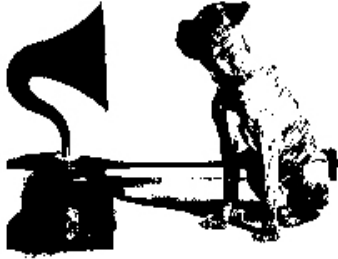


audio

The Higher End: Robinson's Brutus Awards for 2007

by David W. Robinson



My Brutus Award Winners for 2007:

Product Categories: System Tweaks, Enhancements, and Accessories

Furutech DFV-1 Disc Flattener



If you enjoy finding good LPs, you *know* the great feeling you get when you find a real winner. There are still a lot of vinyl treasures out there...whether collectable, a favored title, or a mystery title. Many are just a buck or three for the taking, and all you need back home are the tools necessary for cleaning up and restoring these albums for playback. If you do this right, it's amazing how wonderfully many LPs sound.

At the current time, my armory of preferred LP restorative/care accessories includes:

- the Walker Audio Prelude Record Cleaning System
- the VPI 17F LP vacuum (though I will be evaluating upgrades to the 17F in 2008)
- the Walker Audio Talisman
- the Furutech deStat and SK-II Electrostatic Brush
- the Furutech deMag full-LP demagnetizer
- anti-static-lined paper LP inner sleeves
- re-sealable protective LP outer sleeves

So far, so good. But I still didn't have an important missing component for that occasional problem-child warped LP—a rock-solid reliable LP flattener. One of the worst things that can happen to the LP hunter is to find a terrific album, only to discover that it's something other than *flat*. Misuse/careless handling over the years have warped a number of black pizzas. That's OK when they are too scratched up to be playable, but agony when you see an LP whose grooves are fine, but whose idea of proper geometry is more three-dimensional than two.

In years gone past, the main remedy was to warm up an oven precisely, place a warped LP between two very thick panes of glass, and watch carefully while the LP flattened. You had to take it out at just the right moment, then allow it to cool between those glass panes. You hoped it would flatten correctly. You hoped that it would remain flat. And you hoped that the grooves themselves wouldn't have mooshed together. Ugly, tricky stuff, and definitely not for the faint of heart.



I had some warped LPs in my collection, but they were irreplaceable albums that I didn't want to risk to kludgy procedures, so I left them alone, hoping for a cure some day. I kept my eyes open, but hadn't found a truly acceptable alternative...until this year. Which is when I got the notice that Furutech had produced an LP flattener that just might do the trick.

The folks at Furutech were kind enough to ship a review sample of their DFV-1 Disc Flattener. When it arrived, I popped it out of its box immediately, curious to see how it shaped up. *Now here's just what the doctor ordered: a fully automatic LP flattener that does its job superbly, requires no special oversight, and stands upright to save space!* State-of-the-art heating surfaces, with no heat applied directly to the groove areas. Computer controlled heating and timing system, allowing for controlled heating and cooling cycles, without harm to your vinyl. A simple screw-on mounting and centering component for loading an LP into the Disc Flattener, and a very simple clamp latch system for closing and operation. All of this with an upright stance, minimizing the component footprint ...very important around these parts.

I pulled out some warped LPs that I had been waiting for years to fix. They had warps ranging up to 1/8" in lift, and covering 20-25% of the albums' circumference. They were listenable—barely—but anyone fearing for their cantilever and their sanity wouldn't be able to take it for long. How would the Furutech DFV-1 Disc Flattener do with these ugly ducklings?

It took me about 2 minutes (literally) to get the feel of operation by reading the very brief docs, and noodling for a moment with the LP centering mount. First, I plugged in the unit and powered it up. This initialized the system, put a ready screen in the LCD window, and lit the middle "Mode" button. I then took one of the warped LPs and loaded it onto its mounting and centering holder. Holding it by that holder with one hand, I quickly applied an anti-static flow with the Furutech deStat, then brushed off any dust particles with the Furutech SK-II Electrostatic Brush. (I didn't want to put an LP into the Disc Flattener with dust all over it...you wouldn't want anything to get embedded. I would also counsel users not to put freshly washed LPs into any LP flattening system where it might sit and bubble for several hours; having leftover cleaning solution/water in the grooves is not a good thing during a heating/pressing/cooling procedure, I think. Clean your LPs, left them dry thoroughly overnight, then proceed to the flattening process.) Then the first LP went into the Disc Flattener. I found that the best way to clamp the DFV-1 was to hold it closed right in the middle with the thumb and forefinger of one hand, while battening down the two clamps with the other.

All that I had to do after that was press the "Mode" button to start the automatic procedure. The default heating cycle was 1.5 hours, which is normal for an ambient temperature of 20 degrees C (about 68 degree F). Longer time periods were available for lower ambient temperatures. You can access these during a five second window after pressing the "Mode" button, allowing you to access heating time periods of 1.0 hours (30 degrees C), 1.5 hours (default), 2.0 hours, and 2.5 hours (less than 10 degrees C, which ambient temperature I would avoid if I were you.) The cooling cycle is 2 hours, regardless.

The results of my first trial were perfect, to my surprise. The LP that I had put in had a measured warp of a very full 1/8" over nearly 25% of the album's circumference, and had been completely unacceptable for playback. I had carefully checked the warp again on my LP-12 just before putting the LP in the DFV-1. Horrible! Three and a half hours later, I put the LP back on the LP-12 and spun it up. Talk about being perplexed ...then delighted...



The test LP was now flat as a pancake. Flat as flatland. Flat as the LP-12 platter that it was spinning on.

I had to confirm this. On went another warped LP. Mount, clean, load, clamp, and put the "Mode" button.

Come back in 3.5 hours. Pull the LP. Put it on the LP-12 and give it a spin. It's now flat as a freshman's bank account at the end of a semester.

Scratch head. Take another warped LP. Mount, clean, load, clamp, push the button.

Come back in 3.5 hours. Pull the LP. Put it on the LP-12 and give it a spin. It's now flat as old bike tires.

And again. Fourth verse, same as the first.

This bloody thing really really works!

Inside of a couple of days, and without spending more than ten minutes of handling, I had rescued four treasured, irreplaceable LPs from oblivion, and had made them reference-grade flat, ideal for future use. The DFV-1 had done the work, and had not required one bit of intervention from me at all.

Not only that, its vertical stance makes it a snap to deploy or to store ...it has a very small footprint...and its 20 pound weight is easily transported from one location to another using the carrying handle. If you need more space when you're not flattening LPs, you can store it in a small area.

Enough! In my humble opinion, any serious LP lover ought to have a Furutech DFV-1 Disc Flattener in his or her arsenal of audio accessories. At an MSRP of USD \$1480, it isn't exactly cheap, but you don't have to rescue too many valuable LPs to amortize the investment. And if the cost is beyond your individual means, look at splitting the cost with some other LP lovers, or seeing if your local audio society would be willing to help cover the cost for an entire group. Believe me, this easily transported, easily stored unit would make such an arrangement quite simple to do.

The Furutech DFV-1 Disc Flattener therefore richly merits a "Ye Olde Editor's 'highest recommendation'"—with enthusiasm—and wins a Brutus Award for 2007, as well.