



TO NEARM

WINNER: AUDIO ORIGAMI PU7 £1,300 [see text]

Proof positive that what goes around comes around is this year's recipient of the tonearm gong. The story of the Audio Origami PU7 is an unusual one to say the least, beginning with the now-legendary Syrnix Precision Instruments back in the early nineteen eighties. Syrnix, lest we forget, made some very desirable and superb sounding tonearms – most famous of which was the PU2, which gave the (then new) Linn Ittok a good run for its money. Having a friend who worked at the Glasgow company inspired John Nilsen to start up his own machine shop, and he duly started Audio Origami doing very high quality work on special projects for audiophiles. The PU7 was his own evolution of the PU3, which was Syrnix's finest hour, although "it would be wrong to describe it as a copy of a PU3, as I believe it has a bit of every arm that I admire in its design", he says.

It's very much a low volume product with one hundred and forty hours of build time in each one – and comes 'bespoke tailored' for each individual customer, in a range of anodised colours. It is available in any effective length from nine to twelve inches, and the arm tube effective mass can also be pre-specified to suit your cartridge, coming in alloy or brass versions as a result. There's even a choice of Linn or Rega arm mountings. Prices vary according to specification, but a standard mass and length nine inch design comes in at £1,300. Fit and finish of the arm are both impeccable, and the PU7 comes complete with a DVD of how to set it up and a comprehensive range of accessories.

In action the AO PU7 is magnificent, sounding as tight as a drum with dizzying speed and insight, and a sense of timing that makes similarly priced rivals seem

musically aloof. Despite its brilliantly taut and engaging nature however, it doesn't suffer the associated pitfalls of similarly 'animated' sounding arms. Instead, it is never less than silky smooth, maintaining the sense of clarity and composure that can sometimes slip up with a less than couth pickup system. Soundstaging is another forte, the PU7 being able to throw images far stage left or right, or hang them back with ease. Such is its ability to render a soundstage well beyond and behind the loudspeakers that it offers admirable scale.

As you might expect considering its provenance, the Audio Origami PU7 is a very special product, offering a unique blend of qualities – from superlative sonics to bespoke build. There have been a number of excellent pickup arms released this year, but such is the tremendous ability of this one that it's a worthy and clear winner.



RUNNER UP:
GRAHAM PHANTOM B44 £2,495

There's no shortage of 'super arms' these days, but special notice should surely be paid to this new US-made design, which offers every last penny's worth of performance. The engineering is superlative, the installation easy, calibration a joy and the removable arm wands make this the natural choice for enthusiasts with more than one cartridge. Sonically excellent, it's self evidently the best Graham pickup arm to date and looks set to give all its top high end rivals a serious headache.