

Allegri revised, revisited

CHANGES TO ITS ISOLATING FOOTERS, MASS AND INTERNALS ARE SAID TO MAKE THE LATEST VERSION OF TOWNSHEND'S PASSIVE LINE CONTROLLER SOUND EVEN BETTER. LONG-TERM USER MARTIN COLLOMS HAS A QUANDARY – HOW CAN IT IMPROVE ON NEAR-PERFECTION?

While the Allegri Reference has been carving a path through the high-end passive line volume control jungle, designer Max Townshend has continued his ceaseless search for excellence for this design, which I have been using for some time as a fundamental part of my reference system – it's that good.

But then if the Reference *is* so good, why try to make it better? It's the question I asked when a review sample of the enhanced version, which now sells for £9990, was offered, and in response Max explained that he was continuing to make discoveries about both the materials used and the overall electronic design, and these have proved that it is possible to further finesse the sound quality. A simple enough answer, but one that puts me in a difficult position: after all, I suggested in my last review (HIFICRITIC Jan-Mar '20) that the existing model is close to perfect!

So, what has changed? Well, some inconsistency has been experienced in the effectiveness of the pneumatically damped 'Seismic' footers incorporated in the Allegri design, with variations being found with interconnect cables of differing weight and stiffness. Addressing these is a substantial upgrade from improved heavier duty isolation feet with a reduced bypass ratio (energy transmission), while the overall mass of the Allegri Reference has been raised – also substantially – to match.

Inside the suspension supports, bellows with higher 'Q' and lower damping ratio operate with a more precisely controlled degree of air leakage, so that the damping for large displacement disturbances is close to ideal and moreover now consistent from unit to unit.

There's virtually no damping when the unit is largely at rest, resulting in maximum isolation, by design the mass of the unit and the spring compliance of the feet forming a mechanical isolation filter with a very low frequency of 2.5Hz. What's more, the overall mass has now increased to 9kg, or 20lb, this isolates external vibration/feedback at near 12dB/octave from above 3.5Hz. In addition, the rear springs are now conical and thus progressive, so that heavier interconnect cables may be accommodated, while the facility to adjust the spring rate for levelling once installed is retained.

In the past some customers have experienced variations and inconsistency in the brightness of the display, which shows the input selected – the Allegri

Reference offers five line-ins – and the volume setting, has an ambient light sensor to control its brightness, and can be switched off either from the front panel or the supplied Apple-type remote control handset. To address these display problems, for this latest iteration the control circuitry has been extensively revised to give a much more consistent brightness over a wider range of ambient illumination.

Of course, this being a purely passive controller, it uses power only when adjustments are being made to the volume – which is effected using the autotransformer design, wired throughout with Townshend Audio's unique Fractal wire – or to the inputs, switched by reed relays. The digital clock controlling these operations sleeps when changes aren't being made, but Max outlined the difficulties encountered with even the low power low noise supply for operating the control facilities, even where that power is not used in the signal path but only for driving the indicators, control relays and the system housekeeping section.

RFI from the mains tends to leak in at almost every opportunity, eventually feeding through to the power amplifier from the Allegri audio section. With some systems there little or no effect, with others some loss of quality might be experienced.

Better filtering

To tackle this a specially designed common mode filter has been added in-line to the low voltage supply cable to block RF from entering the preamp via the DC lead from the offboard power supply, while in addition a medical grade of switch mode supply at 15V has been chosen for its very low noise leakage, working well in conjunction with the new in-line, balanced, RFI supply filter which blocks noise from the mains.

The aim here is for less sound quality variation with different power amplifiers, and the connection is now 2.5mm diameter, up from the previous 2.1mm, but perhaps most significant is that the autotransformers themselves have been further