

Sirocco 1.24

L'ultime Atohm

Interview

Catherine Fertin

Tests

Davis Stage

Diptyque DP85

Eversolo DMP-A10

Hana SL MK2



Kora DAC 140
Tubosphère numérique

CD PLAYER

HEGEL VIKING

Laurent Thorin



Being able to enjoy your beautiful CD collection in any situation is a pleasure. And not just on days when your box is broken ;-) Despite the trend towards networked music consumption, physical media still has a lot to offer in terms of musicality and intrinsic sound quality. That's why the Viking comes at just the right time!

We have been ardent supporters of the Norwegian brand since its arrival in France more than 15 years ago. Over the years, we have acquired many Hegel devices, culminating in the beautiful P30 and H30 separate amplifier set. We also had the opportunity to test the CDP 4 mk2 and the Mohican at length, which, as its name suggests, was supposed to be the brand's last CD player. But Hegel's commitment to the CD format is too important for the Norwegian company to give up on it. As a result, there has always been at least one rotating machine in the manufacturer's range since its creation. For us, this loyalty to a reliable and proven medium is symptomatic of Hegel's long-term strategy.

ORIGIN
NorwayPRICE
€ 4 990DIMENSIONS
430 x 99 x 305 mmWEIGHT
7,3 kgSUPPORTED DISCS
CD Redbook 12 cmLINE LEVEL OUTPUT
1 fixed unbalanced (RCA) and 1 fixed balanced (XLR)ANALOG OUTPUT VOLTAGE
2,5 V RMSDIGITAL OUTPUT
1 BNC true 75 ohmsFREQUENCY RESPONSE
0 Hz-22 kHzDISTORTION
Less than 0.0015 %

What's more, listening to music on physical media today takes on a philosophical dimension. It's about the importance of the present moment. Rather than being tempted to zap, given that the online offering is so vast that hoping to take it all in at once is a pipe dream, let's focus for an hour on a particular work that we can consciously savor.

In a world where download options and streaming services are legion, it becomes difficult not to be in "consumer" mode. What should be easy and enjoyable suddenly becomes complex and stressful. Listening to a CD or LP is not. You choose, not the algorithm. And as the philosopher said, "to choose is to renounce." Humans are naturally fragile on this subject, so network playback offers them the

opportunity not to choose and therefore not to renounce... Contrary to this trend, the Viking is a CD player with a native 16/44.1 format, developed exclusively to the standard set out in the Redbook. When asked about the name given to this machine, the staff replied, *«Like its Nordic ancestors, Hegel improves on existing technology. When the Viking era began, boats had been around for thousands of years. What the Vikings did was to perfect their design. Their longboats could not only sail close to the coast, but also cross oceans. The improvements they made led the Vikings to new shores and even new continents. CD technology may be old, but Hegel believes that once perfected, it remains the best digital medium available.»*





Arriving shortly after them, the Viking adopts the design of the P30A and H30A, the brand's high-end preamplifier and amplifier. This not only gives it an attractive appearance, but also symbolically positions it as Hegel's reference source.

For this latest version, the Norwegian company has opted for a "slot-in" mechanism, in short, a sub-assembly without a drawer. This avoids the use of an additional moving part and therefore a potential source of failure in the long term. The message is therefore clear: the Viking is built to last. The solid overall construction reinforces this observation. The controls are grouped on either side of the OLED matrix screen (chosen for its low noise level) in the same way as the switches found on car dashboards.

On the rear panel, the user has two pairs of analog outputs: a balanced XLR output and an unbalanced RCA output. There is also a digital output compliant with the S/PDIF standard on a BNC connector (the only connector that guarantees perfect 75-ohm signal transfer).

The case is made from machined aluminum plates that have been black anodized. To avoid any stability issues, the Viking rests on three circular aluminum feet with a hard rubber hemispherical base. This ensures impeccable weight distribution. Opening the case reveals a methodical layout that reinforces this idea of mechanical methodology.

Hegel does not name the manufacturer of the new Viking's transport, which is no longer made by Sanyo as it was for the Mohican, but states that the company sources it "from a major car radio supplier. It is very good and significantly more accurate than the Mohican's."

The Viking features the excellent AKM4493SEQ conversion chip. It does not oversample or modify the signal in any way. Bent Holter justifies his choice by arguing that *«this circuit is the best for a 16-bit CD player because we have total control over the master clock. And when the latter is of extremely high quality, it is even more important that the DAC chip is perfect in terms of bits and that it does not resample or modify the audio data. With our discrete master clock with very low phase noise, this AKM is what gives the Viking its racing performance.»*

In fact, the transport and DAC are directly controlled by Hegel's proprietary master clock, which ensures perfect synchronization between the various components. Using a very low phase noise quartz crystal and patented "SoundEngine" technology, the discrete clock designed by Hegel in the Viking reduces jitter to an absolute minimum.



The Viking's analog stage was developed specifically for this model. It incorporates both analog low-pass filtering and "Line Driver" technology, ensuring completely symmetrical and noise-free signal processing all the way to your amplifier.

SET UP

Like all rotating machines, the Viking is sensitive to external vibrations, which is why care should be taken to install it on a rigid, perfectly level support. In terms of connectivity, the connection is reduced to its simplest form, notably using a pair of interconnect cables, whether symmetrical or not. To maximize the performance of this player, be sure to use a good power cord and carefully check the phase. The Viking is equipped with a digital output, but given the excellence of its internal converter, there is no reason you should need to use it. However, it will be useful for those who enjoy digital copies of CDs. The player has an automatic standby function for added convenience and comes with the solid aluminum RC8 remote control, which can also control all other products from the brand.

THE SOUND

Time passes, but our respect for the work of the Norwegian brand remains undiminished. Apparently, time has no hold on the passion that the development team puts into each of its new products. And it takes commitment to develop a new CD player in 2024. Yet it only takes a few notes of music to understand that this venerable medium still has a lot of sonic pleasure to offer us and that Hegel, as a connoisseur of the Red Book, has perfectly assimilated the challenges of the iridescent disc. During this long listening session,

which took place over several months, we regularly compared CDs and streaming. What struck us most often was the reduction in background noise on the former compared to the latter at equivalent prices. A much more expensive network playback protocol would be required to achieve the same result. Technically, this is easy to explain, but that's not the point. What matters is that for a budget of €5,000, music lovers with a well-stocked CD collection are guaranteed superlative performance with the Viking. By streaming too much, we have forgotten what CDs are capable of. That is our mistake. The Viking is characterized first and foremost by a truly wide sound spectrum with a very expressive depth. We are at the opposite end of the spectrum from a smooth listening experience that would smooth out all the rough edges of music reproduction. On the contrary, the sound experience with the Viking is an ode to emotion. The dynamic performance of this player is truly addictive. With it, the music literally bursts out of the speakers and fills the listening room. It gives the impression that the power of your amplifier has suddenly increased. This "wide-open" aspect gives the sound an extremely pleasant energy and presence. With the Viking, your records have body. The rhythmic tracking is very successful, whether you're listening to a minimalist work or a large ensemble. The differentiation between the various melodic lines becomes obvious. This ease in dissecting the signal makes listening much more fluid and natural. You'll find yourself listening at a higher volume, because the listener is never bothered by any distortion. The signal is pure and flows delicately. The perspective of the different sound planes is obvious. Nothing stands in the way of your absolute understanding of the three-dimensional reproduction of the message.



When judged in comparison to some of its direct competitors, the Viking is a formidable musical machine. First, because it's very nuanced balance favors smoothness and brightness. It is never dry or on a knife edge. On the contrary, we appreciate a certain smoothness that makes the timbres warm but without excessive roundness. In addition, the silences are "full" and provide real punctuation to the musical phrase. Its energy management ensures that it sticks admirably to the modulation in all circumstances. Equally at ease with vocals and instruments, in small or large ensembles, it is a highly eclectic player that does justice to all styles and offers true musical versatility.

OUR CONCLUSION

Since the Viking became part of our daily lives, we have resumed the habit of listening to CDs for our greatest pleasure. In over 40 years, this medium has progressed considerably. And even if the times don't do it justice, we can assure you that this machine

is surprisingly relevant today. Any enthusiast with a fine collection owes it to themselves to keep a machine worthy of the name to enjoy it. The point is not to denigrate network playback. We cannot oppose technological progress; that would be ridiculous and backward-looking. However, it is important to point out that new media are not necessarily here to bury their predecessors. Many knowledgeable enthusiasts happily combine vinyl records, CDs, and streaming. This has always been the case for us, and we are all the better for it. In this context, purchasing a player such as the Viking seems to us to be an excellent option. Not only is it a particularly musical machine, but it is also the result of the Norwegian brand's in-depth expertise, which has never wavered in this area. In addition, the Viking offers high-end features at a price that, while certainly significant, remains entirely reasonable given the performance it delivers. For all these reasons, and given our attachment to the brand, we are delighted to award it our prize. ■

