

Eastern

Adam Smith tastes Consonance's new T988 tonearm...



adjustable effective length from 10.5in to 12in). I have sent much nagging in the direction of Consonance's UK distributor, Alium Audio, for a review sample of the ST500. However, it was not to be as I recently learnt that Consonance had pulled a curve-ball on me. Yes, that's right, they discontinued the entire range!

All is not lost however, as I sit here with Consonance's new tonearm quietly warming up beside me, and rather smart it is too. The newbie actually comes in two flavours; the T988 which is a nine inch unipivot design, and the T1288 which is the twelve inch variant. The designs are actually identical in other respects and spare arm wand/bearing assemblies can be purchased to simply lift on to and off the installed base. Each wand comes with leads terminated in a small multi-way plug that connects to a short lead with matching socket that is screwed to the armbase. The other end of this lead has a pair of phono sockets, so that the interconnect of your choice may be easily used to connect to your amplifier or phono stage.

The new arms have a interesting bearing structure, consisting of a 'well' with a central protrusion in the base around which sit six ball bearings, and the rounded 'point' on the underside of the arm fits into the centre of these, free to move on their upper surfaces. Maybe this doesn't make it a conventional unipivot in the strictest sense of the word but the arm feels more stable than some of the more 'point on a spike' types. Interestingly, this must be a very new development as the manual shows a thin point and makes no mention of the bearings!

The armtube itself is made of carbon fibre and a single weight allows for balancing in both the fore-aft and port-starboard planes. The

support platform, very much in the mould of the Simon Yorke S9 arm that still stands as the best unipivot we have yet measured at *Hi-Fi World*. Construction quality is excellent, although I was a little disappointed to find that the cueing lever seems to be more akin to the first ST100 arm that I met than the second, in that it dumps the stylus into the groove with a rather abrupt thud. Such things are rather a shock, especially when used to an Alphason cue lift so overdamped that there is time to brew a cuppa in between tapping the lever forward and diamond finally hitting vinyl!

SOUND QUALITY

It is often true that one affordable unipivot arm can often give similar results to another, and to really step forward in sonic terms, a greater outlay has to be made. Consequently I wondered if the ST988 would offer the usual blend of strengths and weaknesses that are most often part of the package with such designs. As the opening bars of Steely Dan's 'Do it Again' rang out through my loudspeakers, however, I realised that the ST988 seemed destined to impress. This particular track, taken from a double 'Best of Steely Dan' album is a rather laid-back recording that lacks top end sparkle and, unless a vinyl spinner can really cut through this to the material underneath, can often sound rather drab. With the Consonance in charge though, everything leapt out into the room and not the slightest bit of action was missed. Even more encouragingly, the bass line underpinning the track

The Opera Consonance Audio Company of Beijing is the oldest of China's respected audio manufacturers, having been founded in 1994 by Mr. Shi Hui Liu,

and I would say that they are definitely the kings of left-field. Whilst I have heard quite a few of their products and been impressed by them all, it is the sheer breadth and variety of their range that never fails to amaze me. If any readers can name a single current manufacturer where high end CD players rub shoulders with affordable turntables; where single ended valve amplifiers like the Cyber 10 sit alongside solid state 200W behemoths like the Forbidden City Calaf, and where horn loudspeakers find themselves stablemates to an iPod dock, then please let me know, because I can't think of any!

It is the record playing department with which we concern ourselves here though, as after testing a couple of Consonance's highly worthy LP spinners, I could not help but notice that the tonearm that was fitted to both, the ST100, was a rather special item. This formed the base of the ST range, below the ST300 (another nine inch, multi pivot design), the ST500 (a 10.5in unipivot)

