

TONIE

The Concierge of High-End Audio®

NO.121



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NOW IN BLACK!

NEW SPEAKERS *from MON Acoustics*

KILLER CABLES *from Wireworld*

NEW MC *from MoFi Electronics*

PLAYLISTS *new music, Jim on Jazz*

And more!

Iso Tek

The IsoTek V5 Corvus Power Conditioning Strip

Keep it clean.

\$1,095 (w/IsoTek EVO 3 Initium Power Cord)
isoteksystems.com

Over the Over the years we've tried numerous power line conditioning solutions, some with better results than others. You know you have it wrong when the line conditioner that you insert into your system harms the musical signal. At first, there's less background noise, but after a while you notice that the fine edges of musical details and transients are shaved off. Sometimes a lot. Eventually, you plug your gear back into the wall, willing to sacrifice background noise for dynamic punch.

So, this evaluation begins with a punchy, acoustic favorite that's fairly old. The title track from Michael Hedges' *Aerial Boundaries* tells you everything you need to know about the effectiveness of any power product. Even if you don't have the LP, originally mastered by Bernie Grundman and wonderfully executed by Windham Hill records, just streaming the 16/44 digital file from your favorite streaming service gets you most of the way there.

Hedges' dynamic, plucky style of playing, along with some fretless bass work, makes it easy to spot a power conditioner that can't keep up.



Bring on the noise

As IsoTek mentions on their site, there are two main types of noise that power conditioners try to combat: differential mode noise and common mode noise. The first is created by other electrical appliances on the power line shared with your hifi system. My experience has been things with motors (refrigerators, power tools, etc) tend to dump more noise back into the system than anything else, but some older microwave oven, computer power supplies, and such can really muck up the sound of your system.

Many times when listening to digital music, it's easy to mistake differential mode noise on the AC line for "that awful digital sound." Perhaps you've heard a fellow audio enthusiast tell you their system always sounds better late at night. Some of this could be the psychoacoustic effects of being more relaxed, however most of it is fewer people on the grid doing noisy stuff. All those wall wart power supplies plugged in don't help.

Don't believe me? Try this easy test. If you still have a power drill or saw that uses AC, borrow a really long extension cord from a friend if you don't have one and run it far enough away from your system that you won't hear it. Plug it into the same outlet that your phono stage or preamplifier is plugged into. Now have someone let that drill rip. Hear that? That's differential mode noise. Next, plug those same components into the V5 Corvus and repeat. Impressive, eh? Of course you could take a bunch of measurements with an expensive audio analyzer, but this will give you results you can hear right now. And I can warn those of you driving EVs that when your car is charging it's wreaking havoc with microdynamics in your system. When we had our i3, things always sounded less than stellar when it was charging. No, I didn't have an IsoTek at that point. I'm not anti-EV, but I'm warning you as they proliferate, it will invade your system.



YOU SPEND A LOT
ON YOUR SYSTEM
**SPEND MORE
TIME WITH IT**



LISTEN LONGER, WITH CARDAS.



Next, we have to deal with common mode noise. This is more commonly known as RFI (or radio frequency interference.) Smartphones, Bluetooth wireless speakers, and your wireless ethernet router are all dumping a ton of noise into your music system.

To make matters worse, some power cables – especially the inexpensive ones that come standard with your components can act as antennas, actually making this problem a lot worse. The V5 Corvus offers up 35dB of RFI reduction, so this will clean things up quite a bit. Especially if you are living in an apartment or condo complex. Who knows what your neighbors are doing to screw up your musical enjoyment? Queue up Tom Waits’ “What’s he Buiding in There?” and ponder this.

Implementation

As mentioned, IsoTek includes their EVO 3 Initium power cord to connect the V5 Corvus to the AC line, assuring more consistent power flow to your conditioner, but if you still are using those lousy factory power cords, on the rest of your gear, there’s still some noise getting through.

Many manufacturers try to convince you that you need to spend tens of thousands of dollars on line conditioning and even more on power cords, but even if you have a modest apartment system with an integrated amplifier, streamer and a turntable, you’ll hear a big gain from making the V5 Corvus part of your system.

While I’m spending your money, I highly suggest grabbing a couple more EVO 3 Initium power cords to go from the V5 Corvus to the rest of your components. They are only \$179 each; just swapping these out will deliver major benefits in dynamics and system clarity.

IsoTek claims that the total power draw for the V5 Corvus is 10 amps, or 2300W. That’s probably a little optimistic, because a 15 amp, 120 VAC line can only deliver 1800 watts max. $10 \text{ amps} \times 120 \text{ Volts}$ is about half that or 1200 watts. If you’re new to all of this, just look on the back of your amplifier, DAC/streamer and other components to see how much power they claim to draw. Just to give yourself room to breathe, go for about 1000 watts total capacity between all your components. Worst case, if you have a fairly large integrated amplifier and really like to rock, either step up to a larger IsoTek model, or just plug your source components into the V5 Corvus. There will still be a major improvement.



A difference you can hear immediately

Finally, to confirm your ears aren’t playing tricks on you, or you might be suffering from expectation bias, plug everything straight back in the wall after you’ve listened to it in your system for a while. You might notice the effect even more than when you first plugged it in.

Having had the past Polaris version of this line strip, as well as using IsoTek’s top EVO3 Super Nova, I’m going to stick my neck out and say the IsoTek products are the world’s best. Whenever I’ve used them, the music comes through clear as can be with no damage to the musical signal. The V5 Corvus and a couple of their entry level cables will take your audio system to a new level of clarity and resolution, without costing a fortune. A definite Exceptional Value Award winner for 2024.

