

Origin Live Calypso Mk4/ Illustrious Mk 3C

KEVIN FISKE SHOWS CONSIDERABLE ENTHUSIASM FOR THIS ENTHUSIAST-ORIENTED TURNTABLE/TONEARM COMBO FROM ORIGIN LIVE



I once owned an earlier version of Origin Live's *Resolution* turntable. It didn't have the best pitch stability or signal-to-noise performance, but compensated with an overall musicality and unforced (albeit somewhat soft-focus) naturalness that kept me faithful for some five years.

The Rega *RP10* that replaced it was quieter, more dynamic, and speed-stable. At a little over £3,000, the radical non-suspended *RP10* comes with *RB2000* tonearm and is remarkable value, though I don't think it's the giant-killer that some have suggested. Certainly MC wasn't tempted to part with his (£20,000) Linn *LP12* when he heard an *RP10* in his system (though he did think the Rega performed rather well).

Major recent changes to Origin Live's turntables include a complete redesign of the power supply and motor control system, a new platter, and alternative phono cables, so I asked to try a sample.

Philosophically different from Rega or Linn, with no attempt to create dust covers plus an extensive list of upgrade accessories, Origin Live produces five turntables from £1,370 to £17,000, and eight tonearms from £295 to £4,595. I was sent the fourth up a line of five, a *Calypso Mk4* (£2,100), plus a 9.5in *Illustrious Mk3C* tonearm (£1,805), along with the new multi-layer platter (£960), an upgraded power transformer (£365), and a superior phono lead (£950).

I used the turntable, arm, and multiple upgrade options with a Rega *Aphelion* cartridge into a Thores *Enhancer* phono stage. I also tried an Audio Note

(UK) *IO II* cartridge through an AN(UK) *S8* step up transformer into an AN(UK) *M6* phono stage.

The revised motor controller is a new low-noise analogue design that compensates instantaneously for load changes, and measures absolute platter speed once per revolution using reflected light. Speed accuracy is therefore maintained despite inevitable variables such as motor ageing, temperature and belt wear.

Origin Live supremo Mark Baker says that higher frequency encoders can create motor jitter, raise the noise floor and result in a 'digital' sound quality. He claims that Origin Live's slower sampling avoids these errors but still delivers benchmark figures: measurable drift from absolute speed is below 0.0001%; wow and flutter 0.04%.

The *Calypso* (and its stablemates) are non-spring-suspended designs that couple most of their mass through a single height-adjustable foot. Two other adjustable feet provide stability. The machined acrylic base has outriggers for damping. The combined motor (it is a DC unit) and control pod is placed to the side and drives the platter through a belt. The oil-filled bearing has a steel shaft with a 2mm diameter tungsten carbide ball that runs on a thrust pad.

The *Illustrious* tonearm has a composite parallel-walled arm tube with ball-race bearings for horizontal movement; two unipivots, at each end of a yoke, allow vertical movement. Bias compensation is by falling weight; tracking pressure is adjusted by moving the counterweight; VTA adjustment is *via* a locking, threaded wheel.

Sound quality

The subjective impressions were mainly obtained with the Rega *Aphelion* cartridge. (Results with the still more costly *IO II* were even better, but that takes nothing away from the *Aphelion*.)

That the Rega cartridge really came into its own when paired with an Origin Live turntable/arm might cause a touch of teeth grinding at Rega, but I tell as I find. Rega informs me that relatively few *Aphelions* have been sold independently; most are specified with *RP10*s. (In my view this stand-out

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cartridge deserves much wider recognition.)

The new Origin Live motor controller has very low electrical noise, resulting in the impeccable stability that's both heard and indicated by the claimed figures. Even sustained single solo piano notes sounded perfectly stable, while the lowered background noise resulted in improved dynamics and resolution.

Origin Live's latest standard 'power supply' (I use inverted commas because its guts are actually in the motor pod) is now a potted balanced transformer. The company offers an upgrade transformer, also balanced but larger, for an additional sum. I did try it, but the standard transformer is that good and the gains so marginal I'd spend the upgrade money elsewhere. Indeed, the standard *Calypto* with its new motor controller is now a fine turntable that those who might have fretted about pitch stability could happily live with.

I then swapped Origin Live's standard copper external arm leads for the *Silver Hybrid S*, built from copper and silver litz wires. This upgrade cable brought about such an obvious improvement in tonal balance, dynamic expression and bass power that I checked that the mains voltage coming into the house hadn't suddenly increased (it hadn't), or that I hadn't changed the volume setting on the amplifier (ditto).

Apart from its obvious sonic benefits, another feature of the cable that had my approval was the multiple earthing options it offers. Neatly finished wires and tags are attached to both channel screens, and to the fifth pin. This is a thoughtful move that will widen the appeal of the cable to owners of other tonearms. Why don't more manufacturers do this?

My final move was to change the *Calypto*'s standard acrylic platter for the upgrade multi-layer affair.

Acrylic may well be a popular platter material, but its detractors observe that it may suck some of the energy from transients resulting in a soft-focus 'Vaseline-on-the-lens' presentation.

Alternative platter materials can sound more dynamic, but none is without its own drawbacks. Origin Live's response was to develop a platter with multiple layers. Thick acrylic forms the base; then a thin layer of what looks like aluminium, with intricately machined perforations; followed by a slightly thicker layer of what might well be Delrin; and finally Origin Live's own platter mat. I am certainly correct about the first and the fourth, but the middle two in the sandwich must remain guesses. (Origin Live declined to discuss the composition.)

The sonic outcome of fitting the new platter to the *Calypto* was not marginal in a "well, it might as well stay now it's on there" kind-of-way. It was

shockingly effective, resulting in a 50% plus uplift in performance over stock.

Invitation, a recording of Jaco Pastorius' One Truth Band made when on tour in Japan has been a vinyl staple of mine for some years. Musically exceptional, tracks that I had listened to many times had a freshness, immediacy, power and resolution on the Origin Live rig that rocked me back in my seat.

This platter doesn't accentuate one band of frequencies at the expense of others. It is a masterpiece of voicing that must have taken heaven only knows how long to get right. It works evenly, top to bottom, removing the fog from recordings. Timing, dynamics and tonal veracity are all improved.

I had thought that the supporting musicians on *Invitation* had got a bit loose and ahead of themselves on a few occasions (particularly on *Fannie Mae/Eleven* where the entire band brings the recording to a raucous sustained climax), but the *Calypto* demonstrated that they don't get sloppy at all. Fine timing, agile dynamics and a lack of slurring and ringing, revealed space between notes where I had heard little or none previously. Now the track made perfect sense, sounding busy, but tight and disciplined.

This upgrade platter enables the *Calypto* to dig deep into the lowest octaves, with more power and articulation than any other non-suspended turntable that I have heard, and better than most suspended designs too. Impressively, if the grooves say 'loud and powerful', that's just what the *Calypto* delivers, and its tonal density is rich and satisfying too, which doesn't imply coloration, but a closer to real life presentation.

The exceptional gains that resulted from the change to the multi-layer platter would not have been realised had the extra tonal density, tight timing and powerful dynamics not been there in the first place, waiting to be revealed. That they were is credit to the *Illustrious*, a middle-tier tonearm in the Origin Live catalogue, but a quite exceptionally resolving, musical and well-engineered product in its own right.

Conclusions

The platter and cable upgrades might add around £2,000 to the price of the *Calypto Mk4/Illustrious Mk3C* combo, giving a total of around £6,000. In this 'tweaked' guise it is still a relatively modest package, yet it produced some of the very best sounds from vinyl that I have heard for a considerable while. It's an obvious example of thoughtful, creative, evolutionary engineering by a manufacturer that clearly listens critically to its own products.

An Audio Excellence rating is amply deserved.

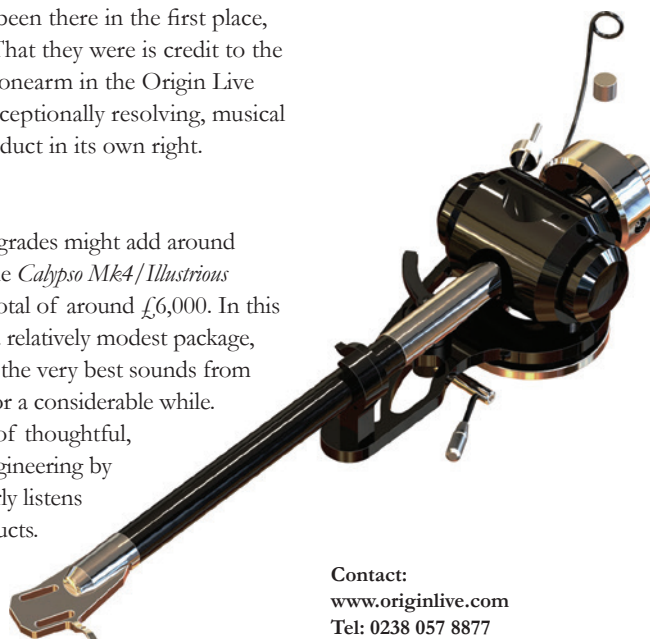
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Manufacturer's Specification

Make	Origin Live
Model	Calypto MkIV
Type	solid belt-drive turntable
Speed options	33 and 45rpm
Wow & Flutter	0.05%
Speed Stability	0.0001%
Size (WxHxD)(est.)	c50x16x35cms
Price	£2,100

Model	Illustrious Mk3C
Type	9.5in/239mm tonearm
Overhang	17.2mm
Offset angle	22°
Effective mass:	12.7g
Price	£1,805

Upgrade Extras	
Multi-layer platter	£960.00
Large PS transformer	£365.00
Silver Hybrid tonearm cable	£450.00



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