

FURUTECH

Stereophile

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2oz bottle costs \$41; 8oz, \$148.50; 16oz, \$246.

Furutech DFV-1 Disc Flattener: a stand-up disc-flattening device

Speaking of underground idiots, after favorably reviewing Air Tight's disc-flattening device (\$2250) in June 2004, I got flamed online and in e-mails from those who claimed the device deformed the grooves of their records. Evidently I was an \$##*@\$*, and an effing one at that. All I know is that I used the Air Tight as directed and it worked as promised.

Now Furutech has introduced the DFV-1 Disc Flattener, a similar product that improves on the Air Tight's ergonomics by standing up like the pants presses found in better hotel rooms. With a footprint of about 17" by 7" (probably Shaq's footprint), it



Furutech's Disc Flattener is *not* vertically challenged.

takes up much less floor space than the horizontally configured Air Tight, and costs a lot less: \$1480.

Any fears I had that gravity would cause a record's grooves to "droop" on being heated were allayed after I'd treated the new 180gm pressing of Spoon's latest album, *Ga Ga Ga Ga* (Merge MRG295), which arrived

in my mailbox on a particularly hot summer day. (Yes, I have an LP-sized mailbox.) The warped record came out of the Furutech oven *flat*, its grooves undamaged.

To use the DFV-1, you screw together the two halves of a small round record clamp through the record hole, unclip and open the hinged plate, insert the clamp into a hole in the flattening plate inside (thereby securing the record vertically), close the hinge, attach the clips, and press

the Mode button. A small LCD screen keeps you apprised of the proceedings, which take two and a half hours to complete (1.5 hours heating, 1 cooling). The Mode button blinks red when the disc is ready to be removed.

Furutech recommends that you don't use your most valuable LP on your first try. Instead, they suggest using

one "of no value." If you're unsatisfied with the results, they accept "no liability." You are specifically warned *not* to try to flatten LPs that lack groove guards—such as Classic's 200gm LPs and a few others—a higher-than-normal percentage of which suffer from warps. Too bad. Fortunately, future 200gm LPs from Classic *will* have groove guards—but then, they'll therefore be less likely to warp in the first place.

Furutech can't be blamed for their warnings and disclaimers—record flattening is never a foolproof process. However, I decided to flatten some valuable, slightly warped LPs, such as an original Audio Fidelity pressing of *Satchmo Plays King Oliver* (ASFD 5930). The DFV-1 worked perfectly: flat surfaces, no deformed grooves. A test pressing of Cisco's recent reissue of Tchaiko-



Furutech's deStat and a vintage Zerostat

vsky's *Serenade for Strings*, performed by Charles Munch and the Strings of the Boston Symphony (RCA Living Stereo LSC-2105), came with slightly wavy edges. After a session with the DFV-1, it was *flat*.

I found the DFV-1 Disc Flattener effective for banishing warps from LPs. Like Air Tight's, it won't cure

serious pressing-defect deformations—the kind that make the stylus jump from the groove and vacuum hold-down systems balk. Those records are best thrown away, or played once with an expendable cartridge at a high tracking force and recorded.

Remember: Even if a warped record plays well and you hear no warp/wow, when you see those woofers pumping, that means the warp is sucking and wasting enormous amounts of amplifier power. Unless you have vast reservoirs of power, the sound will be compromised.

Zerostat 3 Milty & Furutech deStat SNH-2

Winter's dry air causes static electricity to build up in spinning discs, as do both vacuum record cleaning and, as I found

out, the Furutech DFV-1 Disc Flattener's heating process. The resulting pops from the discharge of that static are annoying and sometimes startling. The charge attracts dust to the record surface, and can be strong enough to interfere with accurate tracking, so it's best to discharge it before play. I keep a can of Alberto-Culver's Static Guard handy all winter, and while I don't recommend spraying your records with it, spraying the carpet in front of your turntable can prevent the buildup of static electricity that can be discharged into your system merely by your fingertip touching your turntable, resulting in a loud bang.

But Static Guard won't help static cling on the vinyl surface. For decades now, the gold standard of static-discharge devices has been Milty's Zerostat gun, which has two heavy-duty piezo-electric crystals and a compression trigger. Squeezing it slowly releases positive ions. Allowing the trigger to then slowly return to its starting position releases negative ions, thus producing a neutral static condition.

IN HEAVY ROTATION

- 1) Steely Dan, *Aja*, ABC/Cisco 180gm LP
- 2) Various Artists, *Berkeley Guitar*, Tompkins Square 180gm LP
- 3) Steve Lacy, *The Straight Horn of Steve Lacy*, Candid/Pure Pleasure 180gm LP
- 4) Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto, Nathan Milstein, William Steinberg, Pittsburgh Symphony, Capitol/Cisco 180gm LP
- 5) Spoon, *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga*, Merge 180gm LP
- 6) Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof* (soundtrack), Warner Bros. 145gm red vinyl LP
- 7) Dinah Washington, *The Swingin' Miss "D"*, Emarcy/Mercury/Speakers Corner 180gm mono LP
- 8) Feist, *The Reminder*, Polydor 145gm white vinyl LP/Interscope CD
- 9) Eleanor McEvoy, *Out There*, Verve/Speakers Corner 180gm LP
- 10) James Blackshaw, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Tompkins Square LP

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The current model, the Zerostat 3 Milty, is said to be good for at least 10,000 squeezes in both directions, and costs around \$75. I still have my vintage, decades-old Zerostat, as well as a newer Zerostat 3.

Furutech's deStat simultaneously generates positive and negative ions, then fans this balanced ion flow across the record using a 5kV corona discharge, induced via needle electrodes. The handheld device uses four AA batteries, which both generate the charge and spin the deStat's tiny fan. You hold the deStat about 4" from the record surface, and push the spring-loaded On/Off button for about 10 seconds. It really worked as promised on LPs, eliminating static cling; Furutech claims it also works with CDs, DVDs, LCD screens, and cables (I'll try it on those formats soon). It costs \$360.

While you're unlikely to drop the hard and relatively heavy deStat on a record, why take the chance? It's probably a good idea to strategically locate some stick-on rubber feet just in case you have an "oops" moment. The Zerostat 3 Milty will get the job done 10,000 times, but probably not as uniformly as the deStat. The easier-to-use deStat does the job in grand style, and will probably last as long as you can buy batteries, or the fan motor burns out, or you do. But \$285 is a lot to pay for those differences.

Air Tight AT-LCE-1 Cartridge Enhancer

Remember those ultra-high-frequency electronic stylus cleaners whose frequency and amplitude outputs were so far beyond those that any cartridge was designed to handle that sometimes the cartridge would be damaged? Audiophiles thought they were doing a good thing by getting their styli so scrupulously clean, but the high-frequency vibrations shook thin internal wires to the breaking point and sometimes caused channel failure. No one uses such devices anymore. I sure hope you don't.

The AT-LCE-1 is a much-higher-tech version of such a device. However, it's intended not to *clean* a stylus, but to scientifically pummel the cartridge's suspension into optimal performance. It's claimed to do this by producing perfect 600 and 800Hz

sinewaves that feed a tiny amplifier that drives the actuator, which contacts the stylus. You place the AT-LCE-1 on the turntable platter at a right angle to the tonearm, lower the stylus onto the actuator, turn it on, then hit Stop/Start. (Air Tight's AT-SPG-1 digital Stylus Pressure Gauge uses the same chassis and looks almost identical.) Thus begins a 15-minute cycle during which the actuator, at 2.5-minute intervals, alternately vibrates at 600 and 800Hz. At the conclusion of the process, the AT-LCE-1 emits a high-pitched squeal and blinks.

It sounded like a happy ending to me, but did the AT-LCE-1 actually improve the cartridge's sonic performance? And why 600 and 800Hz instead of, say, 900 and 1200Hz? I don't know. I tried the AT-LCE-1 on some well-broken-in cartridges and can't say I heard a difference, but a brand-new cartridge, treated after playing one side of a record "cold," seemed to sound less congested and more quickly on its way to full break-in. But I'm not certain. I need more time with this device.

But even if the AT-LCE-1 works, why would you need it? Most audiophiles feel that a "cold" cartridge, even one that's well broken in, won't deliver its full potential until after about an hour of play. With the Air Tight, you can reduce that to 15 minutes, though you'll have to listen to CDs while it does its thing. For a reviewer, however, it's a real help.

The Air Tight AT-LCE-1 Cartridge Exciter is a cool product with a practical purpose, but it won't be a must-have device for most analog enthusiasts—unless you have \$360 to drop.



Pilates for your cartridge's suspension