



Avid

Volvere Turntable \$8500

It's been said many times before, but despite the dominance (and eventual decay) of digital disc formats, the humble turntable has managed to survive – in much the same way as lizards, crocodiles and our own tuatara after the extinction of the dinosaurs.

Now, of course, there is the download phenomenon, and recent sampling of network music servers has me convinced that even the CD may be heading to oblivion.

So why is there such fascination with crackly, fragile and unwieldy 12-inch records? Because, adherents including myself argue, vinyl still represents the pinnacle of humanity's attempts to capture audio and preserve the musical moment. There is a certain sonic 'rightness' about vinyl when played on a quality turntable that has eluded the best of digital, even the much lauded and now virtually extinct SACD and 24/96 DVD-A.

When done correctly, a record just sounds better.

I was lucky enough to experience high-end vinyl replay at a recent demonstration at Auckland's Shore Hi-Fi, courtesy of British turntable manufacturer Avid and its spectacular Volvere.

High-end turntables are usually dramatic exercises in style and build quality, and my expectations were realised in full – the Volvere is a quite stunning piece of *objet d'art*. A suspended design, the black sub-chassis, arm board and heavyweight platter (with composite cork mat) sit atop three beautifully turned metal suspension pillars. The turntable is supplied sans tonearm and cartridge, so for this demo a Naim ARO unipivot arm was used along with a very rare Fidelity Research FR1 mk3 low output moving coil cartridge.

The guys at Shore Hi-Fi had the Volvere connected to an all-Naim system, including the new flagship Superline phono stage and a pair of yummy SL2 loudspeakers. I was expecting the sound to be detailed and pacy, and my listening tests confirmed

those attributes, as well as offering a few nice surprises.

First onto the massive platter was Santana's 1970s jazz-fusion epic *Caravanserai*, and I was impressed by the ability of the Volvere to extract detail from this old recording. Carlos's guitar came alive, bass lines and subtle percussion were easy to pick out of the recording and, more importantly, the music had a real swing to it.

That was a good start, but things took off from there as the first notes of 'I Can See Clearly Now' by the Holly Cole Trio percolated into the room.

This was stunning sound quality, and imaging from the system was breathtaking – the SL2s were now producing a giant soundstage that belied their modest dimensions. The detail from the double bass was just so real; I could almost reach out and touch the instrument while Holly's vocals pierced through the recording like a vocal *épée*.

Oh boy this was great!

And it didn't stop there, either. American singer/songwriter Mary Gauthier's *Mercy Now* album was carefully placed on the Volvere, the arm delicately lowered and the fragile stylus began its musical journey in the lead-in groove.

This recording is extremely gritty with lots of reverb, completely different from the lush treatment on the Holly Cole disc. Gauthier's atmospheric vocals ached along with the plaintive harmonica, while the kick drum took on an almost timpani-like character. This stripped-down recording allowed all the emotion of the music to flow through the system and into this reviewer – effortlessly.

Other discs from the likes of Pearl Jam, Morcheeba and Hans Theessink were sampled during this most enjoyable afternoon, and all with quite superb results.

What struck me most about the Avid Volvere was its ability to communicate the expression of the music, so while it is an expensive component, it would represent a fine investment in musical enjoyment for those who can afford it.

It needs partnering equipment of equal calibre and a well thought-out room, of course, but the stunning Avid Volvere is quite simply a superb example of audio equipment done right.

■ BRETT GIDEON

TECH SPECS

DRIVE: Belt
SPEEDS: 33 1/3, 45RPM
PLATTER MASS: 6.7kg
TONE ARMS: Standard cut for SME (adapters available for other types)
SUSPENSION: 3-point, springs in vertical/O-rings in lateral
DIMENSIONS: 425 x 370 x 205mm (W/D/H)
WEIGHT: 12.3kg

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