Cleaning up

Noel Keywood uses Isotek's EVO 3 Corvus filtered mains distribution block.

The Isotek Evo 3 Corvus is a multi-way power distribution block fitted with internal filters to reduce noise from the mains, degrading sound quality. It has nine mains output sockets and can pass a maximum of 16A, although when plugged into a UK mains socket the limit will be 13A as set by the UK's fused mains plug. That's still enough for any hi-fi and, for most systems, enough outlets too. The only niggle is that of wall-warts – always a difficulty. Those that extend above their mains plug cannot be accommodated if the opposite socket is used, except by one central socket. But at least it can accept one such wart, unlike many distribution blocks.

The case is strongly built, measuring 363mm long, 147mm wide not including small attachment lugs, and 46.5mm high overall. It has a brushed aluminium cover, steel base tray with lugs that allow screw fixing, and a three-pin socket providing power input. The unit comes with a stoutly built Isotek Evo3 Premiere mains attachment cable 148cms (4.5ft approx) long.

Isotek use both common mode and differential mode filtering inside – to combat the two common forms of noise encountered. Common mode comes in on the cables from a noisy source, by the way, whilst Differential mode typically comes in over the air as transmitted interference, this stuff happening outside your home to dirty the incoming supply. A small blue LED shows when the unit is live.

Although all mains powered electronic equipment turns the mains to d.c. internally, killing such noise in the process it would seem, subtler forces are at work, dirty leakage currents from the mains transformer (cheap variety with no internal screen and high leakage inductance) being one problem and RF noise re-radiation into sensitive internal circuits being another. We've all heard those small "cracks' that can occur when a fridge or similar switches on, showing that mains noise gets through; a mains filter like this eliminates such noise, whilst also lowering continuous background mush.

SOUND QUALITY

I used the Corvus between our mains and a system comprising McIntosh MC152 power amplifier feeding Martin Logan ESL-X loudspeakers, that have mains power units I'll note. Sources were digital from an Oppo BDP-205D universal CD player/DAC, and analogue from LP spun by a Timestep Evo Technics SL-1210 Mk2 turntable with SME309 arm, Ortofon Cadenza Bronze MC cartridge and Icon Audio PS3 valve phono stage, this lot occupying six sockets in all.

The sonic impact of this unit was quite obvious, giving a quieter background and a smooth, more liquid flow to music through reduction of apparent hash. It didn't quite knit the electrostatics together, XStat panel to bass bin, as well as Isotek's Evo 3 Mosaic Genesis regenerator that we rely upon – a peculiar effect that took us all by surprise – but it did in similar fashion make the whole system obviously more couth and civil, offering a marked improvement from both digital and analogue sources. This gave a sound that was more dimensional, relaxing and convincing. At the price the Corvus isn't cheap, but it works very well, providing an obvious step up in sophistication.

CONCLUSION

Both the Corvus and Evo 3 Premiere mains lead feel and look like the quality components they are. With nine sockets and 16A capacity this is a large distribution unit able to cope with most hi-fi systems, no matter how ambitious. It offers a marked improvement in sound quality and is recommended.

ISOTEK EVO 3 CORVUS £500

OUTSTANDING - amongst the best

VERDICT
Expensive but well built and effective in improving the sound by giving a quieter background and smoother flow.

FOR
- copes with large systems
- well made
- improves sound

AGAINST
- bulky
- one large wall wart only

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