ROY GANDY
Rega’s founder on not just surviving, but thriving, over the last year: and why he’s buying another factory

WILSON SABRINA X
This substantial floorstander is even better than the original model

TALKING ABOUT TAPE NOISE
Keith Howard explains why reel-to-reel really isn’t ‘ultimate analogue’

NAIM UNITI ATOM HEADPHONE EDITION
New arrival takes personal listening very seriously

KEF REINVENTS THE SUBWOOFER
The new KC62 is tiny – and astounding, says Martin Colloms

MONSTER MICHI
The X3 may be all the amp you’ll ever need

TESTED
Speakers from KEF, Dali, Dynaudio and more, plus a revived Rogers valve amp

PLUS
Classical music, jazz and more – and has Audirvana got its reinvention right?
ED SELLEY FINDS MUCH TO LIKE IN THE MORE AFFORDABLE DERIVATIVE OF GERMAN MANUFACTURER T+A’S DÉBUT HEADPHONE OFFERING

Last year’s entry of T+A into the headphone arena was nothing if not ambitious. Companies frequently adopt a top-down approach to product development but the company’s Solitaire P was pitched straight into the most rarefied level of the headphone market. That it more than holds its own is a reflection of the effort the company had put into the project and it remains one of the most singular headphones I’ve ever tested.

The idea of top down of course is that other models follow at lower price points, engineered with technology from the flagship, but simplified. However, start with a £5000 model, and your first rung down is still going to be a fairly serious proposition: the Solitaire P-SE may be 40% less expensive cheaper than the P, that still puts it up against many other companies’ flagships.

The basic design closely follows that of the more expensive model, in being an open-back, planar magnetic headphone designed entirely for home use. The TPM2500 drivers are the same size as before (80 x 110mm), but here use only a single-sided set of magnets rather than the double-sided arrangement in the TPM3000 inside the Solitaire P. The material of the driver itself and the process of applying the conductive material is similar, but again simplified,
the reduction in the number of magnets has some benefits in terms of the sensitivity and impedance. The P-SE presents a load of 45 ohms – down from the 80 ohms of the P – and while I never found the Solitaire P to be difficult to drive, this does suggest that the P-SE should prove a sympathetic load for most headphone amps, particularly when judged against other planar magnetic designs.

The behaviour of the air behind the driver has changed, too, with a different 'Draught control system' to better manage this flow. However, there's still no real attenuation of noise coming in or sound going out, so there won't be an ideal choice for anyone looking to listen in the same room as somebody doing something else.

Connection between the T+A and your amp is made via a choice of cables, two supplied and one that is available optionally. Standard are both 6.35mm, and 4.4mm 'Pentaconn'; connections, both on 3m cables, the latter being a relative newcomer in audio circles – notably on the T+A HA200 headphone amplifier. However, a four-pin single XLR fitting is also available as an option. At the headphone end of the cables, a pair of 3.5mm jacks insert into deep, partially recessed housings.

Where the Solitaire P uses aircraft grade aluminium, the P-SE uses plastic, which sounds more alarming than it turns out to be. However, T+A has prioritised engineering and practicality over pure aesthetics and this does mean that if you plonk the P-SE down next to the Focal Clear MG, at less than half the price, the Focal looks and feels more expensive. This extends to stowage, too: T+A's large box is rather less practical than Focal's case. That said, the more time you live with the T+A, the more sense they make. Even these 'phones, the more time you spend with these 'phones are still immaculately bolted together, with everything feeling assembled with a view to staying together indefinitely, and to a logical design.

The earcups have a significant range of horizontal and vertical movement, this combining with the well judged headband clamping force to give exceptional comfort over extended periods.

And the sonic performance mirrors the appearance: the more time you spend with these 'phones, the more sense they make. Even these simplified planar magnetic drivers are closer to achieving the ideals of the technology that almost anything else I've heard, and the. the transient speed is truly outstanding, for example with Robert Plant's genre-defying Little Maggie.

This is combined with a bass response of both a depth and control – something with which many planar magnetic drivers can struggle. Weight is effortlessly present, but no less impressive is its effortless integration with the rest of the frequency response. Low piano notes or plucked bass strings,