

Kuzma Stabi S turntable, 4Point 9 tonearm, and CAR-40 MC cartridge

by Alan Sircom



There's an established hierarchy in vinyl replay that is almost inviolate. The expenditure goes from top down; spend most money on the turntable, then the arm, then cartridge, and so on. This comes from the days when the Linn LP12 held a nation of audiophiles in its thrall; I remember one magazine said (only half-jokingly) that if you were going to buy a system with limited funds, you should buy a LP12 turntable, and start saving for the amp and speakers! While this was an extreme example, the idea that the turntable should be the most significant investment in a vinyl-replay chain is still a pervasive and respected way of system building. This turntable begs to differ.

Kuzma has a substantial range of turntables, arms, and – most recently – cartridges in its portfolio, allowing for logical hierarchical systems ranging in price from the nursery slopes

of high-end right up to the peaks where additional oxygen is required. And typically, that means a turntable like the entry-level Stabi S is most likely to be used with the unipivot Stogi S arm, and maybe the CAR-20 cartridge, or even an MC or MM design from Ortofon or similar. That's the established way and it works unquestionably well.

This time, however, we paired that entry-point Stabi S with the far more up-scale 4Point 9 arm and the CAR-40 moving coil cartridge from the brand. Making the arm by far the most expensive part of the system, and the deck trailing not far behind the cost of the cartridge. OK, to facilitate this, we part-pimped up the Stabi S with its natural maple platform and optional external speed control, but this is only a couple of steps removed from the base model.

A quick refresh on all three components is in order. We first looked at the Kuzma Stabi S back in Issue 10, and since ►



► then 12" tonearm compatible versions, two arm versions, and most recently a double-height platter have been folded into the basic design. But, it's effectively the same turn-of-the-century design; if it ain't broke, don't fix it. The Stabi S is perhaps the simplest turntable on the market. It comprises two brass tubes, a bearing, a motor, an inner and outer platter, and a belt. The brass tubes have rubber O-rings at either end as an alternative to feet. The standard AC motor housing has an on-off switch, while the expensive external PSU uses a housing with a captive cable connecting to the external power supply with a locking DIN plug. This makes for an extraordinarily well-built product; other turntables might be more ornate, but the Stabi S has the kind of well-trained powerlifter solidity of build to it. You could imagine the Stogi S being air-dropped out of the back of a Hercules to bring aid to the musically starving; it wouldn't even need a chute! It comes supplied with a dust cover as standard worldwide, but unique to the UK Audiofreaks includes the optional brass record weight and composite support as part of the package, too.

The 4Point 9 is a recent award winner of this parish, having been tested in issue 155. It too has the same uncompromising build of the Stabi S. This four-pivot arm features two points

to allow vertical movement, in a manner similar to a double-unipivot design, the second pair allow horizontal movement. All four are designed to have minimal starting and moving friction, and zero play in any playing direction. The larger 4Point arms have a separate tower arrangement allowing for on-the-fly VTA adjustment; the 4Point 9 is a simpler design and the arm base is fully integrated into a single tower. This means the arm is still adjustable for VTA, but through loosening an Allen bolt rather than turning a knurled knob. Personally, I favour the 'less is more' approach.

The CAR-40 cartridge was also tested at the same time we looked at the 4Point 9 but was not the main focus of the review. It's a high-mass design in an aluminium body, custom made to strict Kuzma specification by a very reputable producer in Japan. The CAR range all use a similar body (with a unique aluminium stylus guard that needs to be bolted in place), varying in coil wiring, cantilever material, and stylus profile. The CAR-40 is the first model in the six-strong range to feature 4N silver coil wires, but with a boron cantilever and a microridge stylus profile (the two higher-end models move to sapphire and then diamond cantilevers). Aside from a single high-output model, all have an almost identical 0.3mV output. ►

“While you are listening, you are gripped by the Kuzma’s performance.”

► In fact, we used this trio of components in testing the 4Point 9 but didn’t really express just how well they worked together, as that review focused on just one part – the arm. This time, it’s how they work as a sum of the parts.

In fact, they work better than you might expect. Better than I expected. Possibly even better than Franc Kuzma himself might have expected. The turntable has an unflustered approach to music, taking the emphasises and inconsistencies out of turntable replay, creating a neutral platform for records. Those who want some immediacy to their sound in order to impress their friends will want to look elsewhere, but if you want a right-sized, correctly-scaled musical presentation that captivates, the Stabi S is excellent. The 4Point 9 arm adds a fluidity and openness to the sound that only adds to that neutral platform of the turntable. The best way I can describe the sound of this arm is that it seems to work with the grain of the music like a fine cabinetmaker, giving everything a brilliance and elegance that is waiting to be brought out. Meanwhile, the cartridge is just sublimely musical and tonally accurate, with excellent front-to-back imagery and effortless dynamic range.

Put the three bits together, though, and the magic starts to happen. The only difficulty for a reviewer is describing that magic because you can only really make notes while you are changing records, and then you are too keen to change records. While you are listening, you are gripped by the Kuzma’s performance. The Kuzma trio here never puts a foot wrong, with bass that is as tight as it is powerful and dynamic, a midrange that disappears, a treble that soars, detail as if you are standing by the cutting lathe, and all those filigree micro-details that are so beloved by audiophiles as a sign of good performance are portrayed with complete fidelity. For all that, it also presents that music *qua* music; not as some experiment in soundstage height or microdynamics. Which is why you can play audiophile records back-to-back with the spiky *Jane From Occupied Europe* by Swell Maps [Rough Trade].

Kuzma’s whole is greater than the sum of the parts; the sound you get from the three is outstanding and so well-balanced you might be forgiven for thinking you are listening to something closer to £15,000 or more. In a world full of ‘mug’s eyeful’ style over substance products, it’s great to recommend something this well made, as you know it will last a lifetime, and always sound great. Great! +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Stabi S turntable

Platter: 4kg, 30mm thick aluminium with mat

Bearing type: 10mm diameter pointed shaft with resin/textile material

Drive: flat rubber belt

Motor: Single AC motor

Speeds: 33rpm, 45 rpm

Armboard: optional (Kuzma arms fit directly)

VTA adjustment: yes

Max. tonearm length: 10" (12" option available)

Optional extras: second arm kit, PSU, 40mm natural maple platform

Finish: brass or black

Dimensions (WxDxH): 40 × 40 × 17cm

Weight: 13kg

Price: £2,149

4Point 9 tonearm with detachable headshell

Bearing type: four pivot

Maximum cartridge mass: 35g

Effective mass: 13g

Effective length: 229mm

Arm-mount distance: 212mm

Spindle-pivot distance: 212mm

Offset angle: 23°

Armtube: conical aluminium

Bias and VTA adjustment: Yes

Arm mount: Kuzma

Wiring: Silver as standard, options available

Connections: XLR, 5pin

Total mass: 920g

Price: £3,600

CAR-40 moving-coil phono cartridge

Frequency response: 10Hz–40kHz

Output: 0.3mV

Tracking force: 2 grams

Internal impedance: 6 ohms

Weight: 7 grams

Price: £2,395

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