



SCHEU ANALOG BLACK DIAMOND £1,500

One of the first two names on test that may well be new to many readers, Germany's Scheu Analog have a solid history behind them and manufacture a range of turntables as well as their own arms which have finally arrived on UK shores through three dealers, namely Sounds4Enjoyment, Tom Tom Audio and Musicology.

Founded by a trained toolmaker and musician by the name of Thomas Scheu the first turntable was built in 1985. The company expanded and Thomas increased the range of designs available,

eventually concentrating more on a fixed range of designs rather than the more kit-oriented, made to order items he

had started out with. This culminated in him winning The Absolute Sound's "Golden Ear Award" in 2001 for the Premier II turntable.

Sadly, in December 2004 Thomas passed away, but his wife Ulla took the decision to carry on running the company, continuing her husband's ideas but also expanding the business to bring his designs to a wider audience. One of the most notable aspects of this was the development of a turntable with female customers in mind...

That deck was the Diamond and it is available in a stunning range of colours and finishes, including transparent, blue and the obvious one - pink! Scheu even offer to make one to your favourite colour, to order (see www.ladylikescheu.com for further details and pictures). For those less adventurous souls among us, the Diamond is also available in black and this was the finish chosen

by singer Katie Melua, who became the proud owner of the first deck to roll off the production line. Every part of the deck is made in-house and Scheu also make parts for one or two other well-known turntables.

Fitted with a large acrylic platter of 50mm thickness, drive is provided by a freestanding motor with electronic speed switching and adjustment on both speeds through individual pots. One interesting aspect of the deck is that you won't find a belt lurking in the box, but instead a reel of fine nylon wire for you to make your own drive cord. Good eyesight is essential for tying the knot in the cord, however, and small fingers go a long way towards helping as well!

The thinking behind the use of this material is that the non-stretch nylon removes the resonances that a belt can introduce and also minimises any thickness variations that can be

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found in a rubber belt which can, in turn, cause wow. However, handily, it also allows you to place the motor fifteen feet away from the deck if the mood takes you...



The arm supplied with the Black Diamond is the good old Rega RB250 to which Scheu Analog have fitted their upgraded counterweight and fitting stub, and the package is completed by a supplied Benz Micro MC Silver high output MC cartridge. Future upgrades to the easily-adjustable armboard could possibly include one of Scheu's own arms, such as the rather striking Perspex Cantus.

The main Perspex body of the Black Diamond is quite large, taking up a triangular area with each side 500mm long, and the motor sits outside this. Each foot is adjustable in order to level the deck, and is located at the end of each plinth leg. As a result a good sized support area is required.

SOUND QUALITY

If the increase in bass solidity and depth had been a pleasant surprise when changing from the Consonance to the Revolver, then finding a similarly impressive improvement when changing to the Black Diamond was an equally grin-inducing event. Even though the startup time of the Scheu Analog is slow, apparently as a result of the nylon cord's lack of friction against the motor pulley, it appears that once up to speed, the combination of heavy platter and a driving method free of the theoretically possible undulations of a rubber belt do indeed work, as the Black Diamond has some of the tightest bass I have heard from any deck without an idler wheel or hefty direct drive motor.

As a result, the Scheu Analog was the only deck to really tease the recalcitrant bass line from the depths of the Amy McDonald track, setting up an almost healthy low end underpinning to it. Bass notes from all material started and stopped with metronomic precision, the Black Diamond really relishing Maxi Priest's driving bass lines. If dance music is your thing, then the Black Diamond may well be right up your street, as it pounded out 808 State with incredible enthusiasm. Something else I noted was that the track 'Pacific 202' has a subtle shift in tonality as it starts proper, as if someone tweaked a knob on the mixing desk to bring the treble up. With the other decks, you gradually realise that some of the backing effects have become clearer, but the Black Diamond pinpointed the instant that this happened.

The sense of drive and rhythm continued up into the midband, where the Scheu Analog proved adept at teasing the last ounce of character from instruments, Antonio Forcione and his cohorts being brilliantly reproduced. The deck picked out the minutiae of each string as it was plucked and enabled each instrument to clearly stand out from the others. I was able to place each performer in the soundstage easily, and I suspect that if a professional musician was listening to the album on this deck, they may well have been able to tell me the manufacturers of the instruments being played...

As mentioned, the soundstage of the Black Diamond is most impressive. Not only does it spread everything out expertly within the plane of the loudspeakers, but was quite uncanny in the way it was able to project the performance right out into the room, bringing performers to life. Although not quite up to the standards of the SME 10A, which generates the sort of imagery that you feel you could get up and walk around in, the

Scheu Analog nevertheless has a gratifyingly atmospheric nature. In fact, I was so enjoying this nature that it came as something of a shock when everything went wrong and started collapsing and slurring. Fortunately the problem soon became apparent; namely that my join in the drive cord had come apart. Tip for future users - make sure your knots are tight!

With everything re-joined, the Black Diamond continued to impress with its beautifully clear and crisp top end, the treble aiding in achieving the sharp leading edges of notes and the dynamic nature noted previously. Some more strident material did reveal a slight hardness to the upper registers which added a little more forcefulness to some material than I would have liked, but this was not intrusive and mostly served to increase clarity and detail.

CONCLUSION

The Scheu Analog Black Diamond is a mightily impressive turntable. It is superbly built and this is reflected in its sound, which is dynamic, crisp and detailed, but with a capacious soundstage that brings music to life.

The supplied Rega RB250 arm seems to match very well with the character of the deck aided, I suspect, by the well documented improvements that a better end stub and counterweight can bring. Add in the supplied good quality MC cartridge and you have an excellent value package that gels incredibly well to turn in an extremely convincing performance.

Grateful thanks to Dave Barker at Sounds4Enjoyment (+44(0)2392 717628; www.sounds4enjoyment.com) for supplying our review sample.

HI-FI WORLD

VERDICT

Highly impressive turntable that punches well above its weight, wrapped up in a sleek package.

SCHEU ANALOG BLACK DIAMOND £1,500
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www.scheu-analog.de

FOR

- seriously impressive bass
- excellent soundstage depth
- dynamic and pacy nature
- build quality

AGAINST

- fiddly DIY drive cord

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

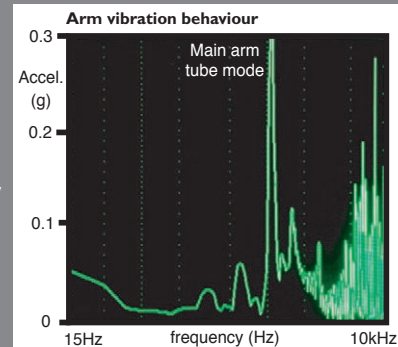
The Scheu Analog Black Diamond is unusual in its use of a thread drive system and I was concerned that the knot in the thread might have an adverse effect on the wow and flutter measurement. Fortunately, thanks to the massive platter this is not the case and the Black Diamond posted an IEC weighted figure of 0.055%. This is a very good result in any terms and is actually the best result seen in this test, so Scheu Analog have engineered the deck very well indeed. Speed stability was excellent during testing and the Black Diamond ran smoothly and quietly.

The Scheu Analog's arm shows the usual result for the Rega RB250 item on which it is based, namely a high main arm tube mode, one that appears undamped as it is narrow. The headshell is also quite active in vibration terms and this has the potential to add midrange harshness with certain cartridges.

Overall the Black Diamond turntable and arm measure well and should be

more than capable of turning in a good performance. AS

ARM VIBRATION



WOW AND FLUTTER

