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*Celebrating the Acutus -
The art of analog!*

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MIGHTY MONOS *from ampsandsound*

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REDEFINING THE MM CARTRIDGE NA3 and NA5 from Rega

PLAYLISTS *new music*

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AVID

ACUTUS TURNTABLE

NO.122

AVID Acutus Classic Turntable bundle

Single stop excellence.

\$34,999 with Nexus arm and Ruby MC cartridge
avidhifi.com

Initial take – JD

Listening to the AVID Acutus Classic breeze through the MoFi pressing (the black one) of Beck's *Sea Change* is an excellent way to revisit two revamped favorites. Since introducing the original Acutus about 20 years ago, this table has been quietly conquering vinyl enthusiasts worldwide.

A couple of tracks from Tool's *Fear Inoculum* reveal a level of quiet rivaling the best high-resolution digital, with a level of subtlety and gradation on the most gentle percussion bits that even the nearly \$100k dCS Vivaldi can't match. This is what analog is all about – that last bit of convincing realism.

Tracking through a broader range of tunes from Joni Mitchell to Robin Trower, the Acutus delivers a big, broad, lush presentation. While I do not possess a ton of seat time with the six-figure tables, from what I've heard, I wouldn't trade an Acutus for one of them.

Bias revealed.



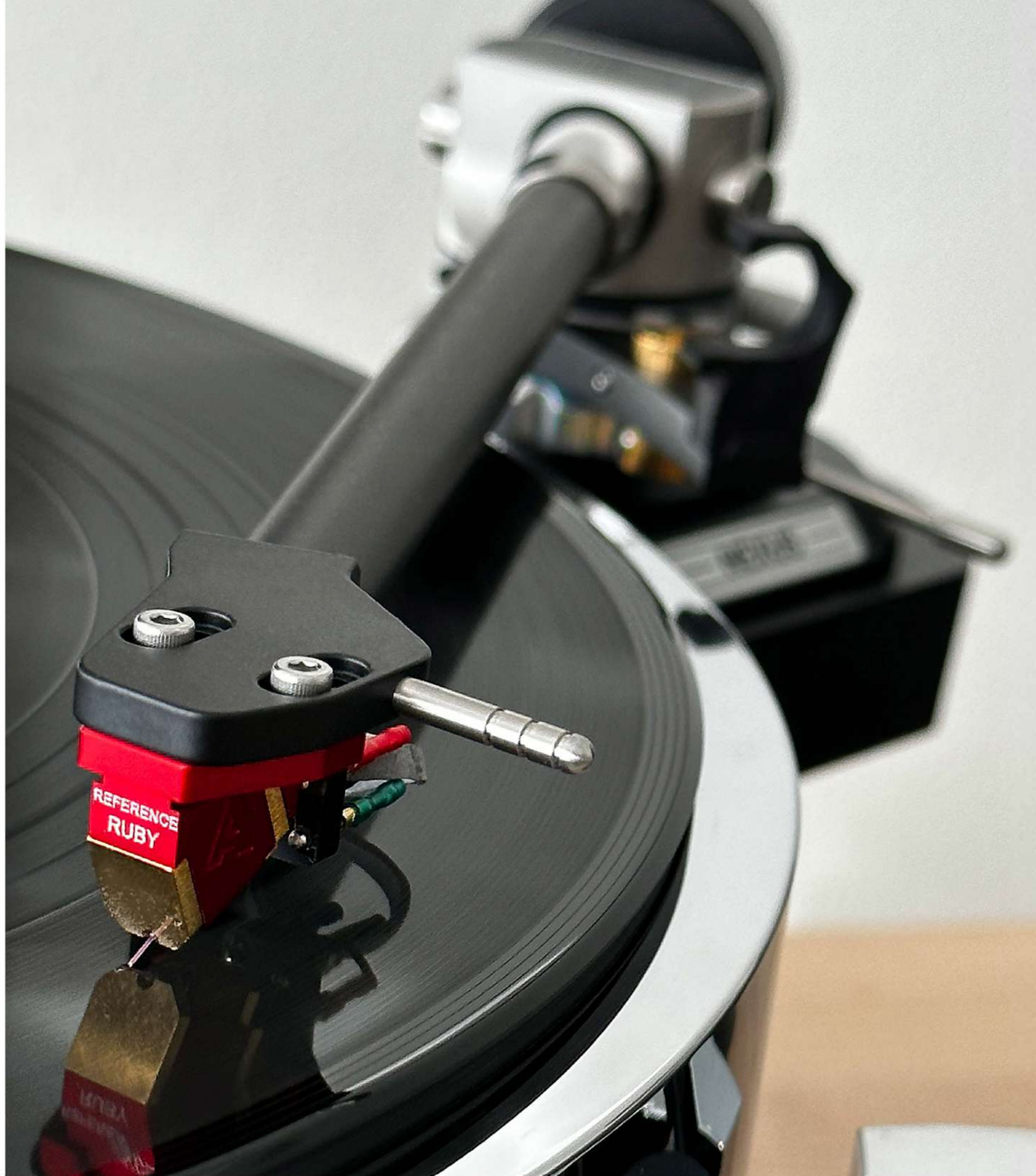
The defining characteristic of AVID tables has always been their ability to capture the perfect balance between damping the presentation and delivering a rock-solid bass response without being overdamped, i.e., one-note bass. Play any of your favorite acoustic bass players through the Acutus to see what I'm getting at. There's tons of texture and resolution down there.

Thanks to the low mechanical noise in the Acutus, records come alive, feeling louder than they do elsewhere. Remember, a lower noise floor is an equal contributor to perceived loudness as merely turning up the volume control. The three-tower, tuned suspension in the Acutus completely isolates the massive platter from the environment around it

Overview – JD

Unlike many manufacturers that scale up from an entry-level product and often lose their way because their need to produce an expensive turntable outweighs their ability to actually build at this level, the Acutus was AVID's initial offering. Making the best turntable they could possibly make, then trying to engineer lower cost solutions with the maximum amount of functionality for the price. As founder Conrad Mas is fond of saying, "good, better, best." If you've seen an AVID demo, they do precisely that, using the same cartridges on one table from each range, so you can easily hear the difference that the better table makes on information retrieval, dynamics, and overall sonic quality. And it only gets better as you improve the cartridge.

The three-point suspension's ability to isolate vibration in the environment from reaching the sensitive record groove is even more effective because each spring tower is individually adjustable. This is a brilliant solution for anyone wanting to use other tonearms. Though the current AVID tonearms are fantastic, you may already have an arm on hand that you'd rather not part with. More about that from Chris later.



The Classic is the beginning of the Acutus lineup. While all three Acutus models share the same sub-chassis, bearing, platter, motor, and twin belt drive system, going further up the range offers larger power supplies that are hand-calibrated to said motor. Unlike many belt drive turntable manufacturers that choose to utilize lightweight, low-torque motors, AVID winds its high-torque motors from scratch and then drives them with a power supply that is more like a power amplifier.

“This results in a belt-drive table with incredible speed accuracy, low wow and flutter, and startup torque that is close to a direct-drive broadcast turntable.”

While your Acutus Classic can be upgraded to one of the two more advanced models, the drive motor will have to be returned to AVID with your power supply so that they can be calibrated to each other. You will also need another shelf to place whatever power supply you use in your system.

Unbox and setup - CH

Unboxing the Acutus is straightforward. Including the manual and supplied 3mm Allen driver, the parts count is fewer than twenty, and each is packed separately. It's well-packed, with each part individually protected. Identifying the parts is intuitive.

After carefully unpacking the contents and mechanically assembling the turntable, the only thing left is to affix the dual drive belts. There's a small tool for this in the box, too – *don't lose it*.



One thing to be careful with is the tiny tungsten-carbide ball bearing used on the spindle. Don't take this out of the bag until you are ready to use it, being extra careful not to get dirt and grime anywhere – it will eventually degrade performance. Using the supplied gloves is an excellent idea because the oiliness from your skin on the dual drive belts will also deter from optimum performance. Keep a close eye on that platter as well; it weighs 10kg (22 pounds), and you don't want to scratch the perfect finish on its edge.

The same protocol is advised for the belts: don't get your greasy fingerprints on them, and unless you're one of the lucky ones who can immediately master this (our publisher still hasn't, so don't feel bad), it might take a few tries to accomplish this task.

Though we both have prior experience setting up AVID tables, AVID's step-by-step instructions and videos are clearly produced, and each step includes a corresponding

photograph. If this is your first AVID table, you'll really appreciate this.

Nexus's adjustments are limited to arm height, anti-skating, and tracking force, with no accommodation for azimuth correction. Nexus's headshell leads are user-replaceable, which is a good idea if you like to swap cartridges. Sooner or later, those tiny wires will break.

Using a WallyReference to measure minimum arm height, the Nexus tonearm is level at approximately 16mm, and the Nexus headshell azimuth angle has no visible error.

If we could request one design change, it would be a counterweight that turns on a threaded stub, as this would allow for easier fine-tuning of vertical tracking force. The included counterweight couples to the arm's counterweight stub via O-rings. It is suitable for all but the lowest mass and lightest tracking cartridges. A lighter counterweight is offered through AVID if needed.

Installing and aligning the cartridge can be done with the sub-chassis (upper section) removed from the main chassis. While owners may choose to perform this step with the table fully assembled, alignment work is easier with the sub-chassis placed on a firm surface rather than suspended on the main chassis.

Getting the turntable completely level is a two-step process. As the suspension towers allow leveling the platter, getting the base with its threaded footers completely level before assembly assures a smooth, vertical, piston-type movement when the table is running. AVID suggests setting the final level adjustment with the clamp installed because of the clamp's weight.

Tonearm choices - CH

The Classic bundle features AVID's current Nexus tonearm (\$5,399). After many years of supplying their tables either without a tonearm or an SME bundled, AVID has finally realized its own tonearm designs that are an excellent match for its table and, ideally, one of its cartridges.



At the end of this review, I purchased the table and arm, moving the Kuzma Four Point arm from my Sequel to the Acutus and the Nexus arm to the Sequel. Should your audio taste be more a fan of "bundles," the all – AVID combination is excellent. As we have reviewed the Ruby cartridge in the past (you can read that review here), we will be concentrating on the table and tonearm. The main reason for choosing the Kuzma is the ease of mounting, unmounting, and resetting new cartridges in the review arena.

Setting up the Kuzma Four point 9-inch arm is an exacting process. The arm height adjustment allows the owner to raise or lower the arm at a rate of 0.5mm per turn of the adjustment screw. Azimuth can be adjusted in repeatable increments by turning an Allen key screw. The headshell is removable, but the arm leads exit the arm from underneath, meaning that a damaged tonearm lead will require the arm to be returned to Kuzma for repair. Victory for AVID here.

.Comparison to other tables – JD

With a few other British favorites on hand (a Rega P9, an SME 20 with iV.Vi tonearm, and the Linn Classik table), it's incredibly easy to see what AVID gets right. Though the Rega and the Linn are considerably less expensive, like the AVID tables, they do share a common voice with the other tables in their range. The Rega sounds a little thin on bass-heavy tracks.

Even my AVID Volvere SP (now residing at Chris' house and upgraded to a Sequel) still follows the AVID design brief of having incredibly low noise and a very dynamic presentation.

The Linn has a nice punchy sound but lacks the low-level resolution and locked-in feeling of either AVID table. Though this is somewhat unfair because the top LP-12 version is in the AVID's price range, oddly, going up the range removes the inherent "linniness" (Is that even a word?) of the table. If I were adding a Linn here in the TONE listening room, I'd buy a Classic or a late 80s Sondek. But that's a story for another day.

Ironically, the SME 20 comes the closest. Yet, listening back and forth with the identical AVID Ruby cartridge mounted to both, the Acutus still has an edge in musical liveliness that the SME can't deliver to the same extent.

Comparison to other tables - CH

The Acutus has several strengths that set it apart from the Rega, Technics, and other turntables I've owned. The playback noise floor is audibly superior, bass extension and weight are a cut above, and the table is nearly immune to disturbance from floor-born vibration or footfalls. This is all critical when living in a house with wood floors.

Listening to the Volvere/Sequel reveals a lot of similar traits that make the Acutus great, but to a lesser extent. The motor and power supply upgrades the Sequel provides close the gap, but AVID's "good, better, best" philosophy is still solidly in place. In addition, the higher mass of the Acutus platter (10kg vs 6.7kg for the Volvere/Sequel) further improves overall vertical stability and speed accuracy. The bonded polymer mat of the Acutus is more effective preventing vibrational energy between the record surface and the platter than the cork mat used in the other two.

The Acutus easily outperforms the more budget-friendly tables I've owned sonically and delivers a meaningful step in performance over the Volvere and Sequel. It performs exceptionally well, even with entry-level cartridges, and importantly, it's unaffected by being placed in close proximity to large full-range speakers and subwoofers at sound pressure levels that would cause other tables to generate feedback into the system.

For those who enjoy playing their favorite rock albums at near concert level on occasion, it's the perfect tool. For playing Tool. (or whatever is in your collection) The rest is easy.

Peripherals – CH

<i>Phono stage</i>	VAC Renaissance, MolaMola Lupe
<i>Power Amp</i>	MolaMola Perca
<i>Preamplifier</i>	Audio Research LS-28SE
<i>Digital</i>	dCS Vivaldi ONE
<i>Speakers</i>	Focal Scala Utopia Evo w/pair of REL Carbon Signature subwoofers
<i>Cable</i>	Cardas Clear Beyond and Clear Reflection

Peripherals – JD

<i>Phono stage</i>	PASS XP-27
<i>Preamplifier</i>	PASS XS Pre
<i>Power Amp</i>	Pass 600.8
<i>Digital</i>	dCS Lina Stack
<i>Speakers</i>	Peak Consult Sinfonia
<i>Cable</i>	Cardas Clear and Clear Beyond

