



Mains thing

Martin Pipe tries out an expensive mains conditioner from IsoTek.

The Evo3 Nova is a heavy (15kg) and expensive (£5,995) box billed as 'twelve power conditioners in one' from IsoTek, a Winchester-based firm

whose goal is to 'create a better solution to the problem of poor mains quality'. It's an imposing and solidly-built piece of equipment, as one has every right to expect given its price. The Evo3 Nova is supplied with spiked feet, which – if you're worried about scratching surfaces – can sit in machined velvet-backed pucks that IsoTek also includes in the package.

The ribbed aluminium front panel of the conditioner is dominated by a raised section, on which lives a blue numeric LCD screen able to display incoming RMS mains voltage or distortion levels (3.5% for most of the time, here in South East Essex); it can also be turned off altogether. Around the back are no fewer than twelve 13-amp power outlets arranged in colour-coded banks. One block of eight ('B') is rated at 10A a throw, while those in the other ('A') are claimed to cope with loads as high as 16A. The latter sockets, which incorporate 'IsoTek's Direct-Coupled

circuit to deliver low impedance power with a maximum continuous output of 3,680W', are designed for 'high-current electronics' like 'power amplifiers, active loudspeakers and subwoofers'.

Into the 'B' block that features IsoTek's 'Adaptive Gating' circuit – a system that 'auto-senses the connected electronics and provides the optimal level of conditioning required at a maximum 2,300W of continuous power' – would be plugged less power-hungry kit like CD players, DACs and turntables. Each of the outlets, as the IsoTek's description suggests, benefits from its own filter. The benefit of this, according to IsoTek, is 'the optimal isolation between each outlet' and elimination of 'differential mode cross-contamination'. Basically, the unit behaves as twelve independent conditioners that happen to share a common housing.

The Evo3 Nova is claimed to reduce RFI (radio frequency interference) by 75dB, eliminate mains noise, cancel any DC component (a frequent cause, they say, of transformer buzz) and 'fully re-balance' the sinusoidal mains waveform.

Also playing a protective role are three circuit breakers, which are accessible from the base of the Evo3 Nova. Each set of outlets has its own breaker, while the third looks after the combined load presented to your mains supply by all of the connected equipment – and for that matter the conditioner itself.

On which subject, getting power into the unit involves an enormous C19 IEC connector fitted to the rear panel – you'll also find this type of connector on big power amplifiers. An IsoTek Evo3 Premier cable connects this to an appropriate mains outlet.

A peek inside reveals a high standard of construction; some components have been sealed in a pitch-like material, presumably to damp vibrations. IsoTek has of course paid attention to the internal wiring interconnecting these elements. It has specified 'silver-plated OCC (Ohno Continuous Cast) Copper' cable, which incorporates its 'VAD – Virtual Air Dielectric – technology'.

PERFORMANCE

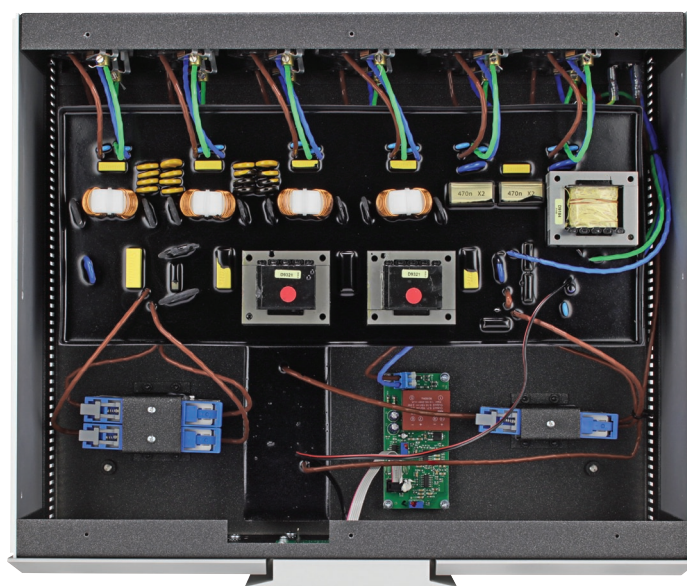
I partnered the Evo3 Nova with a system comprising Arcam A49 integrated amp, Quadral Aurum

Wotan VIII speakers, a Cambridge CXN streamer/Chord Qutest DAC fed from a music collection held on a NAS drive, plus a vinyl playback system comprising a Systemdek IIXE900 belt-drive turntable, Alphason Opal arm, Denon DL304 MC cart and Pro-Ject Phono Box S2 Ultra.

A turntable with MC cartridge was deliberately chosen as its tiny output requires a considerable amount of preamplification – the effects of clean power should be



The outlets of the first B block of eight (black), rated at 10A, are intended for source equipment. Amplifiers and other hungry components plug into the A block (red), with four 16A sockets.



Each outlet has its own conditioner – there's an additional layer of filtering components not obvious in this photo. Note the use of pitch to damp vibrations.

more evident. To deliberately dirty my mains, I installed a Devolo power networking kit.

The Evo3 Nova definitely killed off the effects of the latter. A pristine 180g pressing of Mark Beazley's Stateless sounded noticeably quieter, space between the notes (and for that matter) the tracks of this minimalist work being endowed with an inky blackness that simply wasn't there before. The record has a notable low-end – well, Beazley is the bassist with ambient group Rothko – and I noted, contrary to expectations, that the bass elements of tracks like Three Twenty-Two were both deeper and tighter. Even with LPs in lesser condition (more surface noise) Isotek's conditioner seemed to have a positive effect when it came to bringing out the music.

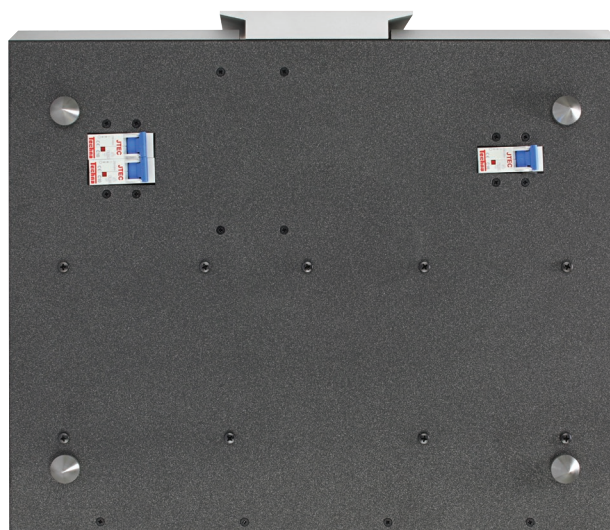
Analogue may demonstrate the biggest improvement, but there are benefits for digital sources too. David Bowie's 'Tis a Pity She Was a Whore (Blackstar, 24/96) benefitted in terms

of both excitement and instrumental focus. More detail was the benefit that the Evo3 Nova brought to

another hi-res favourite, Britten's War Requiem (LSO Live/Nosedá, 24-bit/48kHz). It was easier to define individual singers in the choirs, while the orchestra's brass instruments gained poise and attack. CD-quality material wasn't left behind, either. A lossless rip of Sibelius' Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 43 (Vienna Philharmonic/Leonard Bernstein, digital mid-1980s recording) sounded cleaner and more open.

CONCLUSION

It is undoubtedly expensive, but the Evo3 Nova had a positive effect when it came to the reproduction of music. In my system, deliberately assembled to be sensitive to mains condition, it was a great benefit. I'm left to wonder what audible benefits the Evo3 Nova would deliver to a £30,000 system...Vastly complex then, but equally capable it seemed to me. A unit you should consider auditioning if you own a top-end system.



A trio of circuit breakers are located under the Evo3 Nova. Fiddly to access as the spiked feet provide little clearance.

EVO3 NOVA,
£5,995.00



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best

VERDICT

Clean up and hear the difference!

FOR

- all mains-conditioning in one box
- tangible improvements in focus, clarity and cleanliness
- twelve outlets for any hi-fi system

AGAINST

- very expensive
- fiddly 'pucks' for feet and base-mounted circuit breakers

Isotek
www.isoteksystems.com