



Avid Ingenium

The resurgence of vinyl is no longer just a craze. It's a trend, and one that doesn't seem anywhere close to peaking yet. LP sales continue to grow, driven as much by demand as by ever-improving supply, and the number of turntables on offer seems to increase almost weekly.

British audio brand Avid Hi-Fi is no stranger to the turntable scene, however. In fact, it built its business on turntables long before it became desirable to spin vinyl records again. These days, its product portfolio not only features a half-dozen turntables, but also phono stages, pre/power amplifiers, loudspeakers, cables, and even audio furniture.

The Ingenium is Avid Hi-Fi's most affordable turntable, but it's neither cheap nor entry-level. Instead, this minimalist design is intended to bring top-flight vinyl reproduction to a wider audience by focusing on the essentials

only, and then executing those essentials with flair and innovation.

The chassis is a rigid, T-shaped structure consisting of a solid aluminium bar supported at one end by a shorter aluminium crossbar. The chassis is located on a trio of elastomer 'feet', fitted to the three extremities.

The inverted stainless steel bearing rests on a tungsten carbide/sapphire thrust point, with the bearing assembly rigidly inserted in the chassis bar. The far end of the same bar offers a mount for the tonearm. An extended version with provision for a second tonearm is offered as an option.

An alloy sub-platter with spindle rests on the bearing, and also hosts the drive belt, which is powered by a pulley driven by a free-standing AC motor. The latter's position from the sub-platter determines the rotation speed, and requires some fine adjustment to get pitch-perfect.

The motor is turned on and off via an in-line switch on the motor's power cable

— an arrangement that works well in practice, but appears a little awkward. At least the switch looks and feels robust.

The main platter is made of medium-density fibreboard (MDF) with a cork mat, and fits snugly over the sub-platter. MDF may seem like an odd choice, but its high, consistent density and inherent inertness ensure excellent inherent damping.

Avid offers the Ingenium with a choice of tonearms in 9-inch and 12-inch sizes, of which the 9-inch Pro-Ject Carbon fitted to the review unit is the most affordable. It lacks the sheer heirloom solidity and precision of the optional, dearer SME arms, but frankly, given the Ingenium's positioning, the Carbon is an excellent match.

The tonearm features an integrated headshell and has an effective mass of 8,5 grams. The arm wand is tapered towards the headshell, while the inverted bearing uses high-quality ball races. It mounts directly onto the Ingenium's



chassis and a single hex bolt allows VTA adjustment, although not on the fly.

Interior wiring is flexible OFC, running from the headshell all the way to the five-pin connector at the base of the tonearm. The supplied tonearm lead is RCA-terminated and includes a grounding wire.

Set-up is fairly straightforward, although I struggled to get the tonearm's fiddly anti-skate system to work properly, because the mounting point for the supplied weight support hoop is low, and even with the supplied spacer, the weight line kept snagging the tonearm's gimbal.

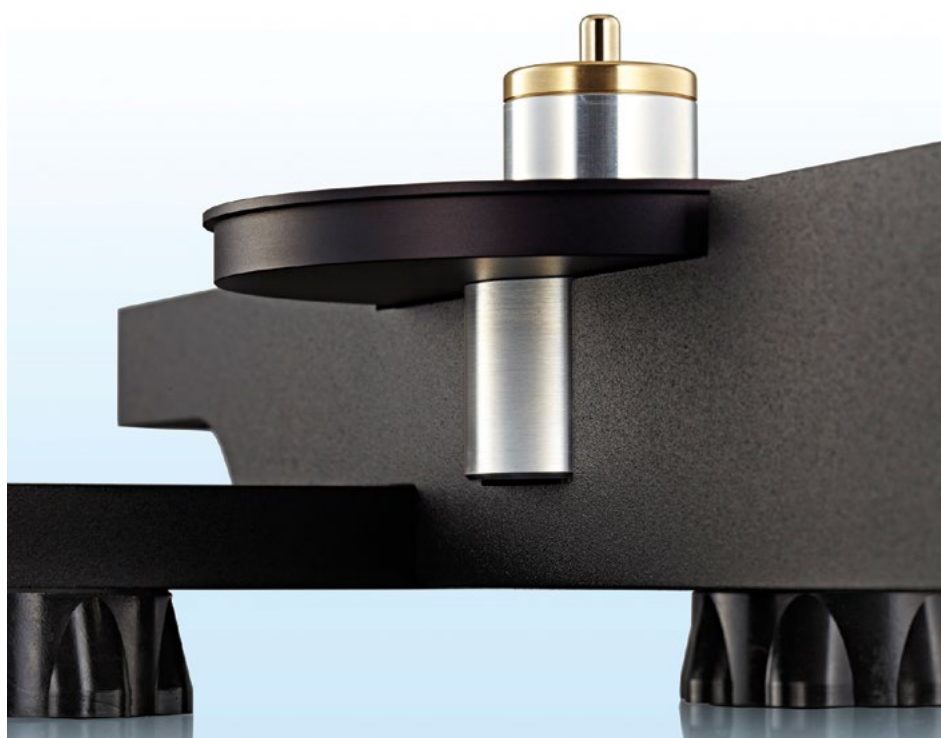
I sorted out the problem by adding some washers, but I think Avid should include some tonearm-specific instructions in the box, and make better provision for raising the support hoop in order to accommodate a wider range of cartridges: the Hana SH used for this review is around 16 mm high, including the stylus, which isn't particularly tall ...

The tonearm's scaled counterweight made it easy to balance the tonearm and then to set tracking force – I used an Ortofon scale to check tracking force after set-up and it was spot on. Azimuth is also easily adjusted, as the tonearm wand is seated in a collar using a single grub screw, which when loosened allows quick and effective azimuth setting.

As mentioned, I ran the Ingenium in conjunction with the boisterous and dynamic Hana SH high-output moving coil cartridge, while phono stage duties were performed by an Ayre P-5xe. The rest of the system comprised a Naim Uniti2 driving Vivid Audio V1.5 speakers.

The Ingenium offered a performance that was low on noise and high on musicality: it provided an excellent platform for the Hana cartridge's incisive, dynamic delivery. There was no motor or AC hum whatsoever, and rotational stability was excellent – the speed was exactly right.

Paul McCartney's *McCartney* (Sony 180g remastered LP) sounded marvellous: a rich, sonorous electric bass, organic guitars, measured percussion and, of course, McCartney's evocative vocals – sometimes melancholy, sometimes joyous,



but always engaging.

Imaging was finely focussed and believable, allowing every facet of the performance to come to the fore. Also, the staging was expansive and expressive, faithfully positioning instruments in spatial

and temporal context, and making it easy to become completely enthralled by the music.

The Ingenium exuded that something special that makes listening to vinyl so pleasurable: there was an accessibility and

VITAL STATS

Motor	AC synchronous, 230 V
Drive	Single belt
Platter	MDF, cork mat
Bearing	Inverted stainless steel, sapphire/tungsten carbide thrust point
Suspension.....	Three-point elastomer damping
Tonearm.....	Pro-Ject 9-inch carbon
Dimensions	370 x 305 mm footprint, 130 mm high
Weight.....	5,6 kg (including arm)

Price R34 990 including tonearm

Verdict

Minimalist but painstakingly engineered, the Ingenium may be Avid's most affordable turntable, but there's nothing entry-level about its execution, nor its performance.

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OUR RATING: 82 / 100





a sonic integrity to the music that made every bar, every phrase, every beat sound real and vibrant.

Similar sonic traits marked Dutch prog rock stars Focus' *Hamburger Concerto* (Red Bullet/Music On Vinyl Remaster).

The recording is dense and can sound thick and viscous, but the Avid interpretation was composed and succinct, never allowing the bass and lower mids to become too dominating, and endowing the sound with welcome air and space.

Alison Krauss and Union Station's *So Long, So Wrong* (Rounder/Mobile Fidelity Remaster) has much more verve and sparkle, and the Ingenium brought all the sheen and glow of the recording to the fore.

The foot-tapping 'I'll Remember You, Love ...' enthusiastically showcased the twangy, urgent banjo, while the evocative, moody 'Looking In The Eyes Of Love' was dominated by the clear, intensive vocals of

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Krauss, set against a beautifully modulated backdrop of acoustic guitars and backing vocals. The turntable faithfully tracked the recording's dynamic swings, and drew a richly hued musical picture.

The more I used the Ingenium, the more I liked the turntable. It may be minimalist in concept and execution, but the precise and circumspect engineering shows in the total absence of mechanical and motor noise, the way the cartridge is allowed to faithfully track the groove, and the deck's ability to bring real, engaging music to the fore.

I have a feeling that a 'super' Ingenium, with the Diva II SP's heavier platter, fancier motor and an SME 309 tonearm would be a real giant killer. But even in current trim, this is a turntable that makes the music come powerfully alive, and always overdelivers on expectations in the process.

Deon Schoeman

