grooves, producing rustling background noise and gunking up the stylus. Cleaning your records will not just banish surface noise, the lower noise floor will reveal more information and the cartridge will track better. The end result is more of what makes records worth listening to, which along with the increased access to second-hand software makes a record cleaning machine one of the most cost-effective upgrades any vinyl junkie can invest in. Just don't forget that a clean record needs a clean sleeve...

Don't go thinking that just because you don't use records you can ignore the problem. Optical discs suffer similar indignities in their production process, and a good cleaner (like the L'Art do Son fluid) can transform the sense of flow, body and colour from a disc. The good news is that the smaller dimensions of the problem mean that you can get by without a machine, but don't let that make you overlook the issue.

...and muck you can't!

It is now generally accepted that the build up of static charges on the surface of CDs and LPs affects their sound quality. There are various steps you can



take to minimize the problem, especially when it comes to storage, but by far the most effective anti-static device I've used comes from Furutech, their DeStat II. This small, self-standing blower washes a CD placed on it with a draft of ionized air, discharging static build up. It takes about 10 seconds and the results are jaw-droppingly obvious to hear: more space, more colour, more weight, body and dynamic range, much more natural tonality but most of all – more music. Few products receive genuinely universal acclaim from reviewers but this is one that does. At around £400 it has a remarkable impact on EVERY disc you play. Every disc? Yep, it works on records too. Just hover the DeStat over the disc in question and off you go. The Furutech DeStat II is so simple, so affordable and so darned good that it really should be a no-brainer. In the audio world where we seem to place a disproportionate importance on the weight and price of products it's easy to overlook just how fundamental an improvement this little gem provides. ►

▶ Which brings us to the DeMag. It looks like a Gerry Anderson space station. A thick, smooth, heavy, silver-grey disc with conical feet and a flared 'tail' extension. A casual glance at the pictures will suggest the DeMag is about the same size as an LP. It's not. It extends a good 3" on each side of an album placed on its central spindle, making it fully 18" across. That's one big lump – and at 11kg it's genuinely heavy too.

But, having found a (large) stable surface to place the DeMag on, the fun can begin. Play a record and get a feel for the way it sounds. Now place it on the DeMag and press the button. Wait for the machine to do its thing and play the disc again. It won't sound like the same band or the same singer! The DeMag strips away grain from within the soundstage and between the instruments, removes glare from the high-frequencies and brings colour and body to the mids. The increase in immediacy, presence, attack, rhythmic integrity and intimacy is remarkable – a bit like the band stepping into the listening room from a space next door. There's so much more purpose in the playing, voices are so much more natural and expressive that it really is hard to credit that you are listening to the same disc.

Furutech suggest the DeMag degausses the record, dissipating residual magnetic fields residing in micro ferrous particles that are present in the black pigment and even the vinyl itself. I couldn't possibly comment on the substance of that claim, but I'll stand by the results, which are little short of stunning and once heard, hard to live without. Which brings us to the rub – don't listen to the DeMag unless you are prepared to fork out the (considerable stack) of cash to keep it. At £1,980 this is not exactly a casual purchase, but the results more than justify the outlay – not least because, like all the other items listed here, it operates right at the start of the replay chain, meaning that the benefits are enjoyed by – and amplified by – every step in the system.

The good news is, that just like the DeStat, the DeMag works on more than just its intended target. Spectacularly effective on records, it's nearly as

impressive with CDs, which have printing on their surface, and many cables where ferrous contaminants can be present in conductors and even some insulators. Simply sit the CD, DVD, BluRay or cable on the DeMag and let it do its thing...

A whole that's greater...

The best thing about all these devices is that their effects are cumulative. Used in conjunction they build on each other, lifting the performance of your physical software to a level you simply won't recognize: all of your software that is – and all of the time. Just as those whose CD players sound better than their record players need to take a long hard look at their turntables, anybody whose file-replay chain is outperforming their more traditional sources should be asking themselves just how much more can be extracted from the software they already own. It really is quite remarkable how much difference even a little basic house-keeping can make. By all means play with a ZeroStat pistol and some manual cleaning, but if you think they make a difference, just wait until you do the job properly! +



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

VPI HW16.5: £750

Manufactured by: VPI Industries

URL: www.vpiindustries.com

Distributed by: Renaissance Audio

URL: www.renaissanceaudio.co.uk

Tel: +44(0)131 555 3922

Furutech DeMag: £1,980

Furutech DeStat II: £395

Manufactured by: Furutech

URL: www.furutech.com

Distributed by: Sound Foundations

URL: www.soundfoundations.co.uk

Tel: +44(0)1276 501392