

More Splendid, Even More Isolation... The latest generation of equipment racks

by Roy Gregory

Back in Issue 41 I looked at the way that isolation strategies for hi-fi have developed in recent years, reviewing a selection of the latest support platforms on offer as examples of a new awareness that trouble all too often starts at home. By that I'm referring to the fact that whilst the sonic impact of spurious vibration and mechanical energy on audio circuits is generally accepted, few people seem aware that at least as damaging as external sources of vibration are those that exist within the equipment itself. The most obvious example comes in the shape of the huge transformers that feed power amplifiers, large lumps that literally kick into life as an amp is switched on. But just because smaller transformers are less obvious about their dirty little habits doesn't mean they don't shake, rattle and roll along with the rest. In fact, just about any component that passes electrical voltage or current is going to suffer some mechanical reaction while doing it. Evacuating that energy through mechanical grounding – that's where those platforms and couplers come in. With that in mind, and using the (extremely expensive finite elemente Pagode) Master Reference as a, err... master reference, I've looked at a range of alternative approaches that vary in cost and complexity but which all set out to deal with spurious energy generated within the components they support.

The Cambré CORE Rack

The Canadian Cambré is a deceptively simple structure and the most straightforward in the test. It utilizes its own version of the now familiar rod and shelf construction, first popularized in the UK by Quadraspire. However, the Cambré is not without its own wrinkles, perhaps being closest in thinking to the Aavik racks. Here, the substantial uprights are over an inch in diameter and consist of solid aluminium,



threaded together with steel stud. These clamp the shelves between them, finished with flush mounted caps at the top and large, conical feet at the bottom. These are beautifully turned to overlap the stub uprights below the bottom shelf, making adjustment of level incredibly easy, even with the rack fully loaded.

The CORE system is modular; you buy a top shelf (which includes the top-caps and feet) and as many individual, intervening shelves as you need, each complete with the appropriate uprights. The uprights provide vertical separation of 18, 23 or 28cm, while the shelves are made from a specially selected MDF and come in a choice of four real wood veneers and black ash. There's also an expensive but surprisingly popular option to go all titanium on the metalwork. Given experience with the Aavik titanium rack I can certainly understand why. The top shelf can of course be used as an amp stand if desired and there's also a glass shelf option, which might look pretty but has no place in a hi-fi system, for reasons that are about to become clear.

So, structurally the Cambré rack has an appealing simplicity while the quality of its metalwork, the carefully beveled shelves and the superb veneers used add up to a discretely elegant and attractive package. The footprint is broad, stable and large enough to accept almost any equipment save the very long and thin. The VPI TNT6 is accommodated with ease, which is saying something! But turn the shelves over and you discover the CORE system's stealth input. The underside of each shelf is scored by a series of deep, diagonal grooves. Varying in length they divide the shelf's structure into a series of discrete resonant zones, again carefully calculated but this time with the aid ►

▶ of a grant from the Canadian government and access to its Institute of Technology. These help spread the resonant modes within the structure,



damping peaks and minimizing their impact. Clearly, this broadband dissipation should also be equally effective in dealing with energy from within the equipment itself. So, although the Cambré looks like a lot of other racks it works rather differently.

The final element in the mix is a pair of extra grooves machine at the rear, in the top and underside of the intervening shelves (and underside only of the top shelf). These accept rectangles of black painted hardboard with a pair of large diameter holes through them. These constitute a simple but effective form of cable management, and incorporate a small amount of lateral movement to allow for cable exits on one side of equipment or the other. Viewed in isolation they are neat rather than attractive, but once the system is installed they all but disappear, taking the traditional tangle of cables with them. My only reservation is that I'd avoid sharing one hole between mains and any form of signal or speaker cable. If necessary, route the mains lead separately.

Each shelf module costs between £170 and \$220,



depending on height and irrespective of finish. Cambré also offer the more affordable Entré and Timbre

ranges if the CORE system is a little rich for your blood.

The Listening

The Cambré is in many respects the simplest of the racks offered here. It's also a neat analogy for its sound.

Big, bold and colourful is the way I'd describe the CORE rack. Its huge and solid images are impressive, its music purposeful, but it's at its best with simpler material. Janis Ian's 'Some People's Lives'



was wonderfully solid, present and direct, even if close comparisons with the finite-elemente revealed a lack of transparency, focus, ambient information and the subtleties of expression, both in her voice and playing. The more complex the material, the more obvious the failings, under-pinned by the weight of the bass and a slight lack of definition. It's not that music stops, it's just that the playing can sound a little clumsy, the shifts in direction robbed of agility.

Compared to a standard metal rack with glass or MDF shelves, the

CORE represents a huge step up in both even distribution of energy and vibrant tonal colour. It's engaging, enjoyable and enthusiastic, and it's also more at home with pop and rock than the intricacies of classical or complex jazz. Even then its failings are readily tempered with the application of coupling elements. In this instance the Rollerblocks aided definition, fluidity and focus but still left it dragging its heels slightly in the lowest registers. Stillpoints were a much better option, adding the focus detail and transparency whilst also evening up and picking up the

effect solution might well be a DIY combination of sink and supports which could be had for very little money indeed. Used alone the CORE rack is good but its flaws require careful system matching to get the best overall results.

With a little tuning of the rack to equipment interface it really takes off, demonstrating that if you get the basics right then you've got a firm foundation on which to build.



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