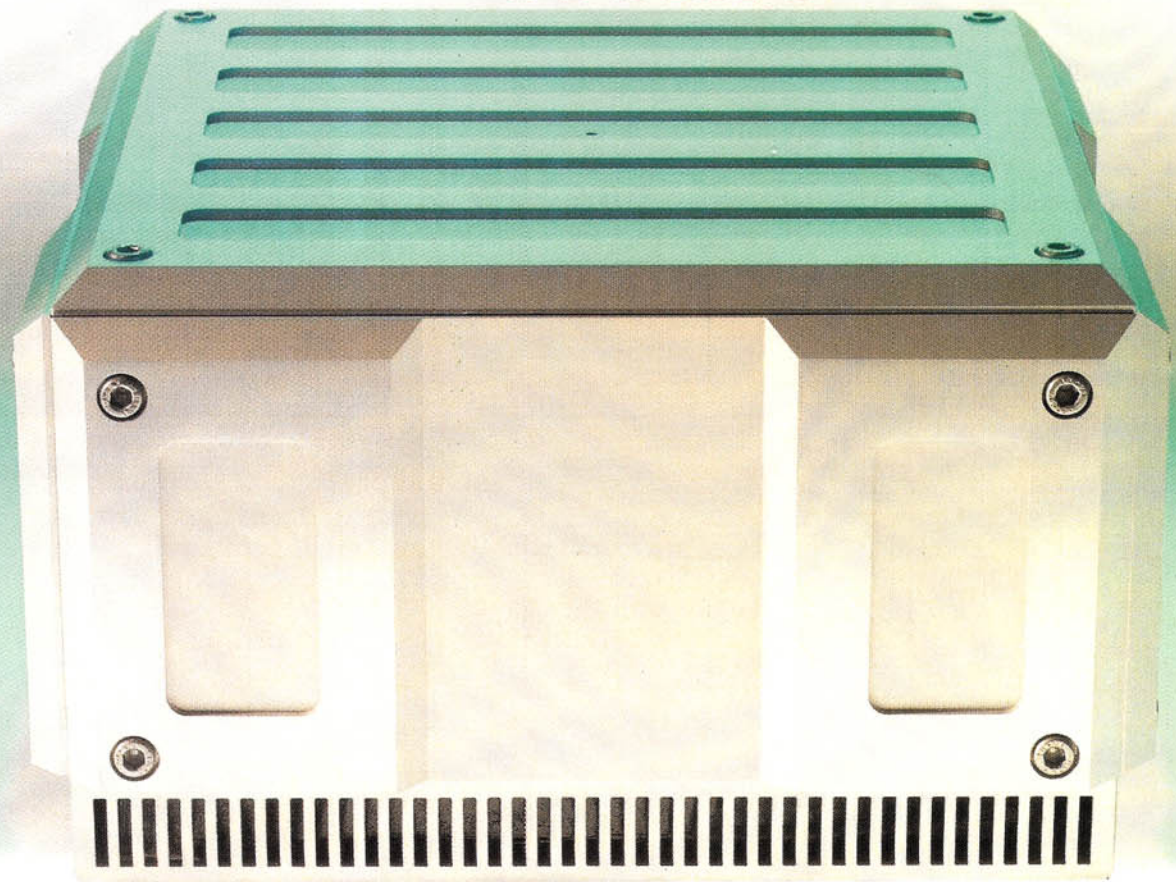


IsoTek Titan



With virtually unlimited power and a promise to allow transients of 23kW, the IsoTek Titan mains filter introduces a radical solution to power conditioning

IsoTek Titan

PRICE £1425

Those who've read my reviews will know that before mains electricity reaches my system it is filtered through a variety of power filters. Predominant among these are IsoTek's SubStation, and a 2K Qube for power amps – a combination I consider to be the best that money can buy. So when I heard rumours that a next-generation Qube was on its way, no longer based on isolation transformers, and designed to offer significant sonic improvements over the Qube without limiting current, I had to get my hands on one. Here's the story on the IsoTek Titan – with further notes from TB [see 'It even works with Naim...'].

The Titan uses a sophisticated filter network housed in an elegant-looking milled aluminium chassis, measuring 275 x 182.5 x 275mm (whd) and weighing a relatively modest 12.75kg. On the back is a pair of unswitched 13A sockets, and a pair of Neutrik Powercon connectors: one for power input and other an output for an extension

block. Also here is an RCBO (Residual Current Breaker Overload), a combined over-current MCB (main circuit breaker) and Residual Current breaker, ensuring absolute safety for the user, for the mains supply powering the Titan, and any device connected to the Titan. This is the most sophisticated protection system I've so far seen on a mains filtration device. Its appearance here

combination with choke-regulated power supply, Bryston 3B-SST and 14B-SST power amps, a Krell KRC-3 pre-amp, Shanling CD-T80 and SCD-T200 CD players (with and without the Musical Fidelity TriVista 21 DAC), and my trusty Basis Gold Debut turntable with Graham 2.0 arm and Lyra Argo cartridge feeding a Klyne System 7 PX 3.5 phono stage. I always felt mains isolation

"I always felt mains isolation transformers were as good as it gets when it comes to filtration; but the Titan was far superior."

is explained by the Titan's claimed ability to allow 23,000W (23kW) peaks, the maximum figure the mains supply can theoretically deliver in an instantaneous transient, and which IsoTek felt was needed to ensure no compression of dynamic range from any connected power amplifier.

As for the sound, the Titan astonished. I hooked it up to as many components as I could, including the Musical Fidelity A5 pre/power

transformers were as good as it gets when it comes to clean power for amplifiers; but the Titan was far superior to IsoTek's 2K Qube, and even Iso-8's 4K Qube, also on hand as a reference. In fact it was superior to every other mains treatment I've heard to date. The soundstage expanded in a way that happens when you locate your speakers in their ideal position in a room. Everything became more focused, and the stage extended far

The inside story

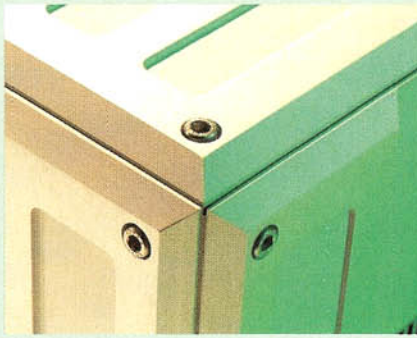
IsoTek is very secretive about what's actually inside the Titan which, given its three man years development time, is understandable. Nevertheless, the mains inlet uses a Neutrik locking Powercon connector as this is rated to 20A continuous load – far beyond what the Titan could be called on to deliver. This feeds the RCBO which in turn feeds the mains filter circuit.

The actual circuit is described as a nine-stage direct-coupled filter, while inside the main board is completely potted, not only to reinforce the board, but also to control resonance. However, this makes it virtually impossible to

identify even an individual component, let alone circuit topology, with what I can only presume to be chokes visible.

Some highly sophisticated common-mode filters are said to be employed in this circuit. These filters have the ability to pass a continuous 20A of current, which then feed the 'Polaris-X' circuit, which mutually isolates each 13A mains outlet, along with the Powercon accessory outlet. The result is that

electrically, each outlet sees only the filter network and not each other. This is a philosophy central to the design of the original SubStation, with the 'Polaris-X' circuit being first seen in IsoTek's GII MiniSub.



beyond the boundaries of the room. What's more, the front of the stage extended to just in front of the MartinLogan SL-3s used, making for a sound that enthralled yet never fatigued.

Meanwhile, the spaciousness of the sound really pulled you into the performance. I wanted to get up and walk around performers, yet the space between them was not total silence; instead the lower noise floor allowed you to hear

in her voice that the system had previously overlooked. Bass notes benefited too, with a new found solidity and power, the driving bass line of Destiny's Child's 'Bootylicious' from *Survivor* [Columbia COL 501783 0] on SACD sounding constrained and restricted on the isolation transformers when compared with the same track on the Titan. It was as if a dynamic compressor had been removed from the recording chain to

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the subtle decay of instruments in their own space, giving further conviction to the illusion that you were hearing a real instrument and not just a recording. Voices now possessed greater subtleties of inflection and timing shifts making performances far more natural. One example was Diana Krall's 'S'Wonderful' from *The Look of Love* [Verve 549 846-2] where I could hear intonations

reveal crushing bass notes that were as much felt through the concrete floor of the listening room as heard in the room itself.

As for treble frequencies, the Titan improved clarity and resolution without adding any undue harshness or emphasis. Stunning recordings like Norah Jones's 'Cold, Cold Heart' from *Come Away With Me* [Classic Records JP5004] benefited with



To the rear are two UK mains outlets plus a Neutrik output for an extension block

It even works with Naim...

My first experience of the Titan was in a friend's Naim system (CD5/Flatcap 2, NAC 112/Flatcap 2 and 2 x NAP 135 mono amps). Given that the previous generation of IsoTek equipment did not always work that well with Naim equipment, I was very pleasantly surprised to find the soundstage opened up with almost (dare I say) tangible images in front of me rather than Naim's more usual 'it's over there somewhere' approach to imaging. The expected benefits of effective mains conditioning were present: lower noise floor, lack of an ultra-fine veil between the listener and the music, and a vastly improved sense of rhythm and timing (which Naim does very well anyway).

My current reference system consists of Icon Audio's Stereo 40 amp and a Graham Slee Jazz Club phono stage, fed by Origin Live-powered, Hadcock 242 Integra/Shiraz-armed Linn Sondek, with Musical Fidelity Kelly KT3 at the end of Atlas cabling. I left the Sondek on normal mains and plugged the amp and phono stage into the two 13 amp sockets at the back of the Titan.

Without going over the top, the only words I can find to describe the effect come in phrases like, 'mind-blowing', 'gob-smacking', 'real three-dimensional images', 'tactile', 'holographic'... you get the idea. I loved the way in which the soundstage stretched out in all directions to the point where I felt that I could almost walk up to and around performers; the extra precision to the timing; and the sheer musicality of the sounds now coming from the KT3 speakers.

I have no doubt that there may be an even better mains conditioner available at some time in the future, but for the moment this is undisputably the most effective unit that I've heard. In fact it's so good I've bought one.

Tony Bolton

both cymbals and piano notes sounding more natural and effortless while the decay of each note was thrown into sharper relief against what was now the incredibly low background noise.

During the time I spent with the Titan it never failed to improve a component's sound. It is, quite simply, the most impressive mains filter I've ever heard. All I can say is audition one as soon as possible, preferably on home demo, but be prepared to hand over a cheque before you hand back the Titan, because without it your system will simply sound wanting. It's that simple. ■

David Allcock

Supplier

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Hi-FiNews verdict

Secret filters instead of isolation transformers make this a benchmark product. It delivers, and does so at a price that will prove cost effective over time and as components are upgraded. Easy to recommend.