



The 'l'Art' of Record Cleaning

David Allcock tests l'Art du Son record cleaning fluid to see just how good it really is



Germany's Finest . . .

David Allcock checks out Germany's finest cleaners. We had hoped to supply both manual and automated machines but the Munich High-End show robbed us of the opportunity to steal a Loricraft PRC-2 from Terry. If we can liberate a machine I'm sure David will be willing to experiment further. This review covers the new l'Art du Son record concentrate compared to the supplied Knosti record cleaning fluid, a fluid arguably designed specifically for use with their machine. Over to you David.

Record cleaning has come a long way from the anti static yellow cloths you'd used to buy in the 70's from Woolworth's. Today, most serious enthusiasts already use a dry brush before playing every record, and these brushes are truly excellent for day to day upkeep. Likewise most enthusiasts will not use normal paper sleeves, instead using anti static inner sleeves which are designed to prevent the build up of static charge around the vinyl. Until recently wet cleaners have only been used by the most fastidious (and wealthy) enthusiasts, as these machines have usually been motorised, equipped with large, powerful vacuum pumps, and, ultimately, expensive. This all changed with two machines coming to the attention of enthusiasts, the Allsop Orbitrac II and the Knosti Disco Anti Stat. Unfortunately, despite its low cost, ease of use and very good results, the Orbitrac has become increasingly difficult to obtain, but the German Knosti machine has gone from strength to strength. The Knosti Disco Anti Stat is a manual record cleaning machine which is easy to use and can deliver astonishing results. This machine should be in any household where a turntable is used, regardless of whether your collection numbers 50 or 5,000. The supplied Knosti fluid is very good at removing dirt, grease and fingerprints, and makes a remarkable difference to record playback, with the camel hair brushes in the machine getting deep into the bottom of the 'V' shaped grooves, loosening the dirt which collects at the bottom of the



groove which is then flushed out by the fluid bath in the bottom of the machine, whilst other hairs in the brushes cleans the surface of the record. The end result is a massive lowering of noise floor, a reduction in the numbers of clicks and pops during playback.

Now Knosti's standard fluid has serious competition from a new fluid with the potential to improve every wet cleaning system on the market, both motorised and manual. Every fluid should act as a degreasing agent, allowing dirt to be removed from the vinyl's surface, whilst leaving no residue, and simultaneously capturing the dirt in the fluid and preventing it being transferred back onto the vinyl during the cleaning process. The new kid on the block is from l' Art du Son, a highly concentrated fluid which makes 5 litres when added to distilled water. This fluid has taken 3 years to develop, and unlike most cleaning fluids this contains no alcohol and is completely none toxic and biodegradable. The l'Art du Son fluid has been chemically engineered to break chemical bonds between the grease, dirt and vinyl, to trap them in the fluid and prevent them re-bonding to the vinyl during the cleaning process whilst also rapidly evaporating without leaving any residue behind, a residue which can capture and retain further dirt and pollutants. You need to mix the fluid with 5 litres of distilled water, and I would recommend you speak to your chemist, not your local car parts company, and try to get triple distilled water, to ensure there are

Those of you who use vinyl regularly know the problems associated with looking after your precious vinyl. Whilst a few people do have collections comprising exclusively of new vinyl, for the vast majority, half of the fun of vinyl collecting is scouring the charity shops, car boot sales and internet for those rare and unusual items. It is an unfortunate fact that most of these treasures have not been cared for to audiophile standards, they have frequently been stored badly, not been dry brushed and sticky finger marks can appear on otherwise precious gems.

The good news is that all is not lost, the procedures involved in cleaning these records are easy and the equipment required will very rapidly pay for itself.

The first consideration is basic storage. Records should be stored upright, preferably with

the entire record side fully supported by the shelf. Whilst most of the shelving units and bookshelves found in DIY stores are not wide enough (you need something a minimum of 300mm or 12" wide) both Ikea and Habitat sell storage cubes which are a perfect size for storing records.

Once you have your records stored correctly you need to look at your inner sleeves, the part which spends the most time in contact with the vinyl. To this end it is strongly recommended you change the inner sleeves of your records for anti static, completely smooth, inner sleeves. Two brands have been found to be of high quality and very cost effective, the Goldring Exstatic record sleeve (**CL-VED-EXST £11.95 per 25**) is an excellent way of minimising static charge on your records which attracts dust and dirt to your records, whilst the stalwart inner



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absolutely no mineral deposits left in the water. With the fluid appropriately mixed with the distilled water, it was time to start cleaning some records.

I pulled three records from my collection which I have three copies of, all of which have been recovered from car boot sales and charity shops. All of them looked like they had never even seen a record cleaning brush, let alone a cleaning machine. One record was on A&M records, another on EMI and a third on Virgin, meaning different vinyl formulations and pressing plants were used in each case, though in the case of all three they were pressed with different stampers so there was a possibility of some slight variation between pressings. This relatively minor



difference was quickly outweighed when I tried them on my turntable, my trusty Basis Gold Debut Standard with Graham 2.0 arm and Lyra Argo cartridge, all components with an excellent reputation for their tracking ability and neutrality. Some of the noises elicited from these records were truly awful. Yes, you could clearly hear the music, but there was also the familiar "Rice Krispies" making itself known with an assortment of cracks and pops, and clearly visible dirt ingrained in the vinyl. Running the first copy through the Knosti using it's own fluid yielded vastly superior results, with almost all the visible dirt removed on the first pass, surface noise was dramatically reduced with far more low level detail being discernible when compared to the uncleaned record. With a second pass, all the



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visible dirt was removed, with a slight shine now being visible on the record surface, bass notes also firmed up with a better extension and far more natural decay. Guitars now started sounding like individual strings stretched across a wooden body, with different instruments having their own personality and character.

Now the I'Art Du Son fluid was brought into play, and the difference was not subtle.

The first thing you notice is how quickly even the very worst dirt is removed with superb ease that I had not thought possible. After just a couple of turns through the Knosti machine it was as though the dirt has been dissolved from the records surface. Once the record dried I noticed that the finish on the record was different to the Knosti fluid. With the supplied Knosti fluid records are left with a slight shine, whilst the I'Art Du Son had a slightly duller finish. The question in my mind was whether the ease with which the dirt was removed from the vinyl resulted in a slightly scaled down cleaning result than with Knosti's supplied fluid.

However, from the moment the stylus hit the vinyl of the I'Art du Son cleaned disc there was an immediate improvement in surface noise levels. The run in and run out grooves of a records surface are often the noisiest, so it was interesting to compare the two pressings, one cleaned with Knosti and the other with I'Art du Son. Although some noise was still present on the I'Art du Son record, the transients of the noise seemed less sharp, with the harshness,

which can cause a listener to wince, greatly diminished. Drums were especially noticeable, with a cleaner initial transient and greater decay discernable. Guitars also seemed to lose a fine edge of noise and grain whilst the texture and decay of the guitar string was easier to hear.

Imaging was also improved with a subtle, but noticeable increase in stage focus, especially at the edges, whilst stage depth was also slightly increased.

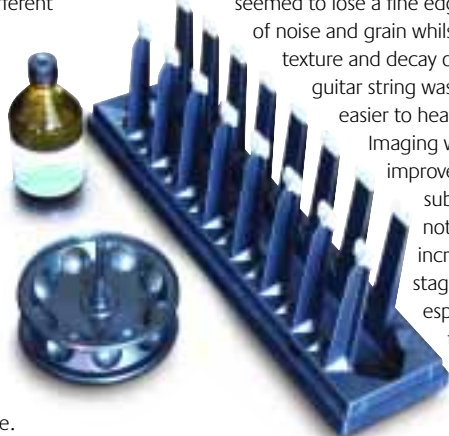
There was an overall improvement in smoothness and the tonality seemed far more natural and organic than the record cleaned with Knosti's standard fluid.

There is no doubt in my mind that the new I'Art du Son fluid represents a considerable improvement in traditional alcohol based record cleaning solutions, and right now I believe this is the most effective formulation

available. Given it's improvement over the standard Knosti fluid on the Knosti machine, and

considering the fluid was originally designed with vacuum record cleaning machines in mind, this fluid

would, for me, be a mandatory purchase if I had a machine like the Loricraft or VPI HW16.5. Given its low price and improvements in sound quality, I will be adding this to my arsenal of record care products and would enthusiastically recommend you do the same.

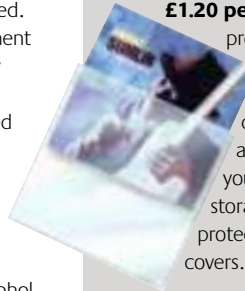


sleeve has been the Nagaoka anti static inner sleeve (VL-VIV-NAGA £14.95 per 50) which are considered to be the finest inner

sleeves in the world by many audiophiles.

Your vinyl collection is well worth protecting with these inner sleeves as both the Goldring and Nagaoka are far superior to the standard cardboard and paper inner sleeves supplied in the past. A further excellent addition is to put the records covers

themselves into our 400 gauge record outer sleeve (CL-MEG £1.20 per 10) which protects the record outer covers and prevents dirt getting anywhere near your records during storage, and protects the record covers.



After bringing your latest clutch of record purchases home, and before they get anywhere near your stylus, you really need to give your records a thorough wet clean. This used to mean owning an expensive record cleaning machine. Whilst these machines are still the very best means of cleaning your records, and one which we still wholeheartedly support and recommend, with machines such as the VPI HW 16.5 (CL-CHE-VP16 £475.00) and Loricraft PRC-3 (CL-LOR-PRC3 £1245.00), representing two of the best machines we've encountered, both in reliability, ease of use and results, there is now a cost



effective alternative in the form of the Knosti Disco Anti Stat machine (CL-KNO-DISCO £44.95). This machine delivers outstanding results, is easy to use and can be used with any record formulation available. This machine has been recommended by Hi Fi News and Hi Fi Choice

magazines in the UK and anyone with an interest in listening to vinyl really should invest in one of these excellent machines. For day to day record care a dry brush is unbeatable, and now there are several excellent examples, starting with our dual bristle carbon fibre record brush (CL-MON-BRUS £7.95), then moving to the Clearaudio carbon fibre record brush (CL-AUD-0035 £13.95), with a clever integrated static discharger built into the handle, with the Goldring Deluxe Record brush (CL-VED-GOLD £14.95) at the top end, evoking memories of the classic Hunt EDA brush from a decade ago with a velvet pad between two lines of bristles, themselves made up of two lines of carbon fibre bristles, long and short, allowing it to



remove dirt deep in the grooves with the bristles and capturing it in the velvet pad. Using one of these rushes before playing each side of a record will remove dirt from the record and protect the longevity of your stylus.

