

AUDIO
FILE

CD player
 Made by: Hegel Music Systems AS, Oslo, Norway
 Supplied by: Auden Distribution Ltd, Lancs
 Telephone: 07917 685 759
 Web: www.hegel.com; www.audendistribution.co.uk
 Price: £4500



Hegel Viking

When Hegel launched its Mohican CD player in 2016, the name was chosen because it was going to be the last such machine the Norwegian company would make. A *volte-face* seven years later therefore raises some eyebrows.

However, the hi-fi industry is now awash with chatter about a CD revival, and Hegel is following companies including Denon [p54], Audiolab and Electrocompaniet in recently introducing new silver-disc spinners. The £4500 Viking, available in just a black finish, is also

'A wide soundstage gave Rudd's drumkit a looming presence'

truly minimalist: it has no digital inputs, no SACD playback, and no user-selectable digital filter.

If this specification will appeal to a certain breed of audiophile, so too might the Viking's modern but unflashy design. The front fascia of its full-width chassis is gently curved, and sports a new, crisp OLED display – which Hegel says was 'specifically selected for its low noise' – flanked by push-button controls for play, pause, etc. Operation of the Viking this way is slightly awkward; the remote handset is generally a better bet.

The simplicity of the player's design continues around the back, where there's just a mains socket, balanced XLR and unbalanced RCA analogue outputs and a BNC digital output if you wish to use the Viking as a CD transport.

So what has changed since the Mohican? The answer is quite a lot, for in addition to the smarter styling, Hegel has revamped the player's interior. Part of this will be because the retirement of the Mohican in 2022 was caused by the discontinuation of 'key components', not least the CD transport, but also because Hegel's aim is for the Viking to be 'the best CD player [it's] ever made'.

The slot-loading mech and laser pick-up are new, as is the 32-bit 'Velvet Sound' AKM DAC. Hegel has also enhanced the fully balanced analogue stage, based around its proven filter and 'Line Driver' technologies, while the digital/analogue PSUs directly benefit from two separate transformers (the Mohican had but one).

Hegel's Master Clock system sees the brand's latest SoundEngine technology at work with the aim, as ever, to reduce digital jitter.

ROLLING IN THE DEEP

From the first bars of music the Viking captures your attention. It has an articulate, composed nature – supple and fluid in the low octaves, delicate and musical in the midrange, and smooth up top. There's a little lack of sparkle and bite, but this politeness is joined by exemplary soundstaging.

Fed AC/DC's *Power Up* [Sony Music/Columbia], the way the Viking unfurled the production was striking. The opening track 'Realize' jumped out of the speakers in a crash of cymbals, drums and guitar, then settled into a groove where singer Brian Johnson was palpably ahead of his four bandmates,

ABOVE: The smoothly contoured fascia with its two push knobs (on/off, track skip and eject/stop/play, respectively) and subtle, central display match Hegel's partnering separates. Under the bonnet are regulated PSUs for the transport, digital and analogue circuits, the latter featuring the new AKM AK4493 DAC

but not thrust forward unduly. The backing vocals seemed to arrive from far behind, while the soundstage width gave Phil Rudd's drumkit a looming presence.

Playing Lyn Stanley *Live At Studio A* jazz set [AT Music], there was precision to the placement of instruments and scads of texture. Notes from the upright bass were thick, meaty and detailed, and the Viking was also happy to let treble details ring out and fade away, such that the ambience and atmosphere of this live recording was palpable.

Kylie Minogue's disco-throwback *Fever* [Parlophone] passed through Hegel's DAC and analogue stages without alarm, leaving its blend of synths, upbeat backing tracks and singalong choruses sounding vibrant and immediate. Yet the darker, dissonant compositions of *This Stupid World* by Yo La Tengo [Matador] also benefitted from the Viking's unfiltered performance.

The refined character of this CD player might not be to everyone's tastes, but it ensures listening sessions are free from fatigue and the absence of treble attack isn't overplayed – while the large, complex orchestrations of Thomas Newman's *Spectre* soundtrack [Decca] are mellifluous, there's plenty of separation between the instruments, and the dynamic bursts of 'Backfire' and 'Snow Plane' are free from constraint.

VERDICT

The sonic character of the Viking won't shock any brand regulars. Like its Mohican predecessor, Hegel's embellishment-free CD player has a smooth nature that makes listening a pleasure – and reminds just how good the CD format can sound. Ⓛ

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Maximum output level / Impedance	2.51Vrms / 22ohm
A-wtd S/N ratio	109.8dB
Distortion (1kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS)	0.00013% / 0.0009%
Distortion & Noise (20kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS)	0.00014% / 0.0010%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	+0.01 to -0.22dB
Digital jitter (44.1kHz/16-bit)	116ps
Resolution (re. -100dBFS / -110dBFS)	±0.3dB / ±0.5dB
Power consumption	13W (1W standby)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	430x96x300mm / 7kg