

# Origin Live Voyager Mk4 and Renown turntable and tonearm

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**O**rigin Live's products all reflect the British naval heritage, something all the more understandable when you realise just how close the company's factory is to Southampton and Portsmouth. With the exception of the Silver tonearm, all of Origin

Live's turntables and tonearms are named after fighting ships of the Royal Navy. This isn't just jingoism; names like Voyager and Renown are great names for solidly-built, uncompromising things... whether they are destroyers and battleships or turntables and tonearms.

And no, H.M.S. Voyager wasn't flung into the Delta Quadrant and it wasn't Captain Janeway at the helm; it was a WWI era W-Class destroyer that was transferred from the Royal Navy to the Royal Australian Navy in the 1930s, where she fought many battles until being scuttled in 1942.

## Voyage(r) of discovery

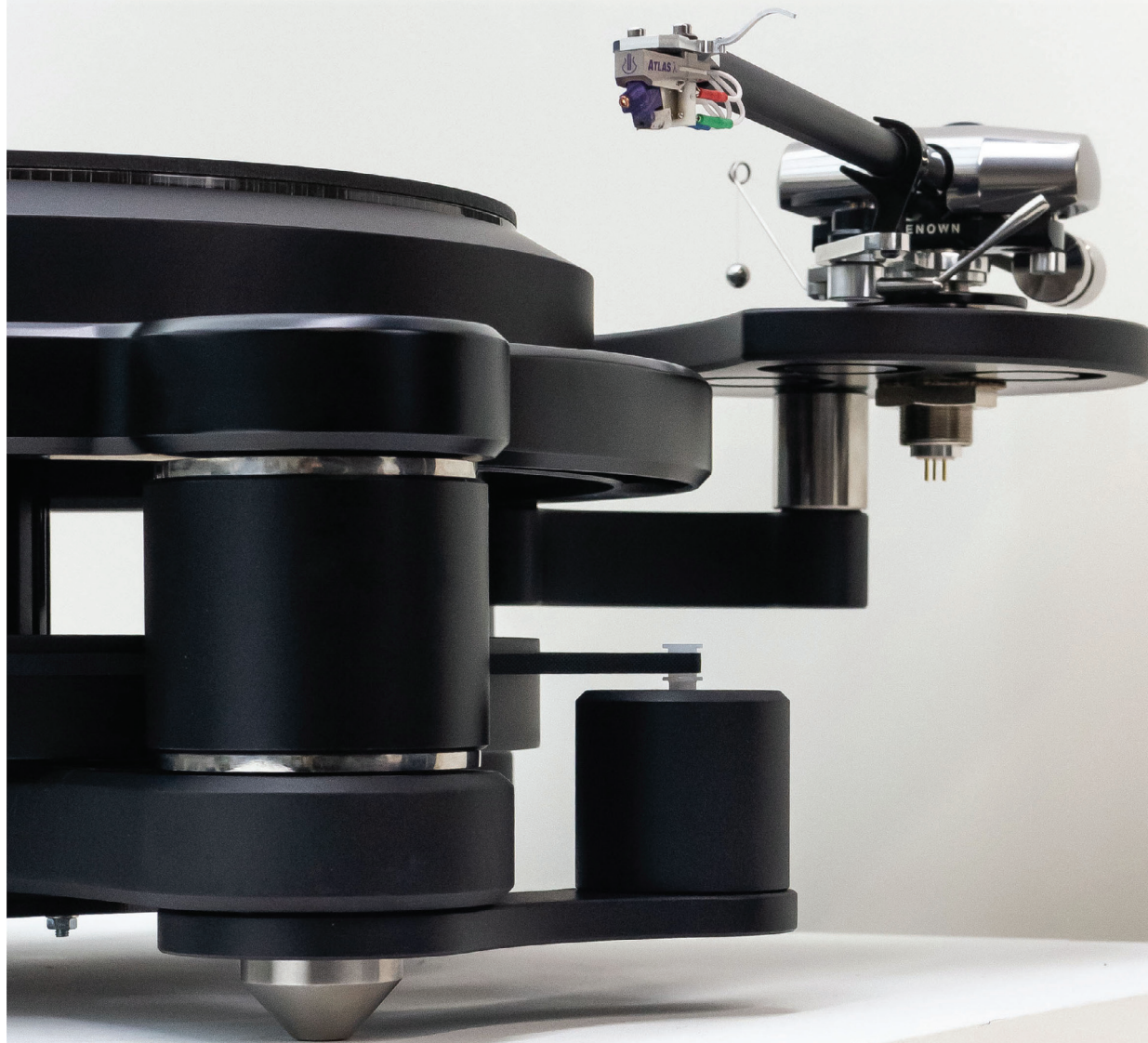
Origin Live's top turntable is the Voyager. Origin Live's top tonearm is the Renown. They are designed to work well together, and also work exceptionally well in the context of Lyra cartridges, and the review sample came fettled with the Lyra Atlas Lambda moving coil.







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» In fact, there's a step beyond even this partnership; the Voyager S. This is essentially a 'blueprinted' Voyager Mk4 with every part built in an even higher grade alloy, with further refinement in the design, at almost twice the price.

Typically at this price point, turntables rely on high-mass designs, but this – says Origin Live's designer Mark Baker – is the wrong approach. A good platter should be like a mechanical diode, transmitting energy at all frequencies without reflections undermining the performance. Origin Live instead uses a more intricate, multi-part platter to damp all frequencies evenly. This can't be done with a single material no matter how damped it seems, so the platter has layer upon layer of contrasting materials. Some of these innovations look a bit insignificant at first glance;

for example the series of holes cut in the mat itself are not simply for decoration, but are the result of extensive listening tests and a lot of structural analysis. They provide a way to manage small vibrations across the LP itself. While there are some who will protest that such tiny levels of vibration and energy control are pointless, a good counter-argument is to look at the size of a LP groove and think just how even tiny stray movements would seem like earthquakes to the diamond tracking a groove. But, in fairness, describing the outer layers of the Voyager is putting the cart before the horse.

The Voyager Mk4's tungsten carbide ball on a hardened thrust plate bearing housing, for example, is akin to that of other Origin Live turntables, writ large and engineered to





## The Voyager Mk 4 and Renown are the result of decades of research and development by Mark Baker and Origin Live.

» the finest tolerances this side of the Voyager S. Similarly, the belt-drive and thigh-torque DC motor arrangement (with the company's grippy upgrade belt as standard) has a lot in common with existing Origin Live turntables, but honed to the finest degree. This is the first two-motor design from Origin Live. But the most notable areas where the Voyager Mk4 stands out are in the platter and plinth. The complex milling process for the former makes it stand far above its peers, while the decoupled aerospace alloy plinth features both a shape and coating designed to reduce structural resonance and damp high-frequency artefacts respectively.

All of which sounds like a dry engineering exercise, but in the flesh, the Voyager Mk4 looks fantastic, with a platter like a skeletal and hypnotic alloy wheel turned sideways and spinning freely. The deck sits on three towers, with the armbase standing to the right of the turntable, but this is visibly offset by the motor to the back left. It's all extremely well finished, too. The pithy way of summing this up is that 'it looks the part'.

Voyager Mk4 is not simply a superdeck, it throws down a challenge to those who think all a turntable needs to do is spin at 33.3rpm and not rumble, letting the cartridge do all the work in terms of sound quality. At a recent UK Audio Show, Origin Live answered that question, by playing the Voyager Mk4 and Renown turntable system into an otherwise very humble audio system, with extremely positive results.

### The Renown steams in

Like the Voyager Mk4, the Renown arm is a distillation of all that is good about Origin Live's arms. A 12" design with floating, ultra-low-friction bearings, high-strength materials used throughout, and the inclusion of carbon fibre. That dual-pivot bearing design uses ultra-hard tungsten carbide points sitting in hardened and burnished steel cups. This is a concept well explored in hitherto top-of-the-tree designs like the Agile. But the Renown takes this to another level, and sparing no expense opened up the options, including the use of exotic materials, such as those used to machine the super-alloys in spacecraft.

Renown builds on the success of the Agile tonearm. That means even higher grade materials in the arm tube, rear stub, counterweight and turret plate. Use of the advanced stiffening techniques employed within the Agile armtube itself. And the oversized yoke with greater energy absorption capacity. Couple that to Origin Live's own high-

grade silver hybrid internal wire and a mount optimised for 12" use and we're beyond the ordinary.

I'm trying not to make this sound like the Voyager Mk4 and Renown are simply highly refined versions of existing Origin Live turntables and tonearms because that somehow lessens the gravity of the project. The Voyager Mk4 and Renown are the result of decades of research and development by Mark Baker and Origin Live. So, while there are commonalities between the other decks and arms in the range, the Voyager Mk4 and Renown are way ahead of the other designs in the line.

That's why the Renown is best used with balanced cables into a balanced phono stage, like the Burmester 100 (tested in Issue 77) or the Phasemation EA-350 (review coming soon). And that's why this turntable was supplied with a cartridge of the calibre of Lyra Atlas Lambda. This is no mere refinement; the level of improvement to the turntable and arm are staggering. This is a tipping point for Origin Live; the point when the company moves into the sphere of the top-notch high-end. And not just due to price.

### Strong and stable

I looked back at the Sovereign and Enterprise review (from Issue 140) in the making of this review, and it confirms much of what Origin Live has done with the Voyager and Renown.

In that review the Sovereign was a remarkably speed stable turntable, and that isn't just echoed here, but amplified significantly. I had this in direct comparison with the direct drive VPI Avenger Direct (tested this issue) and their stability and authority are on a level pegging. This is only the start, however.

I have some internal conflict when it comes to turntables. Part of me likes the lighter, bouncier, more rhythmically taut sound of classic British decks and also like the detail and image size of higher-mass turntable designs. In an ideal world, there would be a turntable that was the best of both worlds; one with the pace, rhythm and timing and the space and elegance of the big decks. And the Origin Live Voyager and Renown get the closest yet.

The Voyager Mk 4 and Renown deliver an extraordinary amount of detail across the frequency range, which became clear from the first bars of the title track of *Norman F\*\*\*ing Rockwell* by Lana Del Rey [Polydor]. The orchestra fades up, the piano plays and her close microphone voice just fills the room. You hear with the kind of clarity that Ear, Nose and Throat specialists could check her vocal





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» chords for notes, and yet with this almost uncanny level of information on offer, the music still bounces along with a well-orchestrated rhythm.

Some of this is an excellent balance between deck and arm. But some of it is that they are two outstanding products in their own right (three if you include the Lyra, and it's a stunning device too). The Renown is an extraordinarily neutral platform for a cartridge, and the geometry is outstanding with almost no start- or end-of-side distortion. It lets a cartridge like the Lyra track like a dream, gets out of the way and just makes records sing.

Similarly, the turntable is the perfect partner for a record, providing nothing more than a spinning platter with as little interaction with the sound as possible. This became clear the more records I played through the Origin Live combination; each sounding different to the last. Not just different in terms of musicians and singer's voices, you could hear the difference in studio engineering, whether it was a natural acoustic or one that had been 'enhanced' by some subtle reverb and panning. You could even hear differences in pressing, and not just the difference between 'oil crisis' LPs so thin you can see through them and classic heavyweights of a bygone age. This was a new paradigm in resolution.

I think that the more I listened to the Voyager Mk4 and Renown, the more the word 'balance' kept appearing. This is a very balanced performance, and not simply because the phono leads end in XLRs. The sound never puts a foot wrong here. It doesn't exaggerate sound for colour or effect, and doesn't add or subtract to the overall presentation. I think that's why it seems so adept at blending those twin requirements of rhythm and detail so well.

If there is an underlying character to the sound, it's one of sheer solidity. Musicians stand rooted in their physical space in the soundstage, the physical sense of an instrument sitting in 3D space is tangible and the sense of 'thereness'. But at no point did that solidity leak over into a stolid, thick sound. Even when playing heavy orchestral pieces. 'Light solidity' sounds like an oxymoron, but it neatly sums up the sound of the Origin Live Voyager Mk4 and Renown arm. What it actually means is it delivers that rare combination of top-end airiness and midrange clarity coupled with a powerful almost structural bass definition. This combines to make voices and instruments

at once lithe and articulate, and rooted in a three dimensional space.

In truth, however, you could comfortably point to any aspect of musical performance and find the Origin Live duo at (or very close) to the zenith of turntable ability.

### No pigeon-holing, please!

The only real negative I can find here is more to do with the ability for audiophiles to pigeon-hole companies and the impact that will have. With the Voyager Mk4 and Renown, suddenly Origin Live is playing in a very different field, one that is dominated by names that don't make more affordable and attainably priced products. There will also be those for whom the Voyager Mk4 simply isn't big and heavy enough, no matter the sonic end result. The snobbery of some high-end buyers might mean Origin Live's best never get on their radar screens. And that's idiocy, because the two make a very strong argument for being included in among the best in turntables and tonearms right now.

Origin Live always manages to impress with its turntables and tonearms. They always manage to sound like they should be more expensive than the price tag suggests. Now with a turntable and tonearm at admittedly very high-end prices, they still have the same giant-killing performance. Despite being some of the most expensive turntables and tonearms this magazine has ever tested (and let's face it, we do 'spendy') these still represent the same value proposition across the whole Origin Live range. It's just a value proposition for a very well-heeled music lover. +

### Technical specifications

#### Voyager turntable

**Type** belt-driven, non-suspended turntable

**Platter** high mass alloy/acrylic sandwich

**Dimensions (W×H×D)** 56 × 26 × 51cm

**Weight** 34kg

**Price** from £24,000

#### Renown tonearm

**Type** dual pivot tonearm available in 9.5" and 12" versions

**Price** from £26,000 (12" model)

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**Manufacturer** Origin Live

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