

the absolute sound T.M.

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Manufacturer: Infinity Corp., 7930 Deering Ave., Canoga Park, Calif. 91304 **Source:** Manufacturer's loan. **Serial No.:** 198. **Cost:** \$200.

I don't think I shall waste your time and my time discussing the first version of the Infinity tone arm that was mentioned prematurely in Issue 8. At that time I (and the rest of the staff) was led to believe that this was the final version of the Black Widow—which is why we referred to it.

This tone arm is striking in its appearance. It is extremely simple, it is extremely slender, it is black with a very small carbon-fiber cartridge mount. It has an elegantly simple, yet convenient to use, antiskate mechanism. More on this later.

In the last five years, we have seen a proliferation of tone arms. I think we may have seen just the beginning of the onslaught, not the end. The secret of a good arm seems to be low mass, low friction, low inertia, low warp-wow factors, and high stability, regardless of a cartridge's weight or compliance. Anyone who is astute in tone arm design knows that it is almost impossible to design a tone arm in which all of these factors reach their optimum. Some tone arms (the M&K Rabco, the B&O 4002) have come extremely close to that optimum but even these are sensitive to cartridge applications, or, as in the case of the B&O, only one cartridge, a rather disappointing one, can be used.

But with the advent of the M&K and the B&O, many reviews began to realize that there was more to be found in the record groove than the SME (a long-term reference standard) could provide. There was a sense of air and subtle inner definition that these two new arms provided and the SME did not. There was a taut quality to timpani and bowed bass that I had not heard before.

Last year the Grace 707 and the Mayware Formula 4 came along. Both pivoted tone arms demonstrated an ability to recreate qualities of "air" and "tautness," (The Mayware is not without problems. Its inner-groove tracking ability is only fair and it provides only about half the air of the servo-tracking arms.)

Enough digression. I am here to tell you that the Infinity Black Widow comes very close to doing everything I have described, those things the radial tracking arms do, and without the inherent flaws of those two radial tracking arms.

I have yet to find a cartridge that does not track perfectly in the Infinity Black Widow, and the cartridges I have tried have been manifold. They include the EMT, the Supex, the Sonus, the Grado, the Micro-Acoustics, the Denon and the XLM. In every case, inner-groove distortion, warp-wow factors and overall airiness were improved when these cartridges were used in this tone arm.

The Black Widow tone arm does amazing things for most cartridges: It helps them re-create the sense of depth and breadth. When you couple this ability with the awesome sense of air that this arm lends to any cartridge, you have opened up a whole new listening experience. Most of the grain and most of the roughness you hear in the higher mass arms are gone. Gone, too, are the lower midrange colorations that the SME is still noted for, especially with cartridges like the XLM and the Sonus.

I have been the subject of some scattered reader criticism for underestimating the amount of time that things take to do (i.e., 45 minutes to mirror image the Dahlquist), but I do not exaggerate when I say that it took only 10 minutes to set up the Black Widow tone arm. There were no instructions with the arm, but you really do not need any instructions, because the process is rather straightforward. The overhang is standard and the protractor provided with the arm does a fine job. Antiskating adjustments are made very easily on this arm, since the needle is actually placed on the record, and the skating mechanism is easily adjusted while the tone arm is tracking the record. Very few tone arms provide this feature. A small sliding collar on the tone arm's rest provides the tracking adjustment. (Other than the fact that I measured it as reading approximately .25 grams low, the device works flawlessly.) The counterweight markings were approximately 10 per cent off when checked using either

reference or the Shure stylus gauges. (This is not a significant error.) The arm is mounted using a standard SME mounting template, so those readers who are now utilizing an SME will not have to drill any new holes whatsoever. The Infinity tone arm seems extremely insensitive to jarring and acoustic feedback in all but the most extreme of circumstances. If a heavy moving-coil cartridge with a low compliance stylus is used with the tone arm and if the turntable suspension system is less than adequate, severe feedback problems can be encountered. The obvious solution is to use a set of the Audio-Technica AT-605 isolation feet or the recently reviewed Netronics Acoustimount base to solve the feedback problem.

The tone arm's hydraulic cuing works as it should—smoothly and without flaw. Infinity has thought things out—they provide a cuing lift which is long enough to span the entire record, and to enable lifting and lowering the tone arm and the supporting of the arm when it is placed in its rest, a feature that arms like the Mayware and the J-H do not have and should have.

Overall, I cannot think of a finer pivoted tone arm available anywhere in this world today. I would recommend the Infinity Black Widow tone arm over arms like the M&K Rabco, if for no other reason that the obvious ease in setting it up and maintaining accurate adjustments (not to mention the tremendous difference in cost). The M&K Rabco is no longer available and, if it were available, it would cost about \$500. The adjustment process to set that arm up takes, regularly, 20 to 30 minutes per cartridge. Enough said. My congratulations to Mr. Nudell and his cohorts, they have given us the gift of good music.

—PHD

HP Comments:

I have no exception to take with PHD's description of this arm's virtues.

Maybe I should add that the staff of this magazine has, for the first time since the Audio Research SP-3a-(whatever) pre-amplifier, unanimously coveted this piece of equipment. That makes the second time we've been in such a state of heavenly harmony among ourselves. It's a rare component that gets this kind of endorsement from us.

There do, however, seem to be some inconsistencies (in looks and material) among the arms we have received. If these bespeak a deeper inconsistency, we shall return to the subject later.

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