

Roksan Xerxes X

We review the latest upgrades to the to the well-loved Roksan record player which first appeared on the market in the mid-1980s

PRICE £3950 complete

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Roksan's Xerxes turntable, the company's first product, was introduced in 1985 just as the emergence of digital sound began to sweep many lesser designs off the market. The Xerxes survived this storm due to its excellent build and sound quality. Over the intervening years, updates have been made to the design. Major changes were covered by Alvin Gold [*HFN/RR* June '89], while in February 1990 Ken Kessler was very impressed with the Xerxes, Artemiz tonearm and Shiraz cartridge as a complete system. In 1995, after 10 years in

business, Roksan announced the Xerxes X edition, which is the basis of the current model. The review player this time round comprised the £2000 Xerxes deck with DS1.5 power supply, Roksan Artemiz tonearm (£1000) and Roksan Shiraz moving-coil cartridge (£950). There is a cheaper model at £1750 using a DSU supply.

The turntable unit itself is actually pretty much unchanged. It's made up of a three-tier suspension system which decouples the middle-tier mounted motor both from the isolated base and the arm-carrying top plinth which sits on five adjustable rubber decouplers. These work rather like a series of leaf springs and adjust the angle of the plinth on two lateral planes parallel to and perpendicular to the main bearing and motor. The motor itself is mounted on a spring system

which allows rotational movement of the motor casing to eliminate fluctuations in rotational speed due to torque effects. It is powered by the XPS.V Reference Xerxes Motor Drive. This in turn receives power from either the DSU power supply or the DS1.5 Reference Power Supply. The latter is a new component since the last review and incorporates new mains filters and improvements to the electronic components compared to previous models. All power supply options are housed in standard Roksan Caspian casework, and have suitable shielding to allow the Artaxerxes phono stage to be included in the one box, with either a DSU or DS1.5 power supply dedicated to it.

A new high-purity copper wiring loom is fitted to the arm, which is now continuous from the



The Roksan Xerxes X turntable is available in an impressive rosewood veneer, or this sleek black finish. Picture shows a Tabriz arm instead of the Artemiz



🔌 A Xerxes X turntable costs £2000 when sold with the DS1.5 power supply, or £1750 with a DSU unit — both come in the full-sized casing seen here

cartridge tags to the DIN plug underneath the arm pillar. Externally a new 'soft-feel' paint finish has been developed which damps out arm tube resonance. (This is correctly named since the pressure of the plastic arm clip has marked, though not penetrated, the surface finish).

The Shiraz cartridge now boasts silver-plated high-purity copper output leads and two capacitors per side across the output wiring to control EHF behaviour. Instead of trying to fix serial numbers to such a small unit, Roksan changes the colour of the cartridge body with every modification, the current unit being an attractive and business-like gunmetal grey.

Although a dealer would usually install this unit in the purchasers' home, there is some owner maintenance required. It's recommended that the main turntable bearing (accessed by removing the inner platter) be lightly oiled every eight months. When reassembling make sure that the drive belt is the right way round and facing in the correct direction (it is marked at the factory). Incorrect fitting results in a somewhat restrained and woolly sound. The same applies, but to a lesser degree with the platter mat which again has a right and a wrong side up (this, unfortunately, isn't marked).

The turntable unit is finished in either rosewood or, as in this case, black. The former has been executed very well and avoids the usual MFI look that this finish is prone to.

I started my listening using an Ortofon MC30 Supreme cartridge and was immediately impressed by the speed and agility of the music through most of the tonal range. I was disappointed to find a rather cluttered upper mid-band and cured this by changing to an Ortofon Kontrapunkt b. This gave a freer sensation to the whole sound, though the slight treble lift given to music by this cartridge was noticeable. It also provided an insight into the sound of the deck itself. It was very precise in both its timing of rhythms and placing of performers within a good sized soundstage. The turntable and arm appeared quite self-effacing, merely providing a

superbly stable black background into which sounds materialised. The scale of the sound was a pleasure to behold, spreading well beyond the confines of the speakers but retaining a very solid 'grounded' sensation. An arm such as the Naim Aro might have the edge for ethereal

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spaciousness, but the Artemiz provided a more holographic physical presence within the room.

After about a week, the Shiraz moving-coil cartridge arrived. Attaching this to the arm was a revelation. Individually, each of the components was very good; together, the effect was magical. Each complimented the other to produce a superbly fast, open and dynamic sound. The Shiraz seemed to dig to the very bottom of the groove to extract any detail it could find. It was quite honest, not flattering poor recordings but not making them unplayable either. But I would describe its behaviour as reasonably forgiving, leaving the listener aware of shortcomings in the recording or pressing but not making a real meal out of them.

The counterbalance to this revealing honesty was a multi-layered sonic image that really transmitted the sensation of being able to touch the music. The speed and agility of the sound combined with a realistic sense of space and scale transformed my listening room into everything from a concert hall when listening to Ansermet conducting L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande performing Weber *Overtures* [Decca SXL 2112], to a rave club with Fat Boy Slim's *Better Living Through Chemistry* [Skint Brassic 2LP], or to the intimacy of a smokey basement club when the Miles Davis LP *Kind Of Blue* [Columbia PC 8163] hit the deck.

At nearly £4000 this is an expensive way of spinning records, but the rewards come in the

form of a balanced and dynamic sound which is highly engaging.

The Xerxes X makes the best of whatever it's given to play, without either covering up or emphasising imperfections in the source. The sound is big and detailed without being

overpowering, and is smooth but well extended at the frequency extremes. In short, hugely enjoyable and very musical. I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know this machine and I feel confident in recommending it for serious audition.

WORDS TONY BOLTON

TECHNOLOGY

Power for the turntable motor initially comes from the external DS1.5 power supply, giving an output of $\pm 26V$ DC. Noise is quoted at $10\mu V$ (ref 1Hz–3MHz), output impedance 0.01 ohm (ref 20Hz–20kHz). This DC voltage is fed into the turntable's XPS.V Reference Motor Drive circuit, which provides an AC output voltage (for 33rpm) of 16.3V AC, $\pm 0.2V$, to drive the synchronous motor, with a phase difference of 90° , $\pm 2^\circ$. The Shiraz moving-coil cartridge is built into a solid machined aluminium alloy body and weighs 8.2g. It has a specified output of 0.21mV/cm/s and is fitted with a Super Fine line stylus on an aluminium tube cantilever. Coil impedance is specified as 24 ohm and the recommended load impedance quoted as 0–100 ohm.

KEY FEATURES

- Excellent rhythm and pace to music
- Clean, uncluttered but detailed sound
- Very good finish and build quality