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Acoustic Signature WOW XL Turntable

Solid Foundation

Spencer Holbert



What's the ultimate purpose of a turntable? To spin a vinyl record at a precise speed without introducing any vibrations into the cartridge. Of course, this is the holy grail of turntable design, and basically an impossible task. Turntables are constantly in a miniature battle to counteract opposing forces. When the Beach Boys sang about "good vibrations," they weren't talking about their turntables. Many turntable manufacturers go to great lengths to reduce the effects of unwanted vibrations, but as the designs become more exotic, so do the prices. So when a turntable comes along that does its job well—and does it without costing a year's salary—that's something to celebrate. Maybe somebody at Acoustic Signature had a wry sense of humor when he decided to name this 'table the Wow; irony aside, the Wow XL is all wow factor without all of the *Gleichlaufschwankung* (the bad wow).

The Setup

The \$2395 Wow XL is one solid piece of precision German engineering. The plinth is a beveled design about the same thickness as the platter, though it is a combination of aluminum and wood (the wood is masked by the outer shell of the plinth). Three height-adjustable feet allow for easy leveling of the entire 'table. The platter alone weighs fourteen pounds and is over one-and-a-half inches of solid aluminum; it could probably be used for home defense, if necessary. Be ultra-careful as you slide the platter spindle into the bearing, as the fit is a bit

snug. The heavy weight of the platter can easily pinch a finger, so make sure to drop it in while holding the outer circumference. The bearing is Acoustic Signature's "signature" Tidorfolon bearing, which is the same proprietary bearing design used in all AS turntables, including AS's flagship Ascona turntable reviewed by Jonathan Valin back in 2012. Luckily, you don't need to spend \$34k to benefit from the bearing technology employed in this 'table.

The Wow XL is driven by an ultra-precise synchronous motor that employs a 20MHz microprocessor that provides "perfect" speed stability and fine-tuning. Two small recessed buttons on the back of the 'table allow $\pm 0.1\%$ speed adjustments, so you can dial-in the speed during initial setup. I checked the speed after I set up everything, and it was spot on. I checked it three weeks later, and things were still spinning correctly. It's safe to assume that once you initially set the speed, you can leave it be without worrying—it's always good to check speed if you move the 'table, though. The motor is extremely quiet, too. Fitting the belt was easy, and once the motor was turned on any twists were straightened out after a few revolutions. Two stainless-steel buttons are located to the left of the platter, an on/off button and a 33/45 button to easily switch speeds. Turn the turntable on, and a red LED blinks above the speed button until the precise speed is reached.

When I first pulled the 'table out of the box, I wondered why there was an Ethernet port in the back of it. The interesting thing about the power supply is that it plugs into the back of the turntable using what looks like an RJ45 Ethernet cable. My one quibble is with the wall-wart, which is so large (roughly 3" x 4.5") it blocked two adjacent outlets on my power

EQUIPMENT REVIEW - Acoustic Signature WOW XL



The Sound

I struggled for a bit to determine exactly what the Acoustic Signature Wow XL's sound was. It's an extremely neutral turntable, which is exactly what you want, but something that I wasn't expecting for \$2395. If anything, the 'table—paired

conditioner. Plus, the wall-wart is so long that I had to slide my power conditioner to the very back of the rack to let the power supply hang over the edge. This might not be an issue with every power conditioner, but it's something to be aware of; you wouldn't want to spend \$3k on a conditioner and have three plugs taken up by the Wow XL's wall-wart.

My Wow XL review sample was shipped with a Funk Firm FXR-II tonearm (\$2400), which makes a really superb combination with this 'table. (Most dealers will receive Acoustic Signature 'tables in this price range with the Funk FXR-II, the Funk F6 thread-bearing tonearm [\$600; see my Funk Flamenca review in this issue for more], or the Rega RB202 [\$400].) The 'table sans tonearm is \$2395. The FXR-II was a breeze to set up: adjusting VTA takes no time with the supplied Allen wrench, and the detachable headshell allows for easy cartridge mounting and azimuth adjustment. I used the Ortofon 2M Black moving-magnet cartridge (\$720) for this review, and a Pro-Ject Tube Box II (\$450) with a pair of Mullard 12AX7 tubes for the phonostage. All told, it took about an hour to set up the Wow XL, with periodic adjustments here and there to fine-tune the sound.

with the Funk Firm FXR-II tonearm—is a bit on the analytical side, which I tend to prefer. There wasn't any of the false impression of warmth that some turntables give to vinyl. Of course, some of this can be attributed to the Ortofon 2M Black, which has won multiple TAS Editors' Choice and Product of the Year awards; yet even with a fast, slightly forward cartridge like the 2M, the Wow XL imparted little overt sonic character of its own. It was this lack of sonic signature that was most apparent while listening to Ludovico Einaudi's *In a Time Lapse*, particularly on the track "Experience," during which Einaudi's soft piano notes are joined by the soft plucks of a harp situated toward the back of the room.

It's the way the Wow XL resolves these delicate, single notes that really shines. If you enjoy the minimalist approach of many modern composers—especially Phillip Glass, Hans Otte, or Ludovico Einaudi—the Wow XL does an amazing job of letting the music be music, with only the faintest traces of image smear. I actually question whether I would have noticed any smear at all if I hadn't heard this record on the superb Kronos turntable a few days earlier at the Montreal Audio Show.

There were some minor tracking issues during

certain passages of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* [Everest], but this is a torture test for even the best cartridges and tonearms. Some of this is due to the turntable's minimal vibration control. If your rack is an afterthought and in need of an upgrade, the Wow XL will benefit from improved vibration control. Since the feet on the Wow XL are solid aluminum, vibrations from an inferior rack might be an issue, depending on your setup. I experimented with several isolation devices, including the Symposium Acoustics Svelte Shelf and AudioQuest's affordable SorboGel Q Feet, which improved imaging. But this isn't to say that the Wow XL is going to have major issues when you set it up at home—far from it. The 'table itself is of such solid construction that it acts as one large vibration-control device, from the high-mass platter to the equally heavy plinth. This, of course, is a methodology to which not every turntable manufacturer subscribes, but Acoustic Signature has hit the mark with this one, and at a price that is affordable for the dedicated vinyl listener.

Taking the Leap

The Acoustic Signature Wow XL sits right in the middle of two turntable worlds. On the one hand, it's a 'table that is pretty much ready to go as soon as you take it home, especially if your dealer sets it up for you, and represents an amazing amount of quality—both sonically and in construction—for the price. But, unlike a manufacturer that pairs its 'arms with its 'tables, it's a 'table that takes you into the world of mixing and matching tonearms, which can be a little daunting for someone who isn't ready to make that leap. If you're ready to delve into this world and start experimenting, the Wow XL is about as good a 'table as it gets. It's

German engineering at its most affordable, and it allows you to start with a solid base and slowly upgrade your tonearm until you find the one you like best. You can get out the door with the Rega RB202 for \$2795, then move on to more expensive—and more elaborate—tonearms. For me, this is exactly the kind of turntable I want to own, because it doesn't break the bank, yet allows for lots of perfecting. If picking out tonearms seems scary, have your local dealer guide you through the process; once you're comfortable with your newfound freedom of choice, you'll thank yourself for having a solid foundation upon which to build—which is exactly what the Acoustic Signature Wow XL was designed to be. **tas**

SPECS & PRICING

Drive unit: Synchronous, electronically regulated internal motor	PRO AUDIO LTD (U.S. DISTRIBUTOR) Brian Tucker proaudio@comcast.net (847) 561-4008
Bearing: Tidorfolon proprietary bearing	GOERNER COMMUNICATION Reinhard Goerner (514) 833-1977 info@goernercommunication.com
Chassis: 10mm aluminum and 25mm wooden plinth	
Platter: 34mm solid aluminum	
Dimensions: 16" x 6.5" x 13"	
Weight: 35 lbs.	
Price: \$2395 ('table only); \$4795 as reviewed	ACOUSTIC SIGNATURE Ulmer Strasse 123 73037 Göppingen Germany

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