

Are You An Aries? VPI Aries 3 Turn Table & Dynavector Te Kaitora Rua MC Cartridge.

The VPI Aries 3, with the JMW 10.5i Memorial tone arm. The white protective cover on the plinth surface has not been lifted yet, on this demo unit. The screw top LP clamp is standard VPI issue.

Ever since I had a spin of the budget, yet excellent VPI Scout II last year, I've always wondered what's in store as one climbs higher up the VPI range of turn tables. The hot selling Classic is not on demo as there's a back ordered queue forming, plus I am told, the line is getting longer too!

Nelson, boss of Center Circle Audio was in the Chinese New Year holidays mood, and agreed to let me have a spin on the RM\$21k priced VPI Aries 3 and wait, he also mounted the nearly top dog Dynavector Te Kaitora Rua MC cartridge, priced at RM\$9k. Total analog source cost is RM\$30k as per reviewed here sans phono stage.

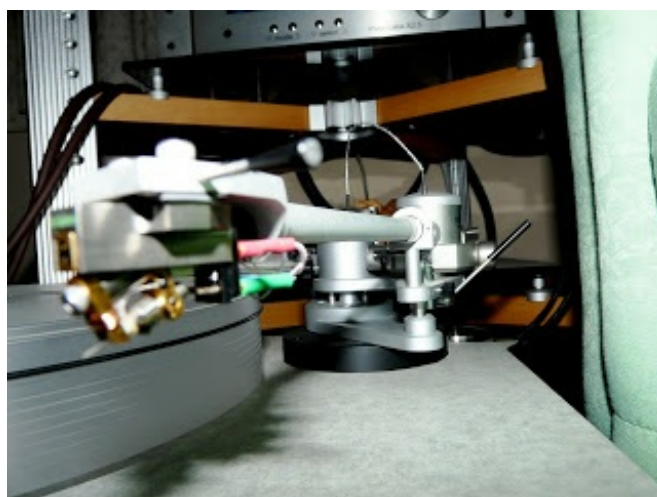
The Aries 3 is a special breed in the VPI stables, look closely and you'll note that it uses an acrylic platter, just like a Clearaudio, rather than the usual stainless steel ones mounted on most other VPI tables. The Aries 3 is a heavy turn table, due to it's solid acrylic - aluminium - acrylic sandwiched plinth construction. The plinth is laser cut for a precision like figure 8 shape and is supported by 4 pointy spikes on each side. The Aries 3 also uses an over sized, high torque out board motor, that parks nicely in to it's own little marina like dock cut out on the left side of the plinth.

Dynavector Te Kaitora Rua MC cartridge. This is a nude design as you can see.

The JMW 10.5i Memorial tone arm is a uni-pivot design with a length of 10.5 inches, as it's name suggest. This tone arm boast a great VTA adjust "on the fly" feature, for those whom it matters. The engineering on the tone arm is exacting and feels very re-assuring in the finger, when in use. The 10.5 inch long arm also produces very little distortion on the extreme ends of an LP while in play, due to it's less dramatic arch when gliding from the outer towards the inner grooves of an LP.

The Dynavector Te Kaitora Rua MC cartridge is of the nude design variety, which I always find them to be very sexy to look at. I marvelled at the miniature, delicate build, of artisan quality. Nude design cartridges tend to have an open, un coloured, yet airy quality about their sound.

I did not put the VPI Aries 3 on my usual FE Spider clone rack, due to it's much bigger size than the usual 17 inch width of most hifi equipment. So I left the turn table sitting on the carpet lined floor, which is not ideal by the way. I leveled the turn table by adjusting the adjustable pointy spikes on all four corners, park the out board motor in to it's cut out dock, and set up the arm. The Dynavector Te Kaitora cartridge came pre-mounted and optimised for the turn table, which make my job a whole lot easier. As a pre-caution, I still checked the tracking force of the cartridge which was measured at 2.3 grams, by the use of my resident Ortofon DS-1 electronic tracking force



gauge. I also set the impedance loading of 300 ohms on my Pass Labs X-Ono phono stage. Since this Dynavector outputs at 0.25 mv, I left the gain at maximum of 76 db on my phono stage. About 25 minutes in all, I am ready to spin my first LP!

Note the black knob with markings on the tone arm tower? That's the VTA adjustable "on the fly" feature, which I did not test, as I felt the original setting performed by the dealer is good enough for all the LPs I spun on the VPI.

From the very first LP I played, Illinois Jacquet's recently re-issued Birthday Party Blues, I was spell bounded by the very open, transparent window to the musical event. It was like as if, the band was in my room kinda pseudo reality. The breathing/finger techniques and the burnish tonal quality of Jacquet's horn was just totally un-real. The drum kit located just behind the stage yet still startling clear if set further away. The whole experience of the performance has that intoxicated quality of the tittle track suggest. How's that for a taste to come?



Let's dissect the juicy audiophile sound description a little more. The tonal quality of the VPI Aries 3 /Dynavector Te Kaitora Rua is near faultlessly neutral, but not in the analytical sense, rather it's so neutral, it never left any signature of it's own in the final musical experience, and just let the music speak for it self. The highs can be refined to the point of being cultured when handling delicate high hats/cymbals on Jazz music, but will never fail to bite when the Rock music ask of it to. The mids has an articulated texture of body mass which serves vocals well. The bass however, is where this acrylic platter ed VPI/Dynavector combo falls a little short, compared to the stainless steel platter ed VPI Scout II. While the Aries 3 is no slouch in the bass department, but should it be compared to the cheaper model, it just lacks the slam jamming, balls out kinda bass performance of the Scout II that so rocked my world. A buddy so graciously reminded me that the bass performance might have been even better, should the VPI not sat on the carpeted floor. And the funny thing is, he might be right too!

However, as one move upwards in the high end audio food chain, other things such as transparency, resolution, low noise floor and band width will certainly take priority. On all these aspects, the VPI Aries 3 certainly is one of the best performing example in the high end turn table market today. The credit must some how go to the Dynavector Te Kaitora Rua cartridge, which will dig out all the finest information in the record grooves, in the most noise free manner. Needless to say, with clean condition LP, surface noise is very nearly non-existent during playback. While this VPI/Dynavector combo will reproduce micro dynamics with great transient response, it does however, lose out a little in terms of macro dynamics, compared to my Linn/Benz combo. Again, perhaps the VPI sitting on the carpeted floor an influencing factor here?

The over sized, high torque motor gets up to speed in no time at all, and maintains speed stability very well, as I could not detect any wow and flutter or pitch issues during the VPI's time with me. The only area I have a small problem with this VPI is that electronic speed adjustment is optional, something which I feel should be part of the standard package, considering it's price, and market position. However, I've also found speed change to be a very un demanding job of just sliding the rubber belt up or down the motor pulley to switch speed. The 10.5 inch JMW tone arm tracks brilliantly and never mis tracked, even on some pretty warped LPs. I actually like the evenness of tonality as it tracks from the outer to the inner grooves of the LP, compared to my standard 9 inch Linn Ittok, which always will sound subtly fuller on the middle tracks of the LP.

The acrylic - aluminium - acrylic sandwiched plinth. Note the adjustable spike feet.

In summary, I felt the VPI Aries 3/Dynavector Te Kaitora Rua combo to be an American built turn table with much Euro style sound qualities. It's certainly a very practical, if slightly over sized turntable, that marries a highly transparent, and refined sound qualities. It gets out of the way, and just let music speak for it self. I can't think of any higher accolade for any high end hifi product.

The high torque, over sized, out board motor unit, to change speed, simply slip the rubber belt downwards to the larger diameter pulley for 45 rpm.

