

Going live



Watch out Rega, because Origin Live's new Alliance is gunning for your budget tonearms! **Neville Roberts** locks and loads...

The Alliance is the new entry-level tonearm from Origin Live, and has been built for both performance and affordability, but uses the same design philosophy of the entire range, at the top of which is its £4,595 Enterprise.

Origin Live arms are very well made and, as with all its other arms, the Alliance uses superior build materials, such as aircraft alloys in the arm tube instead of soft cast aluminium. Although these are expensive to use and finish, the company says that this choice is justified by the improvement in sonic performance that comes as a result.

The design philosophy of the Alliance is derived from the company's popular Silver tonearm, which uses a single piece arm tube made from high-grade aircraft alloy. It also features specially-designed bearings and housings. The latter are a 1mm round pin resting in a circular cup similar to a 'knife-edge' design internally and, although low-cost, they are of high quality and devoid of play. However, the bearing housings are carefully dimensioned to allow a loose fit, which may initially seem rather odd. However, this enables the arm to effectively float, rather than being rigidly coupled to the deck.

The solid counterweight fits over the rear stub, and has a rubber O-ring internally to provide a friction fit. Tracking force is adjusted by sliding the counterweight along the rear stub, until the required force is attained. Bias is provided by a little weight attached to the arm via a thin nylon thread, which passes through a wire loop fixed to the arm support

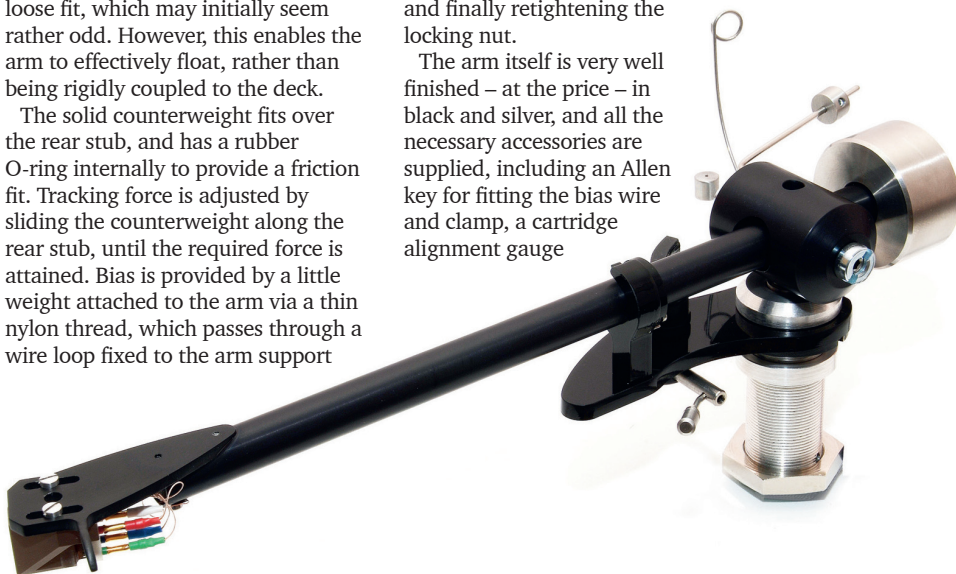
and the bias is adjusted by sliding a cylinder clamp along a bar attached to the rear of the arm.

The Alliance is internally wired with high-grade Litz and externally fitted with a standard-grade cable and terminated with RCA plugs to connect to your phono preamp. A separate blue earth wire is fitted to connect to the earth terminal on the phono preamplifier.

At the cartridge end, the Litz wires exit the arm tube through some foam damping and there is an additional fifth wire that connects to an earth screw just behind the headshell. The Litz wires are terminated with gold-plated cartridge clips.

The arm is fixed to the armboard via a standard Rega single-hole mounting that allows for easy adjustment of the vertical tracking angle (VTA) of the cartridge. It will fit all Rega armboard cutouts, whether designed for the old-style threaded base or the new 3-point mounting. The VTA adjustment is made by loosening the large clamping nut underneath the armboard, then turning the VTA adjuster ring above the armboard and finally retightening the locking nut.

The arm itself is very well finished – at the price – in black and silver, and all the necessary accessories are supplied, including an Allen key for fitting the bias wire and clamp, a cartridge alignment gauge



DETAILS

PRODUCT: Origin Live Alliance
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: tonearm
WEIGHT: 570g
FEATURES: • Rega single fixing with integral headshell and interconnect cable
DISTRIBUTOR: Origin Live
TELEPHONE: 02380 578877
WEBSITE: originlive.com

and detailed installation instructions. This arm is the standard 9-inch in length, but a 12-inch version is available for £400 extra.

As a budget design, I was very keen to compare this with upgraded Rega RB250/300 arms. The Alliance is entirely designed by Origin Live and costs considerably less than a fully-upgraded Rega – the upgrades to a Rega alone cost around £320.

Sound quality

Partnered with my Lyra Clavis DC cartridge, the Alliance wasted no time in impressing me. Orchestras had an easy fullness and I was sure that a couple of extra musicians had somehow slipped into the orchestra since I last played the records! Crisp, clear detail was evident at the top end with no harshness, so tracking was good. Bass was well-controlled, which demonstrated a good arm/cartridge match (the arm has an effective mass of 12g). On many of my recordings, I had the impression that I was hearing more from my records than I had been accustomed to when using similarly-priced RB250 clones in the past.

If you have a little extra money to spend (which is always a possibility, given the low cost of an Alliance arm), I would consider the arm cable upgrade that Origin Live can provide. As an alternative, Origin Live can install a Cardas connector in the base of the arm to use with separate tonearm cables.

Conclusion

The new Origin Live Alliance is an interesting product. For years the only budget tonearm in town was a Rega, or a variation thereof. But sonically this represents a big step up – in my opinion it is streets ahead of even an upgraded RB251. If you're thinking of upgrading your budget tonearm, this should be at the very top of your shopping list. ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Very open, even and musical sound; superior midband fluidity to Rega

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Nothing at the price

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WESAY:** An excellent performer that should put the cat amongst the pigeons in the budget tonearm market!

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★