

IsoTek EVO3 Nova One & EVO3 Genesis One

by Jason Kennedy

When was the peak for the potential of high fidelity audio systems in the home? As audio systems have steadily improved, the amount of noise in the powerlines and even in the air has increased with it. From a noise point of view, the era before switched mode power supplies and mobile telephony, not to mention the internet and the Wi-Fi that came with it should have made life a doddle for audio equipment. In the 1980s, there was far less radio frequency interference (RFI) and lower levels of electromagnetic interference (EMI); go back further and such things would have been lower still, before microwave ovens for instance. Maybe that's why music recorded in the sixties and early seventies sounds so good, but it was also the time that analogue studios peaked before digital came along and gave them so much power to screw things up. Analogue audio systems were reasonably advanced by the 1970s, but digital had only just begun to encroach beyond the lab, and the story of digital audio goes hand in hand with the expansion of noise-emitting devices in the world at large. Now we are at the point where it's possible to improve a system merely by improving earthing, so it's no wonder that the demand for mains cleaning devices has grown.

IsoTek has been making nicely encased mains filters and regenerators for some time now and they identify two key sources of interference: differential mode and common mode. Differential mode is the noise that's on the mains supply and created by other electrical devices such as computers, TVs, etc., as well as the components in your sound system. Common mode noise is mainly at radio frequencies, from things like your Wi-Fi, mobile phone, TV, and radio transmissions. It too gets into the mains supply because power cables act like an aerial. And then there are homeplugs, which carry your network through the mains wiring – arguably the best way to pollute your power supply yet devised by man.

IsoTek's latest creation is the EVO3 Nova One, a single outlet power filter in a very long but small section case that's designed for source components and other low current devices such as preamplifiers. The company describes this as an evolution from the original Gil Nova with a modified and improved clean power network created specifically for source components that use less power. It's designed to deliver high-frequency filtering, and has a nine section circuit consisting of both series and parallel filters to remove both common mode and differential mode noise on the mains. The other single outlet source specific conditioner in the Mosaic range is the EVO3 Genesis One. They call this a single-cell sine wave generations system; in other words, it isn't a conditioner in the usual sense that it filters our noise, but rather a regenerator

that that creates a precise 50Hz, 230v signal regardless of what's coming out of the wall. You can get the Genesis One with or without a display that tells you how many volts it's receiving and how much it's outputting in terms of Watts, THD, and voltage. It's quite surprising how much variation there is in terms of voltage from the mains, mine rarely goes down to 230v but usually hovers somewhere above it. It produces the desired voltage with a Class D amplifier with linear power supply and all internal connections are made with silver plated PC-OCC in a virtual air dielectric cable that you would be happy to have in pretty well any component. The Genesis One is specified to deliver up to 100 Watts and thus can power anything that isn't an amplifier.

The very long, 470mm, deep casework looks great but does mean you need a deep rack or a bit of space nearby. IsoTek provides spikes and pucks to sit them on.

Given the price of these devices anyone with more than a single source and/or preamplifier might wonder if there is a more affordable alternative with multiple outlets. The IsoTek EVO3 Sigmas comes close at just under £3,000 but doesn't have a regenerating output; the firm's EVO3 Mosaic does regenerate and has outlets for power and source components but costs a shade under £8,000. If you want both options a split is inevitable. And when I start describing how the two differ in their effects you might start looking at the EVO3 Mosaic in a new light.

I tried the two IsoTek devices on a number of different components starting off with an Audio Technica HA-5050H headphone amplifier that was already



connected to a (relatively affordable) Puritan Labs PSM136 multi-outlet conditioner; adding the IsoTek managed to open up the sound still further, reduce some lateralisation effects of the headphones and improve timing and immediacy. The overall effect making the tune from the clarinet and string tone in the violins of a Mozart piece far more pleasing ('Violin concerto in D major', Marianne Thorsen, *TrondheimSolistene*, 2L). Using the Genesis with a Chord DAVE DAC relaxed and opened up the layers in the mix, creating a greater musical coherence where the various parts of the orchestra played more cohesively and created a stronger overall musical experience. The effect was to make the performance far more engaging and it also caused the unleashing of the air baton, which doesn't happen very often.

With an Innuos Zenith SE server, adding the Nova One opened up the sound and improved the timing, increasing definition of leading edges, which resulted in greater ►



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- ▶ drama and an obvious cleaning up of the high frequencies. Moving the same server to the Genesis One improved things quite markedly, creating a walk-in sound stage with excellent separation and a magic being-there coherence where the potential of this remarkable server was made very clear indeed.

Contrasting the IsoTek components with the raw power from the wall and switching the Zenith SE to the Nova One and the DAVE DAC to Genesis One improved things quite significantly. Suddenly the dynamics increased with much more vitality and energy coming off the track alongside a much stronger sense of three dimensionality created by a lot more fine detail, it was almost like going from mono to stereo recordings.

With same DAC and an AVM PA 8.2 preamplifier putting the Genesis One on the converter and the Nova One on preamp and playing Doug MacLeod ‘Too Many Misses’ [*Exactly Like This*, Reference Recordings] had an ‘open sesame’ effect on the soundstage which expanded to an uncanny degree and brought more solidity of kick to the drum and enhanced the quality of timing. The overall result provided a far greater sense of engagement and enjoyability, which in my book is the aim of the game. Switching around with the Genesis One on the preamplifier and the Nova One on the DAC reduced the scale and calmed the overall presentation, focusing on the flow and in fact resulting in a more relaxed sound that while not so exciting might be preferable in some systems.

I tried these conditioners on a Rega RP8 turntable which was connected to the phono stage in the AVM preamplifier. Initially I put the AVM on the Genesis and the RP8 on the Nova, but switching things around (with the Nova on the preamp and the Genesis on the RP8) proved far more satisfactory; timing improved quite dramatically and the resolution with it, resulting in a calm yet dynamic and compulsive groove. This sounds counter-intuitive (regenerated mains should be more useful for a power supply) but on LP it works.

Just for completeness I also decided to see if a Valvet P2c valve preamplifier would benefit from cleaner power. Switching the Valvet from the wall to the Nova One cleaned up the highs, but didn’t really do a lot more to what was already pretty open sound. It made me wonder if thermionic devices are less sensitive to mains noise. However, the Genesis One proved that this is not the case by increasing dynamic range thanks to a lower noise floor that distinctly improved three-dimensional imaging, separation, and focus.

It would seem that mains conditioning of some form or another is pretty well essential if you are to realise the potential of a decent system. IsoTek has consistently proved this to be the case and, with these two bricks of power, makes its point very clearly indeed. Expensive regeneration is the way to go for ultimate results but conditioning is also highly beneficial in most instances. You pay your money and take your choice. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

EVO3 Nova One

Type: filtering single outlet mains conditioner

Number of outlets: 1 + linking connection

Outlet: 2300W

Power cable: IsoTek Premier

Specifications for: UK, EU, US, ZA, Australia, Switzerland

Dimensions (HxWxD): 125 x 75 x 470mm

Weight: 10kg (boxed)

Price: £1,495

EVO3 Genesis One

Type: regenerating single outlet mains conditioner

Number of outlets: 1 + linking connection

Outlet: 100W

Power cable: IsoTek Premier

Specifications for: UK, EU, US, ZA, Australia, Switzerland

Dimensions (HxWxD): 125 x 75 x 470mm

Weight: 10kg (boxed)

Price without/with display: £1,995/£2,795

Manufacturer: IsoTek Power Systems

URL: www.isoteksystems.com