HI-FI WORLD

Call to arms

Tony Bolton finds his heart stolen by the sound of SME's update of the famous 3009 arm, the M2-9R.



Updating a tried and trusted product can be a risky thing to do, especially when an item has enjoyed nearly half a Century of production. In the world of hi-fi, Quad have been successful with their updates of the old Quad II amplifiers and SME have now joined this select group with the new M2-9R. This is an update of the 3009 based upon their successful M2 series of arms.

The old SME 3009, in its various forms, achieved sales of over 450,000 examples between its introduction in 1958, and the cessation of this model in 2003. so the new M2-9R has a very hard act to follow.



Two Tungsten counterweights are provided, for standard and heavy cartridges.

Whereas the M2 has a straight arm, the M2-9R follows the shape and style of the old 3009 series with a J shaped arm. However, although it looks very similar to the old 3009, there are very few components that have been carried over, apart from the classic black headshell.

The arm tube is made of thin-walled stainless steel (previously it was made of anodised aluminium) and the counterweights are now made of tungsten instead of brass. The bearing assembly is completely different, with the old knife edge bearings replaced with 10mm ball races.

Internal wiring is with Silver Litz cable. This terminates in a pair of RCA sockets mounted at the side of the base, with an earth screw on the opposite face. 1.2m of balanced hybrid cable is provided to carry the signal to the phonostage.

Comprehensive and easy to follow instructions are provided and setup actually is very similar to the old 3009. Before applying downforce through the calibrated outrider weight, the arm is statically balanced using either or both of the screw on counterweights at the back of the arm. Most users will only need one counterweight, since this copes with cartridges weighing up to 16gms. The second weight can be added to accommodate cartridges weighing up to 38gms using the SME headshell, and plug in heads up to 46gms, so users of Ortofon SPU cartridges are well catered for.

Tracking alignment is adjusted in the usual SME manner with a sliding bedplate (an alignment protractor is provided) and this arm also boasts a knurled thumbwheel to adjust the arm height (VTA). The pillar clamp screw must be slightly loosened and then the thumbwheel can be moved to give very accurate fine tuning of the VTA. Once positioned correctly the pillar clamp should be retightened.

Having set this up on my Sondek, in place of the Hadcock 242 Cryo, and rebalanced the LP12's suspension, since the SME, at 735gms, weighs quite a bit more than the Hadcock, I settled down to the customary ramble through my record collection.

I started at the dance music end of the shelves with Swedish DJ and composer Human Blue's 2002 trance opus 'Electric Roundabout'. The first track, 'Memorexis', opens with a deep pulsating bass tune that gradually builds in intensity until it is finally topped with a sparingly applied mid range of synthesised sounds, with high hats complementing the bass lines. My first reaction was of surprise at just how much bass information this arm allowed the cartridge to retrieve from the

record. It wasn't quite as powerful as it would have been using the SME Series V, but it ran it a pretty good second and carried the loping rhythm of these sounds with a tightness to the timing that was nothing short of exemplary.

One of the things that I have always loved about the old 3009,



The design of the classic SME headshell remains the same.

"I felt almost pinned back in my seat by the force of Grace Slick's voice and the massed electric guitars"

and the reason that I ran one for a while, was the lyrical nature to the sound it produced. Yet, it could also do "intense" satisfactorily and I was delighted to find that the redesign had not dimmed that characteristic in any way.

My early '90's pressing of 'Surrealistic Pillow' has the beautiful guitar instrumental, 'Embryonic Journey' immediately followed by the building power of 'White Rabbit'. The clarity of the finger work on the guitars was a joy to behold, yet a few minutes later I felt almost pinned back in my seat by the force of Grace Slick's voice and the massed electric guitars, bass and drums as the 'Airplane's' journey through Lewis Carroll's writing came to a close.

I first came across this arm when I reviewed the Timestep RA turntable (HFW January 2014 issue). In this case it was mounted on a modified Technics direct drive turntable and playing 78s. It was only a few minutes work to equip my spare SME headshell with the Ortofon 2M 78, crank the Funk Firm K Drive PSU up to speed and I settled down for an evening of classic jazz.

Fat's Waller's 1943 version of 'Ain't Misbehavin' was one of the last recordings he ever made and contains a scorching drum solo by Zutty Singleton that leads into Waller giving a superb display of stride piano in the closing bars. It sounded very vivid and vibrant, with a level of detail around the way the band were interacting with each other that I had not noticed before.

The interpretation of the rhythm was also spot on, the snappy foxtrot beat proving impossible for my feet to ignore.

I also explored classical sounds, finding Jaqueline du Pres' classic performance of the Elgar 'Cello Concerto' awash with emotion. This combined with a well lit and spacious presentation of the sonic image that resulted in my being thoroughly engrossed.

I'll be blunt. I've fallen in love with this arm. It does everything I need it to in the way of accommodating a variety of cartridges. Adjustments are



The new bearing housing contains the 10mm ball race bearings. The thread and weight antiskate arrangement is carried over from the previous model.



Downforce is applied by moving the calibrated outrigger rod forwards. The knurled VTA adjustment thumbwheel can be seen above the pillar clamp.

easy to do and to replicate. The build quality is first class, as you would expect of an SME product, and it has successfully married the flowing musical nature of the 3009 with the frequency range, extension and control that have earned both the 309/312 and Series V models such an enviable reputation. It isn't cheap, but it is worth every penny!

It is a successful reinterpretation of the classic 3009 arm for the 21st Century and deserves as long a production run and all of the success of its predecessor.

SYSTEM USED

Linn Sondek. Benz Micro Ace L cartridge.
Luxman E200 phonostage
Townshend Allegri pre-amp
2 X Quad 303 power amps
Kelly KT3 loudspeakers

MUSIC USED

Elgar. 'Cello Concerto in E minor. Op.85'. Jaqueline du Pres, Cello. Sir John Barnerolli conducting the London Symphony Orchestra. EMI Records Ltd. ASD 655. 1965.

Fat's Waller and His Rhythm.'Ain't Misbehavin'. The Gramophone Co. Ltd (HMV). C.3737. UK release 1946.

Jefferson Airplane. 'Surrealistic Pillow'. RCA Records. NL83738. 1967 (1986 German reissue.)

Human Blue. 'Electric Roundabout'. Spiral Trax Records. SPIT LP 010. 2002.

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