

Paw man's Sondek

Tiger Paw's Khan package for Linn's ubiquitous LP12 enhances the performance of a hi-fi classic, says **Jason Kennedy**...

The Linn Sondek LP12 turntable probably has more aftermarket modifications than any other turntable. It's not surprising really, as the Sondek is a top selling high-end design, so a lot of people have got them and a percentage of those people can't help tinkering! It's also renowned for being difficult to set-up, although not for Derek Jenkins who is an LP12 guru and knows more about setting them up than anyone this side of Glasgow. He has set up more LP12s than Euros loaned to Greece, and so is in a better position than most to know its various weaknesses.

The standard LP12 top plate is a sheet of stainless steel with bolts protruding from its underside which fix it to the wooden surround of the

Keel integrated subchassis and armboard, yet costs considerably less.

There is a second element to the Khan – a cross brace which bridges the bottom of the plinth. This supports the circuit board between the motor and the mains lead, the P-clip that holds the tonearm cable and an earthing point for the subchassis. It's a structural element of the plinth where Tiger Paw replaces Linn's pressed steel channel with a machined aluminium brace that brings further rigidity to the plinth without adding weight.

Like the Keel, or any other LP12 upgrade the Khan needs to be fitted to the turntable, and as this involves a full rebuild it can add to the cost. Derek Jenkins charges £200 for the job but this includes any new 'consumables' such as

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plinth, and support the subchassis on springs. It's a simple but effective component which also holds the motor in place, and has holes for the bearing in the centre and the on/off button in its bottom left hand corner.

The Tiger Paw Khan top-plate is machined from aluminium with grooves top and bottom designed to maximise rigidity and control resonance produced by the motor. It's a beautiful and substantial part, with an unusual ring pattern on top to break up standing waves.

Underneath, it has specially machined studs to support the spring grommets which look considerably stiffer than the standard items. In its particle-blasted and anodised finish it compares favourably with Linn's

grommets and fixings. The company has seven dealers around the country who have their own prices for the service.

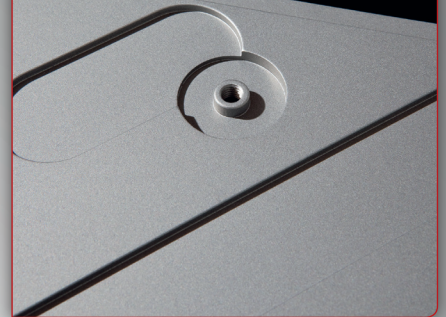
Sound quality

I went to visit Infidelity in south west London to hear a demonstration of the Tiger Paw Khan modified Sondek against the standard-issue Linn LP12. I auditioned an otherwise current specification LP12 with a Linn Akito arm and Dynavector DV17D3 moving coil cartridge, fitted with the Khan upgrades, this via a system consisting of a Naim NAC 252 preamp with Supercap power supply, Naim NAP 250 power amp and Bowers & Wilkins 805 Diamond speakers. The modified turntable delivered a

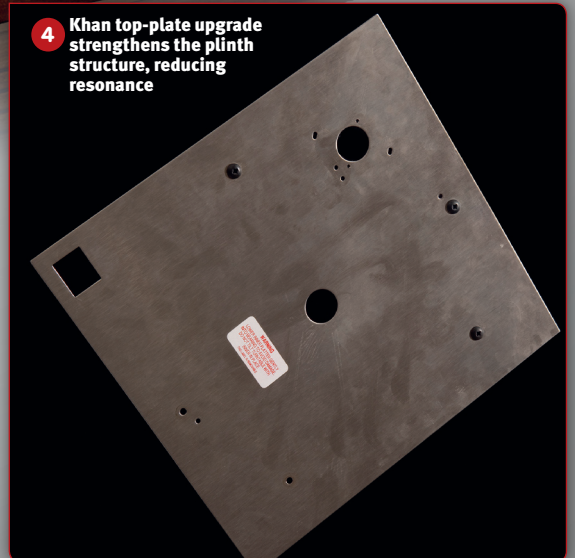




3 A series of grooves are set into the casting to improve rigidity



4 Khan top-plate upgrade strengthens the plinth structure, reducing resonance



If you want to discover the thrill and power of the music, then this is an impressive modification for the LP12 owner looking to bring his turntable into the 21st century

The finished product only looks distinctively different with the platter off!



powerful, well defined and dynamic sound that has oodles of detail. It's a considerably more contemporary sound than this turntable produces in standard form, which seems rather vague and loosely defined by way of comparison. Most surprisingly perhaps, the timing improves. It resolves considerably more of the music's attack and decay, especially in the bass – an area where the standard LP12 is fluid but not particularly well defined. I played a Leo Kottke piece called *Nothing Works* which is dense and energetic, and both qualities were apparent on the modified deck, which revealed the small scale temple bells and the punch of the kick drum in a highly controlled yet musical fashion.

Rickie Lee Jones' *Ghetto of My Mind* has a rhythmic line that sits just behind the beat, something that you get a hint of with a regular LP12, but it's pretty obvious with the Khan. As is the snap of the snare and the power of the bass drum, the lows being taut and extended to gravity-enhancing effect. The other interesting quality that this mod brings is enhanced coherence, you get a better sense of the interplay that the musicians brew up in the studio, this probably because it's possible to hear what they're doing with greater ease.

A simpler piece, *Sweet Home Chicago* by Taj Mahal, with backing by the Pointer Sisters, reveals the extent to which this turntable can put the players in the room, shut your eyes and the speakers can't be picked out, but the sense of live music is palpable. The quality of backing is

If you want your Sondek to sound like a well-worn pair of slippers, this is not for you...

also entirely apparent with the different voices being easy to appreciate. This is also down to the partnering electronics and speakers, of course, but if it's not being produced by the source it won't manifest however good the system.

If you want your system to sound like a well worn pair of slippers the Tiger Paw may not be for you. But if on the other hand you want to rediscover the power and thrill of the music then this is an impressive modification that looks like great value for the LP12 owner looking to bring his turntable into the 21st century.

On the record

Jason Kennedy speaks to Tiger Paw's Derek Jenkins...

JK: What's your background?

DJ: I've always kept quite a low profile really. I started in 1975 when I got a Saturday job in a shop in Hounslow that had a Linn account, it was one of the very first ones. Then after the guy sold the business I moved to New Sound in Holborn where Chris Thomas used to work and they sold Aristons. In 1979 I went to Grahams and worked with Jimmy Hughes setting up turntables which was an unusual experience! I was the youngest person at Grahams in those days, just 21...

Then I moved on to the Sound Organisation and worked with Roger

and Hamish, and did all the Sondeks for them in the eighties at London Bridge. I briefly had a shop called Auditorium in the City then came to work for Simon Byles (Infidelity) about seven or eight years ago.

I've gone freelance now and work on the more challenging turntables; I've worked on Roksans, Thorens and have a Nottingham Analogue currently. There are very few turntables that I haven't done!

What got you into turntables?

My brother had a Thorens TD160 with an SME arm in the sixties that was the first turntable I set up, but I also had a go with the original AR, but couldn't get on with the arm. It didn't have a bias system and the whole thing turned!

What's the key to LP12 set-up?

The devil is in the detail, you have to have a feel for it and plenty of practice because no two are the same. I always rebuild the player, clean all the parts and examine them, replacing worn parts and upgrading others. Earlier models before the mid-eighties are the worst, but they got more consistent after that. It can take me five or six hours to strip down and rebuild an LP12, then it needs to settle overnight as it sinks into new grommets.

What do you find people get wrong with turntable set-up?

You get quite a lot of poorly matched cartridge and arm combinations. A lot of people don't pay attention to what the compliances are. If you've got an Ittok which is quite a massy tonearm then you don't want to use a cartridge with too high a compliance. People put nice Denon cartridges on arms like that and after a while they collapse!

What were you trying to achieve with the Khan?

To improve the player and to complement the Keel. Linn has never changed the top-plate. We thought that Linn had got that part of it right, but what it was hanging from was the top-plate and the plinth. We've taken to using the Chris Harben plinths that are distributed by Symbiosis. They couple up perfectly with our top-plate, he's incredibly passionate about it and does a superb job. Linn has come up with a brilliant product which is the Keel and they've got the Radikal motor which is excellent. This is by no means to take away from what it's done, it's really to complement what Linn has achieved with the player. ●



DETAILS

PRICE: £795

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OUR VERDICT

