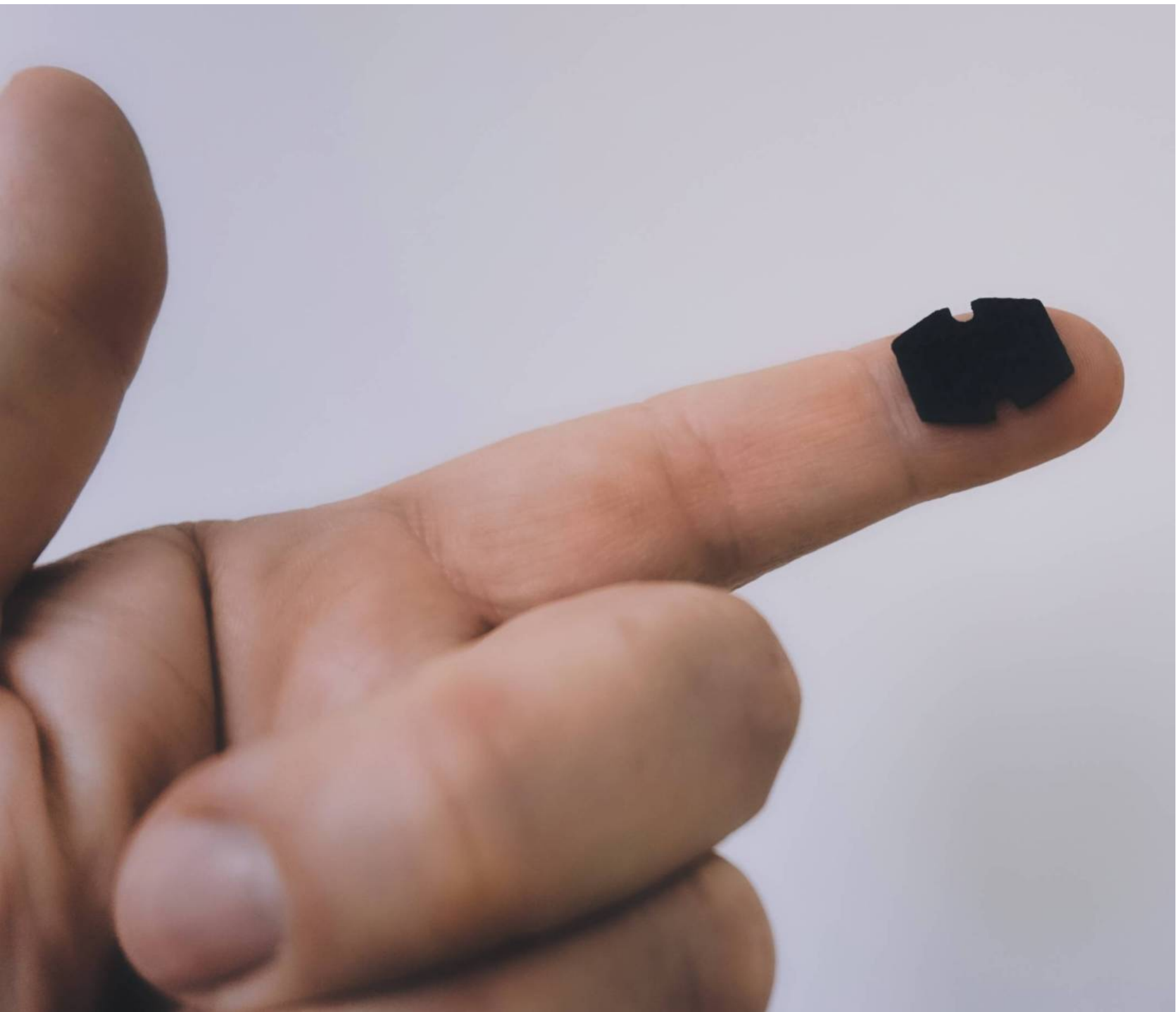


(The Audiophile Man)

CARTRIDGE ENABLER FROM ORIGIN LIVE

Posted on 21st November 2019



Looking to enhance sound quality at a low, low price, Origin Live offers the dinky Cartridge Enabler, which sits in between your turntable's headshell and the cartridge to isolate and dampen. Paul Rigby gets to grips

There is something immensely satisfying about buying a cheapo accessory and finding that it enhances the sound quality produced by your hi-fi. I wondered if the Cartridge Enabler gizmo could do the same.

As I say, the accessory sits in between the headshell and cartridge. But what does it do? I asked company boss, Mark Baker who offered, “It’s does a combination of damping, decoupling and

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reducing reflected energy.”

These things are all different, by the way. Some people don’t differentiate between them but they’re technically different.

“A tonearm resonates,” said Baker, “the Enabler decouples the resonances that could get back into the cartridge. When a cartridge gets going it ‘excites’. It’s like a generator. It’s micro-vibrations kick out tremendous force. You put your amp’s volume right down and you can still hear the cartridge playing the music.”

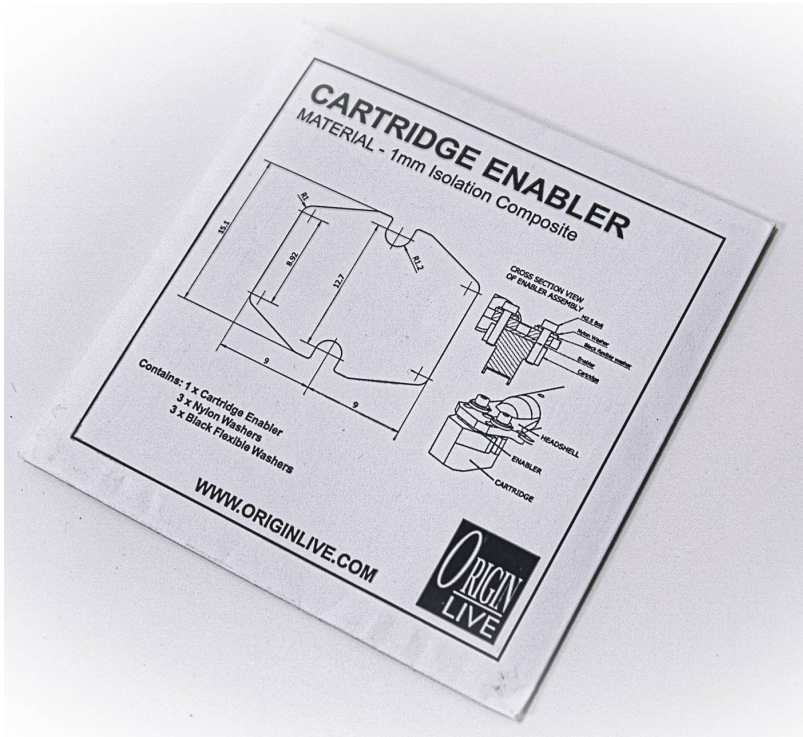
But those vibrations can be destructive, “It’s like scraping a file across your nails. You’re getting all of the vibration and that goes into the tonearm as resonance.”



Then there’s the reflected energy, “Yes and this is not resonance. It’s a simple energy wave and when it hits something hard it reflects back down the tube. That emerges from the cartridge, down the arm and back up again to the cartridge. Reflected energy goes on everywhere in a turntable.”

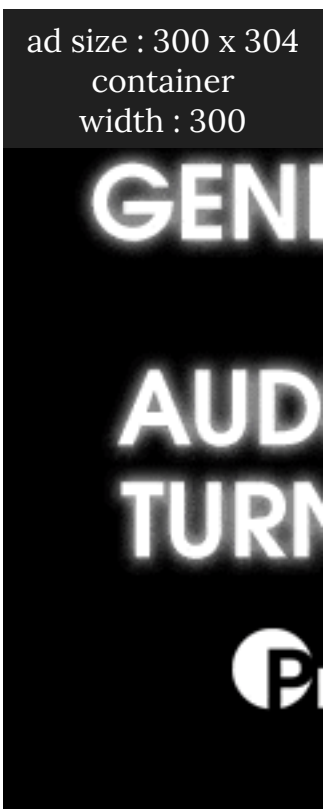
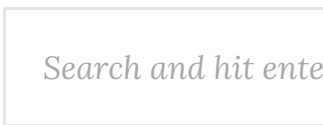
De-coupling stops energy from the ground, for example, “...getting into the cartridge or from the turntable bearing or the turntable’s motor,” said Baker.

All three effects are quite different to one another. The Cartridge Enabler tackles them all.



Part of me hates the name of this thing, though. Cartridge Enabler. It sounds clunky. There’s far too many syllables. It also sounds more than it is. I feel like I’m buying something the size of a monoblock amplifier. Not something that will disappear if I sneeze on it.

Although, of course, what else are you going to call it? It’s a tough one, I know. That said, Cartridge Enabler does sound like an aid to disability. I feel that I should really be able to obtain one on the NHS.



I reckon Origin Live should have reduced the entire name to one word, one or two syllables and made the word lean towards the snazzy and cheeky.

Never let it be said that I shirk a challenge so how about the ‘Origin Live Wafer’ (because it is very thin), the ‘Origin Live Slice’ (same reason but a single syllable), the ‘Origin Live Mil’ (because the thing is a mere 1mm thick) or the ‘Origin Live Bit’ (because there’s hardly anything of it).

I like the ‘Slice’, any offers?

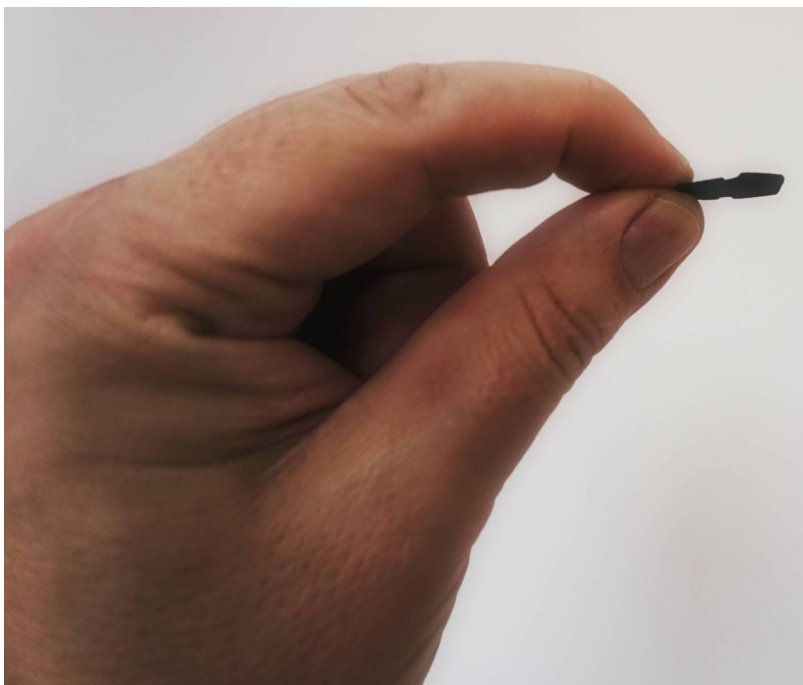


This thing is super small, though. Well, it’s going to fit in between your headshell and your cartridge so that’s no surprise. Still, up close, there’s nothing of it. It’s a bendy composite material too of indeterminate derivation. Company secrets and all that. What I can say, though, is that it’s made from the same material as the company’s platter mat.

Apart from the Slice™, you also get three (including a spare) washers of the same composite material plus three (including a spare again) nylon washers. I was glad of that because I did manage to lose one of the pesky things during this review. Gawd knows where it is now.

The company advises not to use these washers if the underside of your headshell is not flat because the washers might not sit flat. Nevertheless, they’re there if you need them.

When fitted, the Enabler sits between the underside of your headshell and the upper side of your cartridge. Like the meat in a sandwich. Its a simple device and it takes no time to fit. The composite washers sit above the Enabler and the nylon washers sit above the composite washers, the headshell sits above the nylon washers. And in that order.



When you do fit the Enabler, make sure that you place the the right way around. You’ll find the word TOP on one side (the label’s a bit vague but angle the Enabler in the light to see it). Place this side uppermost.

As I say, this thing is bendy and flexible and easy to manipulate so, if you have a Rega-type arm with three bolts, you can even pierce the enabler to fit.

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The idea is to gently tighten the securing bolts when in position and not to go mad. Don't overdo it. Tighten until, as Origin has it, you feel "the 'nip'" of the screw catching.

As I say, the Enabler is 1mm thick so, ideally, you should raise the rear of the arm by 1mm to compensate for this. This is fine if you have an arm that can make such an adjustment but some arms are not as tweakable as others. For those arms that do not include a ready adjustment tool, I would recommend, for the confident users out there, unscrewing the entire arm, adding a set of 1mm washers to the screw holes and refitting.

If the above scares the life out of you or if you feel that removing the arm is just not an option then I would advise this: try the Enabler out and, if you hate it, send it back and get your money back (at least if you buy the thing direct from Origin Live). Origin Live has no problems with this. If you're in this position, where your tonearm can't or won't be tweaked, then you really don't know how the 1mm alignment shift might sound. There are all kinds of variables to consider. See the Sound Tests below for a great example of this.



For now? Well, let's assume for the moment that the Enabler will sound wonderful as an accessory – I'm counting chickens I know at this stage but let's assume that for a second. Adding the Enabler might just solve more sonic problems than it causes. Meaning that the 1mm alignment shift might prove not to be an issue at all. Also, you never know, your arm might have been slightly out of alignment in the first place and adding the Enabler might actually correct that issue.

You see? Basically, I'd advise giving it a go. If you hear improvements, keep it. If the sound collapses around you like a pack of cards, send it back. So, the Enabler is well worth a try. At £19, what have you got to lose?

One more thing, when you install the Enabler, if you find, because of the particular shape of your headshell, that bits of the Enabler stick out, just shave them off with a razor blade or similar to tidy the whole thing up. Easy.

INSTALLATION

I would recommend screwing on the washers first then pushing the screws through the headshell. Then add the Enabler between the dangling screws, which should freely hang in place while you bring the cartridge to the screws.

Be aware that the Enabler and washers will physically lower the cartridge so make sure your cartridge screws are long enough. You may need to invest in longer screws. During testing with an SME arm, I got around the issue by removing my SME's finger lift. The thickness of the finger lift was replaced by the thickness of the Enabler which meant that my cartridge screws were long enough but check yours before the full installation takes place. Do a dry run.

So how does it sound?

SOUND QUALITY

I tried the Enabler on my Avid Reference and fitted it to a SME IV, sporting a van den Hul Crimson

XGW Stradivarius priced around the £4k mark and played a mixture of Ella Fitzgerald and Jethro Tull as a rocking contrast. So, you're talking about a set-up of around £28k+. I was also able to tweak the height of the tonearm to compensate for the Enabler.

I chose this rig for a reason. Firstly this: £28,000. And I'm adding an accessory priced at £19. And the latter is supposed to improve sound quality?

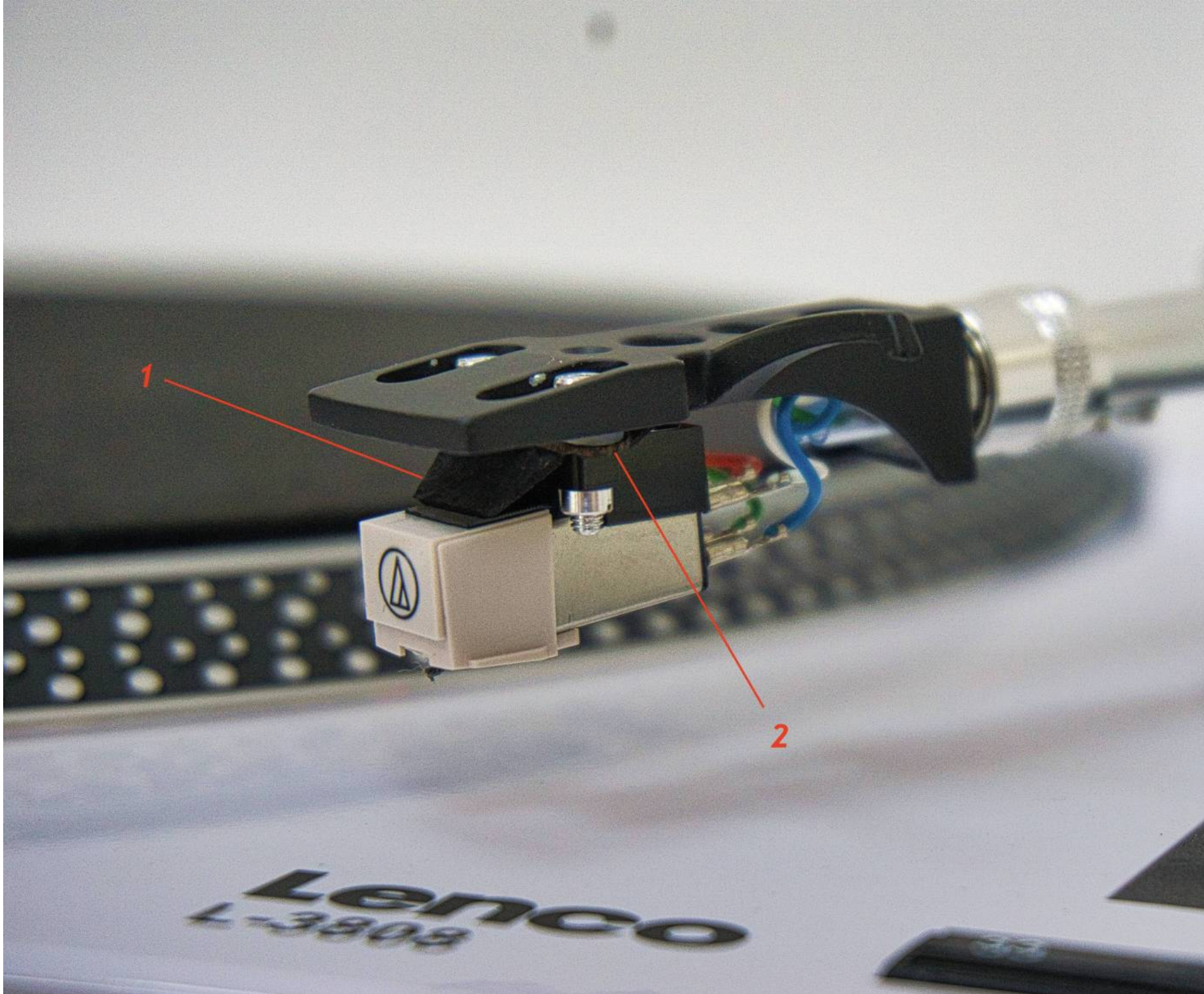
Secondly, the Avid and cartridge are actually much too good for the tonearm which is based on an outmoded tapered design and forms the bottle-neck on this turntable. A died-in-the-wool classic, yes, and a good quality item (it wouldn't be part of my reference kit, otherwise) but when it comes right down to it, off the pace by today's standards. Since SME pushed their hardware prices 'upmarket', it's also over-priced too. What I wanted, what I was looking for, was for the Enabler to help out a bit and give the SME a bit of a sonic boost.

And, by golly, it did just that. You're looking at £28,000 and this bit of bendy stuff actually boosted sound quality. Firstly in bass terms which, on the Tull LP, was much more confident and solid. Even the Fitzgerald track offered better bass from the lower frequencies via the saxophones. There was a new solidity here. Bass was firm but also nimble. Before the Enabler, bass was a little bit diffuse, lacking in relative focus. With the Enabler, added precision helped the bass to move swiftly and with purpose.



Upper frequencies benefitted from lower noise which enhanced clarity and introduced a new level of transparency across the soundstage of both LPs. Vocals from both were clean and open, allowing the ear to pick up slight nuances heard during the deliveries.

For the Fitzgerald vocal, the ye olde 'echo' attached to the lead vocal was more naturalistic. Before, the lack of focus gave the echo attribute a gimmick effect. As if it had been stuck on there with Blu Tack. Not now. The vocal on the Tull LP also offered a sprightly and active feel instead of the slight dragging effect I'm used to.



1: Because of the slightly odd 'step' effect of the Audio-Technica AT 3600 cartridge design, part of the Cartridge Enabler can be seen to have stuck out and flopped over. This excess can be trimmed, though. 2: You can just see the composite washer here. I cocked this bit up. It should be on top of the headshell, not under. Even so the Enabler still sounded great! Thing is, the main sound benefit comes from the Enabler. The washers only add a tiny bit of sonic benefit. So don't worry if you make the same mistake as me.

Now that's all well and good and also very (very) expensive but what about the other end of the price spectrum? What about a budget turntable? Would the Enabler work in that category?

I decided to go 'worst case scenario'. I grabbed a Lenco L-3808 and fitted the Enabler on to its shaky S-shaped arm. This £200 turntable arrives with a very basic (in design and build terms) tonearm and needs all the help it can get but the rear of the arm is going nowhere. It's fixed to the plinth. Short of a hammer and chisel, I wasn't going to lift the rear of the arm in a month of Tuesdays (never mind Sundays) so I assumed that the Enabler would effectively put the arm out of alignment by a tad. Would it be enough to cause sound problems or would the Enabler's benefits outweigh any potential issues?



I must say that, before fitting the Enabler to the Lenco, the headshell looked a little low, if anything. Installing the Enabler actually levelled the tonearm position as a whole so you might find the Enabler *improving* the position of your tonearm!

Returning to those favourite *Beverly Hillbillies* of mine, Ella and Jethro, I was impressed! The first impression was a lowering of noise and an subsequent increase in clarity. This was represented by the echo hanging around Fitzgerald's vocal. Without the Enabler, this Echo was there...kinda. It was more hinted at than resident. With the Enabler installed, that echo was obvious and tagged onto the vocal throughout the song. Similarly, cymbal hits were far more delicate and fragile in

execution.

The brass section was also more transparent, cleaner and tonally more accurate. Flipping to the Jethro Tull piece, the bass was, again, confident and definite in its execution. It sounded secure where, previously, bass was a bit on the woolly, bloomy side. Not bad, mind you, but diffuse. With the Enabler in place, the bass was focused and agile in its execution.

CONCLUSION

One of the simplest and cheapest turntable upgrades I've seen of late, the Enabler arrives in a simple paper packet to keep costs down. In fact, talking to Origin Live, after costs and the like, the company reportedly hardly maings a bean from Enabler sales.

I suppose that it's a nice way of getting the company name 'out there'. Especially if it catches on. And it deserves to.

The company might not get much from this little accessory but you will. Enhanced sound quality by the bag full, whether you're looking at a high-end system or a simpler budget design or anything in between. The Cartridge Enabler improves overall sonic quality across the frequency spectrum. In fact, the Origin Live Cartridge Enabler is one of those 'no brainer' add ons that you hear about from time to time. Well, this is one of those times.

ORIGIN LIVE CARTRIDGE ENABLER

Price: £19

Tel: 02380 578877

Web: www.originlive.com

GOOD: price, soundstage focus, low noise, bass confidence, midrange clarity

BAD: nothing

RATING: 8

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REFERENCE

Avid Acutus Reference turntable

SME IV tonearm

[Van Den Hul Crimson XGW Stradivarius Cartridge](#)

Icon PS3 phono amplifier

Aesthetix Calypso pre-amp

Icon Audio MB845 Mk.II monoblock amplifiers

Quad ESL-57 speakers with One Thing upgrade

Pro-Ject RPM3 Carbon turntable

Trichord Dino phono amplifier

Audiolab 6000A amplifier

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4 Comments	<div><div>f</div><div>🐦</div><div>📌</div><div>g+</div></div>	By PAUL RIGBY
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I’ve been a journalist and editor for 30 years and still retain my good humour. Who’d have thought? I have worked within a range of industries, writing for hundreds of national magazines and newspapers in the UK, Europe and the USA covering: aviation, music, computer technology, computer gaming, hi-fi, mobile technology, home automation, lady’s lifestyle, plastic model making, antiques and more. I currently write for national magazines in the subjects of business, music, hi-fi and general technology.

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4 COMMENTS



STUART

25th November 2019 at 12:08 am

Edit

Reply

Hi Paul, I usually thoroughly enjoy and respect your reviews and news items but can’t help feeling you completely dropped the ball with your Origin Live Enabler review. Can I suggest that it deserves a “part 2” follow up but maybe this time take the care required to get the installation right and also this time maybe try it with a better quality tonearm turntable and cartridge combination such as for example the Origin Live Sovereign and Enterprise etc combination you reviewed a short time back. Best wishes, Stuart M

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PAUL RIGBY

25th November 2019 at 12:27 pm

Edit

Reply

Thanks for your comments Stuart. The idea on this one was to test it on a popular and widely used ‘high-end’ arm – in my case a SME IV – and then a cheapo but also well used arm – via the Lenco. Merely to illustrate that the gadget will work on a range of technologies, nothing more than that. I did install it correctly on my two set ups (I messed up once and illustrated that to make a separate point, that wasn’t my ‘default’ 😊). I don’t think that the Sovereign/Enterprise set-up would have changed matters fundamentally, to be honest. Yes, it would sound different because the basic tech is different but I think I made my point in the review in terms of contrasting, expensive/cheap, hi-fi tech and this gadget. It’s possible that my intentions didn’t come across in the review and, if they did not, then apologies.

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JOHN HALL

26th November 2019 at 11:42 am

Edit

Reply

Hi Paul, A very long review for a small object, thanks for the details. You have set me thinking about a new tone arm to replace my SME V on my Avid Sequel SP; any recommendations? Best wishes John

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PAUL RIGBY

26th November 2019 at 12:47 pm

Edit

Reply

Hi John – not a problem. I'd look at Origin Live, who are quite friendly with AVID. I know the tech works together well.

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