

EQUIPMENT REVIEW



Tiger-Paw Khan LP12 kit *By Chris Binns*

After forty years of production there is very little to say about the Linn LP12 that hasn't already been said, except perhaps that it must surely qualify for one of the longest standing production units in audio industry. My first experience of this turntable occurred in 1977, having wandered into the shop front that was then the Naim factory. Julian Vereker, at first angrily dismissive having (correctly) surmised that I was a young impoverished student, proceeded to spend the rest of the afternoon playing music and emphasising the importance of the turntable in a hi fi system, something of an alien concept to both myself and most other enthusiasts at the time. The idea that he wouldn't sell me an amp unless I bought an LP12 seemed just weird; and I couldn't get my head around the fact that his preamp didn't have any tone controls. While that first meeting was something of a culture shock, I will never forget the sheer passion and drive of the conversation, something that I had rarely encountered before relating to audio. Move forward a couple of years to a time where I could consider buying a decent turntable, and the Linn / Naim philosophy was beginning to take hold and would in time form a divide in the audio community like no other, radically influencing (if not redefining) the hierarchy that applied to system building. What was less welcome was the accompanying narrow-minded arrogance adopted by many in the industry, an attitude that in this day and age is worse than useless, but sadly still pervades in some quarters.

So I bought a Linn on the basis of its sound, but not without casting a resigned glance back at the precision engineered, beautifully machined Technics/Micro Seiki/Trio alternatives. Lets face it, by comparison the LP12 hardly looked like a definitive engineering statement at the time, with bits of fibreboard, self-tapping screws and a degree of voodoo required in setting it up. Over the years I have owned or used several other turntables that together with CD's as an alternative source, have given me a more enlightened overview of what the Linn does and doesn't do. But whatever its faults, I find a well set up LP12 is never less than engaging and enjoyable to listen to, focusing as it does on the positive aspects of vinyl reproduction while not drawing too much attention to the failings.

At the height of its popularity it was considered heresy to apply modifications unless they originated from the Linn factory, these days it seems to be open season with a multitude of options that cover almost every aspect of the design from power supplies to new motors, plinths and sub chassis.

The Khan explores new territory by offering a replacement for the pressed steel top plate together with a new internal cross brace and fixing hardware, this can be fitted without any modification to the existing unit. The original plate was slightly curved to enable a stressed fit to the plinth, and a degree of inconsistency had to be taken into account during the set up procedure this was an area that could have a major influence over performance. It's also worth bearing in mind that the role ▶



► played by this component is fairly critical, as it is effectively the foundation (albeit inverted) on which everything hangs or is attached to, looked at from this perspective it becomes clear how much of a factor it plays in the behaviour of the turntable.

Machined from a solid billet of aluminium, both the Khan top plate and the cross brace have a complex milled pattern on both sides to control resonance, the former is tapped to take the studs that replace the original bolts allowing better accuracy to the perpendicular. The surface is a fine blasted to a matt finish, a massive aesthetic improvement over the rather 70's looking original. The top plate is completely flat, and a useful (though not always necessary) addition is a couple of clamps to augment the two fixing studs, that come into their own if for example the plinth is slightly out of true.

The team behind the development of the Khan have collectively had plenty of experience with the LP12, and speaking with Mark Digman, one of the partners in the project it was interesting to discover that 'over engineering' a product is not always the best solution. During the process of prototyping it was found that making the Khan thicker and more substantial effectively killed the performance of the turntable, and the final product is the result of a considerable amount of fine-tuning and listening to achieve the desired balance of attributes.

The first consequence of the Tiger-Paw kit becomes obvious during the process of setting the turntable up, where the greater accuracy and alignment of the bolts allows everything to sit in place more readily, but I admit this was an observation rather than actual experience. Phil March of Phonography originally alerted me to the Khan, and having fitted a few of them kindly offered to do the set up, he also happens to be second to none when it comes to getting the best out of a LP12. The current example dates from the early nineties with Linn modifications up to the Cirkus and an Armageddon power supply, but nothing beyond that. Tone arms used while evaluating the Khan were the Linn Ekos (an early one) followed by a Rega RB1000 and an Alphason HR100S, while the cartridge for the main part was a Lyra Skala.

Possibly one of the most obvious character traits of the LP12 as a basic turntable has always been a tendency toward a 'mid bass hump' or coloration if you will, that resulted in a mildly emphatic quality particularly evident with kick drum and bass guitar. Back in the day with Naim Amplification and speakers such as the Linn Sara, its quite possible that this was a contributory factor in the whole foot tapping / timing issue, particularly given the kind of records I was listening to at the time. These days with a very different, wider bandwidth system (and a ►



▶ broader range of music) it is not as camouflaged as it once was, and although not objectionable is far more difficult to ignore.

The Khan had the immediate effect of reducing this 'bloom' at the bottom end. I will admit that my very first reaction was one of slight disappointment; it felt as if it had taken all the warmth and bass weight with it as well, but the whole system (and in particular the cartridge) was cold, and so was I. A little later that evening everything had fallen neatly in to place, and over the period of a few records it became abundantly clear what the Khan modification was doing. Before describing the changes with the lower registers, I have to mention what for me was the most striking difference – the sheer presence of the music. With the mid range liberated from the now absent enveloping coloration, imagery, sound staging and projection of instruments was noticeably more coherent with a greater sense of projection away from the speakers. This heightened level of definition and clarity extended through the mid and into the high frequencies, coming from what I perceived to be a generally quieter background, with lower surface noise and less in the way of intrusive clicks.

So the bass was definitely more even, but what I found really intriguing was how much lower it seemed to go, reminiscent of some of the heavyweight and very expensive high-end designs that I have lived with. Rather than just a indistinct presence, it had an agile clarity that revealed more information and detail that the pre-Khan Linn could not cope with. I'm not suggesting that it wasn't there previously, only that it tended to get lost amongst the less than well-organised bottom end. The really crucial aspect to this however, is that there was still a great sense of timing, which if anything was more natural and in keeping with the music than before.

Substituting the Ekos for the lighter RB1000 only served to confirm the differences I heard. I've always felt that that there was a mild conflict at the bottom end that somehow masked the full capabilities of the arm on a Linn, this was

far less apparent with the Khan in place. As a result, I heard much more of the fabulously open mid range, speed and attack that I know the Rega is capable of, and it no longer felt as if the arm and cartridge were being held back.

The LP12's success is all about a delicate balance of compromises. Tiger-Paw has identified what could well be a weak point in the design, and empirically come up with a very elegant solution that addresses the problem without disturbing that equilibrium. A lot of the available modifications for the Linn I have heard seem to work on a very 'hi-fi' level, and some end up making records sound a bit like CD's, at which point I lose interest. The Tiger-Paw retains all of the musical qualities that go to make the LP12 so engaging, and the upgrade will work on any LP12 regardless of age or level of existing modifications. However, judging by what I have heard I would suggest that within the turntable hierarchy, the Khan should be an essential upgrade for your Linn before you consider anything else. +



PRODUCT DETAILS

Price inc VAT: Khan £795.00

Clamp kit for plinth £ 40.00

URL: www.tiger-paw.com

