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# ORIGIN LIVE SOVEREIGN MK4 RECORD PLAYER



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An audio reviewer has only got one life time to listen to the best high end equipment available, and I can tell you that this means very little time indeed.

Having the privilege of being born in the First World, managing to be hired as a reviewer at age 25, (thanks to writing skills and acute hearing), possessing great genetics to enable a glorious career which might well span over half a century, the number of products tested will still only be a fraction of those present in the world today.

Aware of this hopeless limitation, if one stays humble and keeps one's feet on the ground, you will never succumb to the temptation to affirm (at any point in your career) that "such and such" a product is the absolute reference in it's sector. Because very quickly, one realizes that in the high-end industry, permanence is like the foam of a gigantic wave when it nears the sand and breaks, nothing else!

Our oldest readers are witnesses that I never drank from this "cup" because even if I audition and rate exceptional products, I always take

care to remember that if I haven't heard all the rest, so I can't say the one under test is the best of the world!

So here is the question: is there really the best of the best? For under what conditions could we conclusively assert this? I will die without answering this question. So what do I know that I can share with you readers?

That some products, of the more than 1700 tests published in the 25 years of the magazine, reach such a level of performance that describing its virtues is as difficult as speaking in detail about something we've never seen before. This challenge was laid down for us in this test, as in Test 1 of this same edition.

The gods of Olympus willed that we had both products at the same time, in order to help give them the greatest synergy possible. I don't remember any other moment in the history of the magazine in which we had this privilege, to test 2 such products like this in the same issue - two products so differentiated in terms of their performance from the rest, simultaneously



It is clear that this “combination” helped enormously, even to understand the magnitude of both products. I'm happy that this very favourable condition occurred precisely in an edition of huge meaning for us. Because it's not every day that a specialist magazine celebrate running for a quarter of a century (still more in a country like ours, where the High-End is seen as something elitist and an “an insult” to our economic reality).

When people ask me my field of work (especially on flights) and I say what I do, the ones who don't react with disdain, are surprised that the existence of audio equipment that costs more than a house or a car – in spite of the fact that markets in jewellery, designer handbags, watches, etc., compare directly with high-end audio and are ten times larger than our sector. I'm so used to the layperson's reaction, that I always try to be as succinct as possible about the main features and reasons why a person spends so much time and money in search of a dream system.

Always focus on the virtues of listening to music, and on its influence on our physical, mental and emotional health. This approach usually works, because the inquirer then changes their questions, taking the emphasis away from valuation, to the benefits of good sound! And when I say that neuroscience diligently studies the positive effects of music in our lives, the interest (mainly of women) grows steadily. Of course, this cannot be seen as qualitative research of trends, but at least it reveals that women seem to be more concerned about their health as a whole, than men.

Returning to the test, if it's already difficult to explain to a layman what a high-end system can do for your well-being, the same happens when

trying to talk about a product that will make you re-evaluate all your concepts and, above all, discover that your benchmark will be completely updated.

This is the case with these Tests (1 and 2), in that the products evaluated are far above the best products that we have already evaluated here in the magazine. And I'm not just talking about top score, I speak mainly in the concept of seeking solutions to improve performance.

As I am a "squirrel" of information and knowledge, I have followed Origin Live since the time I had a Rega Planar 3, (I was still in Audio News Magazine) and I read in Hi-Fi Choice magazine about accessories produced by this manufacturer along with "turbo-charging" Rega's RB300 arm. Honestly, I thought it looked more like a company with an attitude of wanting to live in the shadow of another company already very well established, and I wasn't interested. After all, my Planar 3 served me perfectly at that time.

A few years later, I discovered that this same company had gained “autonomy” of flight, and begun to present its own arms and, later, its turntables. A few more years, and excellent reviews began to come out on both. This put Origin Live on my radar, and when I do this, dear reader, it means that I gather information useful to me and for adding to my list of products to audition.

But honestly, I never had the illusion that one day there would be distribution here, as we already have enough record player brands for such a restricted market. Until Giovanni and Robson Mozer from Timeless introduced me to their first record player, the Ceres, and the arm they sent out for testing was an Origin Live (Illustrious) arm!

I was surprised and, at the same time, anxious like a child on Christmas Eve, to find out if it was all I had ever read it to be. It was love at first sight!

The result was so impressive in terms of information that I had never extracted with the SME Series V and Soundsmith Hyperion 2 cartridge that I made a radical decision to sell my SME V (my partner and decade-old reference) and bought a 12-inch Origin Live Enterprise arm without even hearing it - something unheard of, and which I've never done before in my publishing career!

For if, with the 9.5-inch arm, two models below the Enterprise, the result was so overwhelming, there was no reason to postpone this upgrade.

My new arm arrived, and was immediately installed in the Acoustic Signature Storm, replacing the SME V, and as a comparison: it was the Chainsaw massacre. Raising my analog setup to another level of transparency and musicality.

But, the biggest surprise was yet to come, because in the delivery of the Ceres, Timeless told me they had taken up the distribution of Origin Live, and that they were interested in us testing the turntable. A Sovereign Mk4 deck, with Enterprise 12 inch arm, which is the manufacturer's recommendation on how to extract the best from both products.

It was like combining hunger with the love of food!

Along with the Sovereign, we received the Nagra phono (read Test 1 in this issue), which was one of those rare events that occur once in a lifetime, leading us to spend four weeks listening exclusively to analog. It was as if digital had not yet been created. Never in this period did I use my battered Sota record cleaning machine so much, and I've never ordered so many gallons of "miraculous" vinyl detergent from Maltese to put my LPs in order to listen in this setup!

Describing this turntable won't be that complicated, as Origin maintains a very up-to-date website. The difficult thing will be to explain to you how much "less is more", and how this concept can be extrapolated until it reaches a point where the seeming simplicity of the final product, makes it impossible to imagine the performance that lies behind it.

The Sovereign, before Voyager's entry, was the top of line, which is why it is now in Mk4 version and continues being, in terms of cost/performance, the most "favoured" record player in the company! The differences between Mk4 and Mk3.2 are significant, and of huge importance to bring you even closer to the standard of the top of the range Voyager.

In the previous version, Origin had already modified its platter to a multilayer, designed to dissipate energy more effectively. In this new version the platter is the same with the multilayers, but the platter decoupling was even more effective in relation to the plinth. The power supply is even more sophisticated than the previous version, and designed to work with ambient temperature variations without loss of speed accuracy.

Other important features are: High mass plinth with low-resonance sandwich construction for clean bass performance and excellent extension, body and energy. Decoupling the bearing from the plinth is through 3 levels. The low-resonance, high-inertia armboard has a higher mass than some lower models from Origin Live. The bearing in this version has improved tolerance for as little friction as possible. The rigid sub-chassis, with a single centre point support, has a unique method of damping. The decks total weight is 32kg, including the nearly 2.5kg of the platter.

Origin Live founder and designer Mark Baker is an expert on turntables and arms and has never trodden the "usual" paths, always looking meticulously at the details which make up the whole.

An example of what a detail can do for the whole is the way in which Origin tackles vibration issues, the biggest bane of any turntable project. Many follow the school of thought, isolate the plinth from the arm and sub-chassis using a set of springs. Others insist in the weight and rigidity of materials so that they become as inert as possible, but Mark went a different way by developing a semi suspended sub-chassis, built with high quality materials and low resonance that is decoupled from the plinth and supported only by a central point.

In practice, the result is as if the platter is suspended without much contact to the plinth.

The platter, made of high inertia acrylic, has 3 layers of different materials, and on the platter there are screws that must be adjusted counter clockwise, to precisely tuning the platter. This produces a dampening balance between the fundamental notes and their harmonics. It's something never seen or thought of by any other manufacturer - but that in practice gives a spectacular result!

The bearing on which the centre spindle rests is machined to high precision with low tolerance. Shaft lubrication is provided with an oil to Origin Live's own specification.

The motor is supplied by a Swiss manufacturer. possessing high torque and smooth rotation with low vibration.

The power supply uses a large transformer and maintains precise speed regulation, which is automatically corrected at each turn of the platter.

The arm-board is solid metal, but also inert







The 12-inch Enterprise Arm Test will be published in an upcoming edition, as we've tested it on three different turntables. For its very high degree of compatibility and performance, it deserves a separate test.

What I can say is that Sovereign, for this test, could not have had a better partner, and the same can be said for the Enterprise arm!

The cartridges used in the test were: Hana Umami Red, ZYX Bloom 3, and Grado Platinum series 3. Phono Stages were: Boulder 508, PS Audio Stellar and Nagra Phono Classic (read Test 1 in this issue). The rest of the system was the Reference from the publisher (Pre and Powers Classic from Nagra). Interconnect cables: Sunrise Lab Quintessence Anniversary, and Dynamique Audio Apex. Power cables: Sunrise Lab Quintessence Anniversary, Transparent, Reference G5 and Powerlink MM2.

For all adjustments necessary with each cartridge used, we had the service of our collaborator André Maltese which has been vital

in extracting the best performance from all the analog products in this test. (Thank you Andre for your willingness and patience to move from São Paulo here to our room, 70 km away from your home, in the middle of this pandemic, you deserve a "public" thanks.

As I wrote many lines above, the look of Sovereign doesn't do justice to its level of performance, even though it is exquisitely finished, and its chrome details draw the attention of metallurgy lovers. What makes it such a surprising and exciting performer is not visible.

Many think that for a record player to play well all it takes is a good motor, a good chassis/isolator, a decent platter of inert material, an arm and a good cartridge, and we'll hear all the beauty of the good ol' vinyl! Yes, this reasoning is correct for conventional turntables made by manufacturers with conventional expertise. But what separates the good from the great and the great from the sublime?

This question is already more difficult to answer, especially for those who have never heard a sublime analogue “tuned” for the last grain of performance. And often, even audiophiles and experienced people make their choices much more from technical information and concepts that they think are the most correct, than from listening. I remember this question, because of showing photos of Origin Live to some “experienced” audiophiles and analog lovers. On viewing the product they asked the same question: “And does it play well?”.

I think they figured that to be considered exceptional and of superlative level, a record player has to weigh 50kg, have plinths that only a stevedore can carry, and the platter has to be at least half the weight of the plinth! Although 34kg is already a reasonable weight, what is impressive in the Origin is that visually it doesn't seem like it should weigh so much!

Because its design is smooth, clean and of modest dimensions, it is possible to fit on any rack of normal dimensions. But, the moment the needle lands on the record, all the doubts give way to full attention, because what will be heard will be very different from the best of references you may think are the more correct.

But don't be fooled, the icing is still to go on the cake! What differentiates an Origin Live record player from the run of the mill, is that they pay great attention to the balance between fundamentals and harmonics. Without this balance, the cartridge / arm setup is no substitute, neither is the performance level of your phono pre, the result will always be below par.

How many times do we read that a particular record player is exquisite in resolution, timing, transparency, but be careful with cartridge choice as it can sound “soulless”? Something we also hear for cartridges and arms. This crucial issue is important for Origin Live as a turntable will influence the other components like an inspirational leader. This should be a prime consideration when choosing a system.

An Origin Live, turntable or arm will benefit all cartridges, believe me! It is precisely for this reason that I thought it better to separate the arm test from the turntable test, even though it's hard to imagine how the marriage between both could be improved on.

How do I know? Listening to the arm on two other excellent turntables!

The platter has 12 white screws on its plinth. For transport they all come tight. The manufacturer indicates that after mounting the arm and everything is set up, the owner turns the screws 2/3 counter clockwise. As I am worse than São Tomé, I left the competent Maltese to do everything. We listened for almost three hours using the Phono stage Classic by Nagra . He left with his chin on the floor. I went to prepare dinner, went back to the living room and tightened all the screws to see what it sounded like.

I put Friday Night in San Francisco John McLaughlin, Al Di Meola, Paco de Lucia) track 1 side A, version 45 rpm. The guitars of Paco de Lucia (left channel) and Al DiMeola (right channel) (sounded dry, to the point of becoming aggressive, with dominant fundamental notes.



I then loosened the screws 1/3 of a turn, the harmonics appeared, making it possible to hear the guitar body, but still very dry. I loosened it to 1/2 turn and the harmonics finally appeared, making the recording sound much more correct and natural. then I went to the manufacturer's exact instructions, and turned it 2/3 counter-clockwise, and the magic happened!

Amazing how we do not have much idea that losing the correct balance between fundamental notes and their harmonics is as important as the overall tonality!

Which led me to another question, and this one made me sleepless for two nights: how many cartridges do we listen to, evaluate and many times discard because we think they are too dry, or not musical? Fortunately, the three cartridges used in the test performed very similarly in terms of sonic signature on the three turntables with the 12-inch Enterprise arm. But the difference in terms of performance, when installed in the Origin deck, was very impressive because all rose to a new plateau!

After adjusting the platter screws, I wasted no time and just enjoyed the Hana Umami Red cartridge as well as Nagra. There were unforgettable days and nights! Because I've never heard my LPs with such a degree of refinement and pleasure.

Of course, with cartridges, turntables and arms at this level, we are going to notice details never heard before or that weren't so clear. But to hear several differences in practically all of the over 120 albums we listened to was unheard of! And I'm not talking about subtleties, but about details that change our perception as a listener. They showed us "details" totally absent in any other setup I've had or tested.

A record that I really like, due to the complexity of the synthesizers, is Weather Report's Domino Theory LP, dense layers and more layers of huge-bodied analog synthesizers, distributed between solos and harmonic backing. This requires resolution, transparency, tonal balance and precise timing. On limited systems, it's a disk that borders on tiring, and needs extreme care with the volume, due to the dynamic variation of the arrangements

The best results of this record were always only good, never more than that. So much so that I've always been very restrained in setting the volume, just to be able to enjoy the music. It was however the second album I listened to most in the first week! Because the amount of information and insight that this setup provided me was spectacular! The layers and layers of synthesizers, all in their planes, heights, decays

At the correct volume of the recording, without fear of saturating or peaking. A magnificent Tonal Balance (so difficult in other setups, with the highs always sounding bright on alto saxophone and cymbals), and a rhythm to make the heart pump.

My brain thought with each "new-old" record: so this is how it is, that this LP should always have sounded? It is a degree of revelation that gives us a mixture of torpor and disappointment, knowing that from each of those discs, it's always just been waiting for a suitable system, and that if I were not a professional in the field, I would die without discovering all this!

Every record I heard in this analog setup over a five-week period was reproduced so well, it was a revelation, which literally left the digital setup for dead.

I don't want to go back to the old tiresome discussion of what's best. But I have to confess that trying to compare both topologies at this level is a total waste of time, because your brain will not be subject to listening to digital without thinking that it is electronic reproduction. For the harmonic body in music is something so difficult to capture. After listening, for example, to solos by bassist Scott La Faro on pianist Bill Evans' Exploration album, listening to this same double bass on CD sounds like a joke. Or the timbre of the brass suit and the solos on Duke Ellington's Blue Orbit, makes the CD sound like the instruments have no tonality.

Of course digital has moved on a lot, but analog will always have a huge advantage, as it's just perfecting and refining that which was already excellent. What we didn't have was the systems to reveal what has always been waiting in the grooves. The most amazing turntable we've tested so far had been the Basis Debut V with the SME Series V arm and the Air cartridge Tight PC-1 Supreme. A high level analog setup. Refined, musical and very correct. It was my best reference in analogue terms, so much so that I never heard my huge collection of LPs with the same pleasure on any other system . And I thought that even if analog did not stop evolving, the level of sublime performance, would only be surpassed in a minor way!

Read deception dear reader. It was literally obliterated by this Origin Live setup and Nagra phono stage. The difference between the two is 8 points! This is what separates the tallest giants at this State of the Art level!

I remember in my personal notes on the Basis test, and of the PC-1 Supreme cartridge, that all records had been improved and that only the technically poor ones benefited little. As I'm methodical and have everything precisely written down, I listened one by one of these (poor) LPs, and every one, without exception, benefited from this degree of refinement and precision. to the point of being able to hear these LPs with interest and redoubled taste for artistic quality.

This is quite an achievement. And so the reader can imagine the effect of how much technically good and excellent recordings benefit from this turntable! It's hard to find the right tone to describe these auditions, but if we have to try the closest term, it would be: "touching the unreachable". That is, having a moment of communion with what analog has to offer that few, very few, can and are able to enjoy.

With this setup, I would probably listen to digital only to fulfill my professional duties, or listen to recordings that only have it on CD. Do I need to close this text by saying anything else? If you have the desire to own a record player of this level, don't miss it this time my friend. For what it will offer you in return, will be worth every penny invested!

<b>SPECIFICATIONS</b>	Speeds	33 & 45 RPM
	Wow & Flutter	0.05%
	Stability	0.0001%
	speed	
	Voltage	Factory Configured for destination country
	Arm Base	For 9.5" and 12" Origin Live arms, or Rega geometry. Other bases can be made to order.

### POSITIVE POINTS

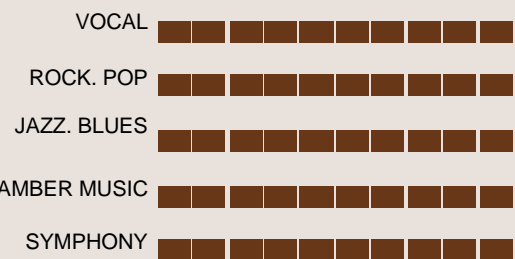
The best turntable ever tested in the 25 years of the magazine.

### NEGATIVE POINTS

Price.

### ORIGIN LIVE SOVEREIGN MK4 RECORD PLAYER

Tonal Balance	15.0
Soundstage	14.0
Texture	14.0
Transients	13.0
Dynamics	13.0
Harmonics	14.0
Organic quality	14.0
Musicality	15.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>112.0</b>



Turntable: R\$68,640

Pool price:

12" Armboard: R\$3,610

R\$124,400

**Total: R72,250**

Arm: R\$48,420

Additional 12": R\$3,730

**Total: R\$52,150**

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