

VPI HW - 16.5 Record Cleaning Machine

by Reuben Parry

Harry Weisfeld's HW - 16.5 cleaning machine (and its big brother the HW - 17) are more than just a statement about personal hygiene. They should be considered an essential component for any serious vinyl play-back system.

Records deserve to be treated like a non-renewable resource because those cherished, secondhand purchases are often simply too difficult to replace, while the expense of unnecessarily duplicating audiophile discs is so prohibitive that a little preventative maintenance makes good sense.

An initial outlay of £399.00 may appear extravagant at the time, but not to do so is false economy. Ultimately, an HW - 16.5 will pay for itself by extending the life of your LPs; protecting the cartridge from damage inflicted when playing dirty records, and through a marked improvement in sound quality.

This machine is extremely user friendly and takes all the awkwardness out of wet cleaning. The procedures are straightforward: read the comprehensive owners manual; unbox your HW - 16.5 with its accompanying brush and VPI cleaning fluid (Disc Doctor or other fluids can also be used) and find some grubby LPs.

I used the VPI's arrival as an excuse to spend another lunchtime at Gibbs in Manchester. They were having one of their regular vinyl sales so I splashed out a £1.00 each on three early L'OISEAU-LYRE Bach recitals. Superficially, their surfaces looked pretty good, but a quick spin on the deck at home revealed the usual clicks, pops and detritus in those tired old grooves. I could have as easily

used a brand new pressing, say from Classic or Speakers Corner because although visually perfect, they are coated with mould release agents (MRAs) that should, in an ideal world, be removed before playing, though I admit to being far too lazy to do this all the time. I soon remember once that cherished new disc starts to play!

The cleaning regime is simple and methodic. Clamp the record in place; flip the 'turntable' switch, and apply the preferred liquid onto the grooves as they rotate, spreading the solution across its surface with the brush provided.

The next step is the effective removal of the contaminants suspended in fluid. For this the pickup tube should swing counter clockwise above the record until it roughly points at the spindle, then hit the 'vacuum' switch and cover your ears! This is the noisy part. The velvet coated nozzle automatically lowers and locks into position. After two revolutions the suction should be sufficient to have removed the fluid, then the vacuum switch is turned off. The entire operation is then carried out again, on the record's flip side. With a little practise an LP can be dispatched in just a couple of minutes. It should then be zapped with a Milty Zero-Stat and given a plush new Nagaoka anti-static inner sleeve. The waste liquid stored within the machine's stainless steel reservoir should be drained after half a dozen records have been cleaned.

That's the basic procedure, but you can jazz it up with an extra mat to keep your just-cleaned record side from contacting a contaminated surface; a two part fluid like the Disc Doctor

(extra brushes and a rinse in distilled water as well as an extra vacuum turret); or anything else you might dream up. Whilst I've heard the benefits of the demon Doctor's alcohol free fluid, I'm happy to keep things simple. That way the machine is so quick that I can clean each record before playing it.



Visually these Bach discs now appear to be pristine, with the surface noise reduced to a negligible level. However, the biggest gains are to be found in terms of tangible sonic improvements. Densely textured recordings like the *Concerto in A minor* for flute, violin and harpsichord (BWV 1044) are transformed. The tonal qualities, and position of the soloist's instruments within the soundstage, was given greater prominence. And the presence of supporting orchestral players was also enhanced, as subtle background details, especially in complicated passages of music, became far easier to hear. Images were far more precise and transparent, the playing more cohesive, creating a far more credible illusion of realism.

A four hundred pounds expenditure along the conventional upgrade path would struggle to replicate these advances, so Harry and the VPI team are to be congratulated. A good wet cleaning machine opens up the latent power lurking in secondhand record shops, as well as spring cleaning your existing collection. Any vinyl lover should consider one an essential purchase. ➤+

Distributor
Vinyl Demand (see p67)

Manufacturer
VPI Industries Ltd.
Tel. (001)908-946-8606

AAA Strobe Disc

If you have a variable speed turntable, then you need a strobe disc to set it up. The best I've come across is the Analogue Audio Association disc from Germany. This gives you 50 and 60 Hz bands, as well as a tracking arc compatible with Linn mount tonearms, and a tangential line for parallel trackers, all printed on a 12" mirrored surface. It's definitely on the heavy side, so not ideal for Pinks and the like, and at £65 it's expensive, but it's the last strobe disc you'll ever buy.

Bear in mind that any strobe disc is only as good as the light doing the illuminating. Ideally, this should be independent of the mains, and the nicest I've come across is made by Loricraft, at a price of £40.

Battery powered and incredibly accurate, it is a model of functional simplicity. And if you ask them really nicely, they might even dig you out a 60 Hz version, which will make it even more precise. ➤+

Suppliers

AAA Strobe Disc

Vinyl Demand

Tel. (44)(0)1579-363603

Fax. (44)(0)1579-363604

Strobe Lamp

Loricraft

Tel. (44)(0)1672-511401



VPI Perspex Cleaning Kit

Every piece of hi-fi that I own seems to be big, black and shiny. More and more manufacturers are turning to Perspex as a material, and piano lacquer as a finish. Which looks great, until it gets dirty. And believe me, it shows every finger mark, every speck of dust, and every cat print in enough detail to positively identify the culprit. As a company that could win awards for the conspicuous consumption of

Perspex, VPI offer their customers a cleaning kit consisting of a fine rubbing compound to remove scratches, and a polish to keep everything shiny. The kit costs £20. The creams are basic industrial products, and probably have UK equivalents. I've just never found them. And the VPI kit is so good I've never felt the urge to look. For anybody with high gloss hi-fi, this is an essential purchase.

And a quick tip for those that find that polished Perspex attracts dust quicker than a ticket tout attracts United fans; once you've polished your pride and joy, give it a wipe over with Nordost Eco 3 static dispersant. This will keep baby clean, and help it to sound better too!

Distributor

Absolute Analogue (see p64)