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Vertere's DG-1 S turntable. The best just got better!

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Vertere DG-1 S turntable

Alan Sircom

We first looked at the Vertere DG-1 turntable back in Issue 184. The review praised Vertere for its innovative approach, combining elements of its more up-market turntables with a flat tonearm made of a laminate of materials. With a couple of minor operational 'quirks' notwithstanding, the DG-1 set a standard for 'sensibly' priced turn-key turntables that remains hard to match today. Engineers are an ever-interested bunch, however, and in manufacturing the DG-1 it became clear that modifications and improvements could be made to the original design. All of which put Vertere on a path to create the DG-1 S. Unfortunately, the changes preclude an upgrade path, but while the DG-1 S is markedly better than its predecessor, the original DG-1 is more than competent in its own right, and few would consider the move an upgrade.

That 'not an upgrade' position doesn't completely hold water; if you conducted a side-by-side comparison, you'd choose the DG-1 S in an eyeblink and choose it over the DG-1 every time, but I think most who have already invested in the DG-1 are looking beyond simple replacement, and with a Vertere turntable range that goes from the 'aspirationally' to the 'astronomically' priced, Vertere might have that next turntable in line too.

Revision, revision, revision

To roll out that old cliché, the changes from DG-1 to DG-1 S are more 'evolution' than 'revolution'. These minor operational 'quirks' mentioned above have been painstakingly ironed out; not in bold changes, but subtle improvements to a broad spread of the DG-1's construction and design. Even to the point of little details like a slight change in position of the on/off/speed control button, so it has further distance between that and the round belt. »





The original's three-layer aluminium/polymer sandwich has been further stiffened and improved by the use of five polymer layers.



» The signature aspect of the DG-1 receives a heavy share of upgrades, though. That 'Groove Runner' flat arm wasn't just for show: it helps push resonances out of band that a conventional arm-tube just has to live with, but the original's three-layer aluminium/polymer sandwich has been further stiffened and improved by the use of five polymer layers. This not only further reduces resonance, but prevents accidental deformation of the arm.

Meanwhile, the bearing now sports an adjustable Kevlar vertical bearing alongside the Nylon of the horizontal. In talking about five layers of flat polymer and Nylon/Kevlar bearing systems – not forgetting the ribbon flexible PCB as signal wires runs in between the two polymer arm beam layers, it's pretty clear that we are definitely not in Kansas anymore, Toto!

The counterweight is underslung with two secondary weights, making the counterweight more 'intelligent' than most. Setting the counterweight downforce is slightly more complex than most as it requires the use of a (supplied) stylus gauge, but it's easy to use and fully explained in the manual. This also allows for azimuth adjustment.

A lot of the alignment for the Vertere DG-1 S can be done for you, and the turntable can be specified with the Magneto moving magnet cartridge as standard, although

it can be supplied with a Sabre moving magnet cartridge design or without any cartridge at all. There are also several upgrades to the DG-1 S that can boost performance, but we limited our upgrade path to the Challenger power supply, some Redline cables, and the Phono 1 Mk II L phono stage (itself an update and worthy of a revisit review in its own right in a later issue). While the upgrades can quickly rack up a pretty penny, most keep their feet (make that 'optional support pods') on the ground. No-one's recommending an eleventy-thousand pound phono cable replacement for a three and a half thousand point turntable here. Even though the DG-1 S would be surprisingly likely to be able to take such an upgrade.

The turntable itself

A lot of the changes to the DG-1 S are under the surface of the turntable itself. The motor control software, for example, has been re-written to help improve smoothness and reduce rumble, as well as being more accepting of that Challenger power supply. The bearing is of a far higher tolerance than before. The means whereby acrylic joins hands with acrylic on the chassis has been improved, too. And finally, the feet are at once adjustable and more able to sit on Vertere's own IsoPaw pods.





If the DG-1 S can tease out the lyrics from post bike-crash Bob Dylan with ease, it's doing a lot right.

» I'm trying not to make a get-out clause here, but almost everything else remains unchanged from the original as tested in Issue 184, so there's no need to rehash things. Our original sample arrived before Vertere had picked out a natty line in cartridges, however, so the Magneto (essentially a Audio Technica AT-VM520EB moving magnet cartridge wearing a different Vertere-coloured coat) wasn't part of the review. But, MM is very clearly the way to go with the DG-1 S and I felt little need to strip that Magneto off to jump up a few notches. Maybe that's a long-term goal for DG-1 S listeners. Upgrading cartridges is made a little easier by handy guidelines on the arm itself.

Fair and balanced

What I liked about this turntable as a complete package is it doesn't make things difficult for the listener. It's the sort of turntable that could happily drop into a starter system or grace one where every single component costs twice as much as the turntable. Why it does this is simple; it's got the ideal balance of 'head' and 'heart'. Often turntables fall into one of two categories, extremely detailed (and a bit sterile sounding) or great fun (but a little inaccurate). It's almost as if the reaction to the presence of digital audio was an over-emphasis of vinyl's innate characteristics, or over-compensation to make them sound almost coldly precise. The better turntables at any price tend toward a dynamic balance between these two characteristics, and the DG-1 S just does this a lot better than most. Not simply 'at its price point' too.

A fine example of this is to play a copy of Neil Young's *After The Gold Rush* [Reprise] and play 'Only Love Can Break Your Heart'. You need the detail and precision to make sure it doesn't sound like Kermit the Frog singing, but you also need the warmth and musicality to ensure you hear the intent and passion behind the song. It's a tightrope walk, and one the DG-1 S gets wholly right. The clarity of the vocal, the weight of the instruments behind that voice and the pain that went into the music all shine through.

After that, the rest just falls into place really well. Staying with Neil Young, the bounce of 'Southern Man' shows just how good the DG-1 S is at handling the rhythmic elements of a track. And playing both tracks shows just how captivating the DG-1 S can be, as you feel no burning desire to track hop, and every time you change a record, you want to play a record. Right the way through.

More and more records were offered up to the DG-1 S and each of them sounded great. This wasn't some endless

revelatory experience; not every album sounded new and like the first time I heard it. But every album sounded how I felt it should sound, in all the right ways. And I've heard a number of significantly more expensive turntables that fail to make that grade.

What I found on my listening notes was a complete absence of listening notes! Nothing about soundstaging or dynamics, vocal articulation or detail... effectively all of those important elements of sonic performance are folded into the sound. They aren't ignored and in fact are all very good. Dynamics and vocal articulation in particular are excellent, with good projection of both male and female vocalists; staying with adenoidal singers, if the DG-1 S can tease out the lyrics from post bike-crash Bob Dylan with ease, it's doing a lot right!

Just one more thing

Toward the end of the listening session, I added the Challenger power supply upgrade. This little DC power supply (best used with a Redline power cord) is claimed to reduce motor noise, but that's already pretty low. However, it does give the turntable seemingly more accurate speed control and better 'space' between the notes, especially bass notes. Whether from the outset or as a Christmas present to your turntable at a later date, it's a great addition to the DG-1 S performance.

The Vertere DG-1 S is an excellent performer, both at its price and in absolute terms. This is what you upgrade to from your Rega or ProJect, and it will keep you in vinyl until you are prepared to spend really big. Excellent! +

Technical specifications

Type Belt-drive record player with fixed axis bearing tonearm and moving magnet cartridge
Motor 24pole synchronous AC motor with acetal spindle thrust bearing, axially decoupled
Speeds 33.3 and 45 rpm, electronically changed and adjusted
Tonearm Flat, multilayer polymer arm
Power supply optional upgrade
Finish Black and white gloss
Dimensions (HxWxD) 13 x 47 x 38cm
Weight 8.3kg
Price £3,550 (including Magneto cartridge)

Manufacturer Vertere Acoustics

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