

Jelco

TK-950S tonearm

AS ONE OF the largest OEM manufacturers of tonearms in the world Japanese manufacturer Jelco has built an enviable reputation in the business by providing customised tonearms for turntable manufacturers that do not have the extensive manufacturing capacity or expertise to make their own.

The TK-950, supplied in the UK by distributor ISOkinetik, comes in two variants – the 12in L and 9in S model that I'm looking at here. Both are quoted as being high-mass designs, best suited to low or medium-compliance cartridges. The vertical axis bearings are high-precision knife edges made from a proprietary steel material. They are made by hand and designed to have very low friction, low centre of gravity and resistance to unwanted vibrations. The geometry has been designed to be set up using Baerwald calculations, which follow IEC recommendations. The supplied universal counterweight is for use with cartridges and headshells with a combined weight of between 17 and 35g. The tonearm has a standard SME-style 0.5in connector for attaching the supplied headshell and incorporates a small clamp that allows for adjustment of the cartridge azimuth angle.

Balancing act

The tonearm comes with everything you need for installation, including a Perspex mounting ruler, various Allen keys, nuts and bolts, armboard template for the standard Rega three-point fixing and a combined specification and instruction sheet. Also included is a Jelco SG-1 digital stylus balance (shown). There is a static tracking force gauge on the front of the counterweight.

My test cartridge is a Kiseki Blue NOS moving-coil cartridge with a compliance of 15cu, making it a medium-compliance cartridge. My turntable is the ISOkinetik Modular One with a removable armboard and I have a ready-made armboard for the Jelco's three-point fixing. I set the tracking force to 1.75g using the supplied digital stylus balance.



This is one of the nicest digital stylus balances I have come across in a while and the clear and stable reading remains unaffected by the relatively powerful magnet in my cartridge, unlike some that I have used.

Having installed the arm, the first disc that I spin is a superb recording of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. Choosing the exciting first movement of *Winter*, the music grabs me with a fantastic attack from the strings, which are bright and clear and with no signs of harshness. The three-dimensional nature of the recording is spot on, with an overall superb imaging of the instruments. The bass is tight and well extended and with excellent tonal clarity in the lower registers demonstrating the arm and cartridge are in perfect harmony.

To check out the tonearm's handling of vocals, a recording of *Don't Misunderstand* sung by Thelma Houston on a Sheffield Labs direct-to-disc pressing proves to be totally convincing in my listening room. The excellent detail and clarity of the recording, coupled with the smoothness and refinement of the performance, is very much in evidence throughout the track.

Handel's *Organ Concerto No. 1 in G Minor* with Adrian Boult conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra showcases the majesty and maturity of this performance. The orchestra is full, without being overblown and there is an excellent balance across the entire frequency spectrum. The bass is very well extended but tight, and this is particularly evident in the organ passages. The top end is clear and crisp, without being at all edgy and the brass is beautifully strident with the strings sounding rounded.

Four play

I conclude with a jazz version of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* by the Raymond Fol Big Band. The *allegros* sparkle with excitement and the performance is conveyed with great energy and gusto. The trumpet solos are clear and strident, without sounding at all abrasive and the guitar in the second movement of *Spring* is very moving and involving.

Mechanically, the TK-950S has a sophisticated feel and an elegant appearance. It's truly a fantastic performer and fully justifies its position at the top of the range of Jelco's respected tonearms. **NR**

