

Clean-up Campaign

There are mains conditioners and then there's the Isotek Super Titan, says Paul Rigby...

There are mains conditioners *and* mains conditioners; for everyone who's had a good experience there'll be someone claiming a bad one. So you've got to take each product on its own terms, in your system, and not arrive at any preconceptions. This said, Isotek's name precedes them; if there's one company that's made its (fine) reputation from mains-related products, this is it. They do a lot of live demonstrations at hi-fi shows, where time after time, they demonstrate the efficacy of their products. This prompted me to review this, the Super Titan, a flagship of their range.

At £5,995 it's right on the edges of what even high end audiophiles would regard as acceptable, so for me it wouldn't be a case of it doing a bit of good here and there; to justify its price it would have to work wonders! Happily, I have a high end system (although even in this context £6,000 quid is pushing it), so I duly installed it and listened with interest...

It certainly looks the part; it's a beautiful thing in its own right, and massive weighing a beast-like 30kg and spanning 500x500x300mm, in no small part due to the fact that it has to deliver 32A. It builds upon the current Titan model but offers twice as much power and doubles the filtering capability: offering a group of four, seven stage, filters to help remove differential noise (the noise from your fridge, for example) and common mode noise which is a more insidious distortion that you only often notice once it's gone.

Designed to work as a sort of pre-power conditioning combo with the current Aquarius conditioner, the reported ideal configuration for sound quality is to plug your power amp (or monoblocks) directly into the Super Titan, the rest of your

front-end into the Aquarius and the Aquarius itself into the Super Titan. The point of the Super Titan? To deliver clean and consistent power. So what does it sound like?

SOUND QUALITY

Initially utilising Skunk Anansie's 'Stoosh' as a test CD on an Icon CD-XI CD player within a valve system, the listening tests began with the basic reference system presenting a tight, thumping bass with a dynamic rhythm guitar, smoky vocals with discernible acoustic guitar and cymbal elements on the periphery of the soundstage.

Next, the Aquarius mains conditioner presented a more focused soundstage with now, centrally placed, rhythm guitar and bass. The downside was a slight upper midrange lift but the reduction in distortion, improved bass grip and more acoustic guitar and cymbal effects held promise.

My monoblock power amps were then plugged directly into the Super Titan chassis. My reference system has never displayed such a wide and deep soundstage; bass power was immense, almost visceral, while Skin's sometimes subtle vocalisations proved that the upper midrange and treble were particularly nuanced and delicate.

Finally, the monoblocks remained while the front-end loaded Aquarius was connected to the Super Titan. What I heard surprised and shocked me because, up until this point I was presented with more and better

fireworks. The Super Titan removed that. For the first time, I was listening to the music and not the hi-fi. That focused soundstage of the Aquarius-only rig sounded false, in retrospect, and the basic reference sounded relatively veiled and lacking in bass power. Now, the soundstage had a more organic arrangement while each instrument could be heard clearly. In fact, I could have easily written the bass guitar part on a piece of paper; it was that lucid.

Via my Avid Acutus turntable, Ella Fitzgerald's performance on Speakers Corner's 'Cole Porter Songbook' was simply arresting. In standard reference mode, her performance was relatively stodgy, slow and tired. Post Super Titan, Fitzgerald revealed sparkle, a crisp enunciation and elegance. Also, a tremendous instrumental separation was drained of distortion by the Super Titan and, within the resultant gaps, new detail was revealed.

CONCLUSION

Power conditioning has always been of value, but with the Super Titan, it has finally come of age. Here is a system that never imposed itself upon the music. Here, in fact, the music was king, not the hardware. Yes, the Super Titan might cost a pretty penny but this is one of those high-end components which is actually worth every penny – providing you've got them in the first place!



HI-FI WORLD

VERDICT ★★★★★

Beautifully built and presented, this is an extremely effective mains conditioning device – but so it should be at the price!

FOR

- tonal accuracy
- incisive detail and clarity
- bass interpretation
- 3D soundstaging

AGAINST

- price!