



Arms race

Vertere's more affordable tonearm might look rather simple but, as **Ed Selley** discovers, it is very clever indeed

Recent months have been tough for those looking for a new tonearm, with both SME and Jelco calling time on their ranges. Happily, some interesting options remain in the market including this more affordable offering from Vertere. Of course, this is a relative term, but with its Reference arm costing more than £30,000, £1,950 seems reasonable.

The SG-1 is a unipivot-style tonearm in so much as there are no captive bearings, but it's different to a classic unipivot. There are three silicon nitride balls placed equidistantly around a stainless steel pivot so the armtube moves and tracks in a more reassuring way. The tube is made from roll-wrapped carbon fibre and finished with an aluminium headshell that is mated to it via an alloy end plug. The headshell has plenty of room for even the heftiest of cartridges and alignment is straightforward.

The counterweight is underslung to lower the centre of gravity (and helps it to adjust azimuth too) and Vertere has fitted a small adjustable collar that sits in front of it to mark its position when correctly set, combined with a lock screw in the bearing housing. Other details include a small sliding weight on the armtube

to fine-tune tracking force and resonance, while the antiskate weight line has a rubber O ring to grip the mount correctly. Both help the SG-1 to feel immensely reassuring and it is beautifully assembled and finished.

The mount is the single-hole 'old Rega' type with a 223mm length pivot to spindle. Fitting the SG-1 to a Michell GyroDec takes about 30 minutes and is helped by clear and helpful instructions and the supplied tools. The arm terminates in a five-pin mini DIN connection and Vertere additionally sells a £600 Redline arm cable to complete connection to a phono stage. Some very high-quality tags make fitting a cartridge straightforward too.

Sound quality

As well as helping to describe the design, the phrase 'like a unipivot but not' has considerable validity in framing the sound of the SG-1. Some facets of its behaviour are very much in keeping with the traditional qualities, but there is rather more going on. Listening to Poppy Ackroyd's *Resolve*, the expected width of the GyroDec's presentation is augmented by a level of airiness and sheer three dimensionality that eludes many rivals even at this elevated price.

The Vertere manages to take the frenetic live performance of Bloc Party's *Silent Alarm* and capture the space of the venue very effectively.

It also exhibits some qualities less readily associated with unipivots. The bass response is a wonderful blend of texture, detail and depth that is as happy with the band's frenetic live drumming as it is with the huge orchestral swells of *Fink Meets The Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra*. Equipped with a Goldring Ethos (HFC 449), the Vertere reveals all the qualities that this talented cartridge brings to vinyl replay, while overcoming some of the slight reticence I found in the Goldring's performance when used with an SME M2 arm.

What is most admirable is that none of this additional energy has any perceivable effect on what is a very accurate and even-handed tonearm. The spectacular pressing of Annie Lennox's *Diva* is released from the record in a fabulously real and unforced way. It can't quite match the heft of some more conventional bearing designs at the same price, but none of them can hold a candle to its articulation, particularly as music gets more complex.

Conclusion

Living with the SG-1 is entirely painless. It tracks everything I try on it and hits the same groove of the record it is lifted from – something that isn't always a given with unipivots. Thanks to the clever counterweight, setting azimuth is straightforward and, while changing cartridges will never be as easy as it is on a design with a detachable headshell, it is still a relatively straightforward undertaking. The result is a tonearm that should work with a wide selection of turntables and cartridges and do so brilliantly. The tonearm market may have thinned out a little, but if the new arrivals are this good we really don't have to worry ●

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Vertere SG-1 MkII
ORIGIN
UK
TYPE
Captured unipivot tonearm
WEIGHT
397g
FEATURES
● Rolled carbon fibre armtube
● Captured unipivot bearing
● Underslung counterweight
DISTRIBUTOR
Vertere Ltd.
TELEPHONE
0203 1764888
WEBSITE
vertereacoustics.com

Hi-FiChoice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★
FEATURES
★★★★★

LIKE: Exceptional combination of space and impact; ease of use
DISLIKE: Trades a tiny amount of bass
WE SAY: Combines the spaciousness of a unipivot with the impact and user friendliness of a conventional design

OVERALL

