

Tonearm of the Year



Continuum Audio Labs Viper

Tested with the Continuum Audio Labs Obsidian turntable (the ideal home for the Viper, and itself a strong contender for the best turntable of the year), the Viper tonearm picks up where the company's outstanding Copperhead tonearm left off.

The Viper is a unipivot with a sapphire vee jewel bearing on a hardened stainless steel pivot. Its bearing housing has been designed with the Continuum Obsidian in mind, and features extremely precise adjustments of VTA, Azimuth, and VTF (down to 0.001g increments). The exceptionally light but rigid arm tubes are easily detached and are interchangeable. It uses an underslung counterweight in a set position. Changing its balance point means running through a series of different counterweight washers to ensure the geometry of the arm remains consistent.

The result is a tonearm that simply refuses to get in the way of the cartridge, and its job of playing music. Once installed, the tonearm is effectively so perfectly optimised to such precision that it is as if the Viper were bespoke made for the turntable and cartridge combination. The result is a tonearm with such an absence of its own impressions on the music it effectively disappears from the sound. "A source component isn't supposed to be a filter or a influence on the sound, and that's precisely what the Continuum is or isn't doing. It has no 'drag' on the sound, no influence, no footprint, nothing. Images are as wide as the record, dynamic range changes from album to album."

Reviewed in Issue 161