

FEATURE



FEATURE

TECHNOLOGY BENEFICIARY

The IsoTek Aquarius

by Jeff Dorgay

Power conditioning products are a lot like doctors, even though they claim to “do no harm,” very few actually deliver on that promise. More often than not, most of the power products we’ve sampled give a false sense of quiet at first blush, then upon careful listening either round the transient peaks off, or worse, alter the tonal balance of the audio signal they are supposed to be protecting. In the end, most gear sounds better *not* plugged into a power conditioner. It’s no wonder this segment of the audio world has so much skepticism surrounding it.

FEATURE



However, when line conditioning is done right, you hear more music and more of what your gear is capable of delivering. A successful power conditioner (at least in our minds) doesn't give you a bigger bottom end, or more push anywhere else in the range. A successful power conditioner merely minimizes the noise and artifacts present in the power line so that they don't become part of your signal chain.

So the arguments go that if the power supply in your gear is properly designed, it doesn't need power conditioning, or you think you live in a magical place that your AC power is really clean. Wrong and

wrong. Even a properly designed power supply doesn't make up for the inherent distortion in the AC line, and it doesn't always filter out random garbage (like your neighbor's table saw, or the back EMF in your Linn LP-12 turntable, etc., etc.) present in the power line.

We've used the IsoTek Super Titan for some time now with fantastic result, but it will set you back about \$20k, especially if you throw in a couple of great IsoTek power cords. Another point of contention, but suffice to say IsoTek power cords are some of the finest out there. *(continued)*



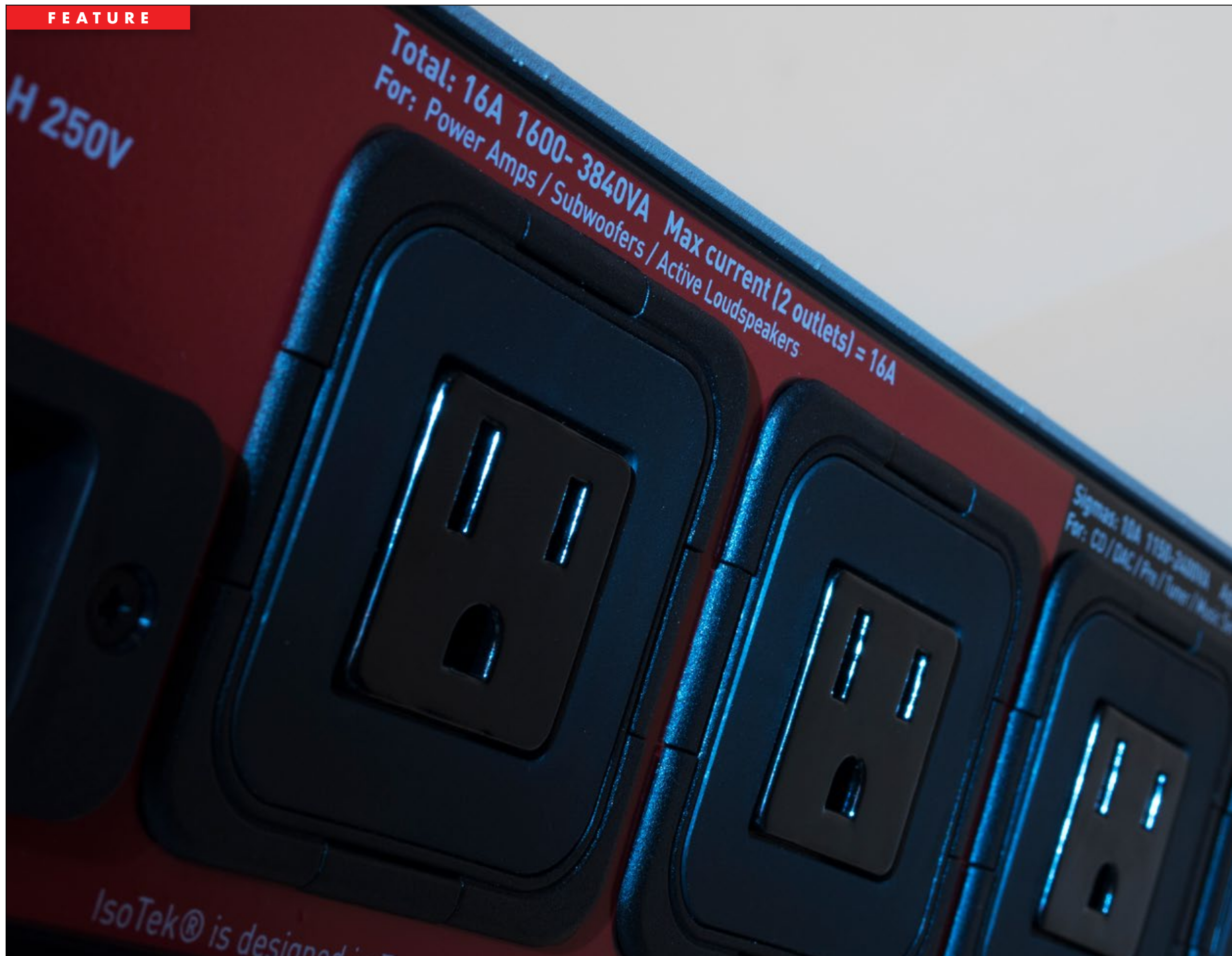
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What you do and don't get for \$1,995

For those of you that don't want to drop \$20,000 on a power conditioner, or for that matter \$20,000 on your *entire system*, we've found a great solution. IsoTek's new Aquarius line conditioner tips the scale at \$1,995 with one of their Premier C19 power cords. Taking advantage of much of what IsoTek has learned on their state of the art power conditioners, it's a great value.

There are a few major differences between the top range Super Titan and the Aquarius. First, the Aquarius only has a constant current capability of about 16 amps, where the Super Titan is rated at 32 amps. (You will need a special outlet to deliver 30A service to a 120V line) Second, the level of filtration that the Super Titan provides is greater, offering even more fine musical detail through and greater dynamic range, but that's what you pay the big bucks for.

Finally, the level of sheer mechanical construction in the Super Titan is much higher, i.e. the ST weighs a *lot* more, and it has proprietary Neutrik outlets, so you have to pair it with IsoTek power cords made specifically for the ST. An extremist approach for a cost no object solution. *(continued)*

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Considering how good IsoTek power cords are, I can't imagine using someone else's if you are starting from scratch with adding power conditioning to your system, but if you're already in possession of power cords you enjoy, with the Aquarius, there is no need to change them. In my case, this worked swimmingly with my Cardas and Nordost power cords already on hand in room two.

The Aquarius features six outlets in two banks on the rear panel. Two outlets make up the high current bank, more suitable for power amplifiers, and the other four, a lower current bank. IsoTek rates these at 16 and 5 amps respectively. All of the integrated amplifiers auditioned had maximum capacities of about 700 watts current drawn from the AC line and none

experienced any kind of current limiting, or reduction in dynamic range. To be safe, I wouldn't push the Aquarius much further than this. Most of you with a 30-100 watt power amp or integrated will be well served by the Aquarius.

The results

There's not a lot to wax poetic about here, and it takes all of about 30 seconds into the first track of whatever you queue up to hear the effect that the Aquarius makes. You'll be instantly struck by a lower noise floor. Leaving your system at exactly the same volume level before adding the Aquarius illustrates this brilliantly. The minute you fire it back up it feels louder, and that's thanks to the lower noise floor provided by the Aquarius. *(continued)*

FEATURE



FEATURE

Should you track through some of your favorite acoustic tracks, you will notice better clarity and articulation throughout the range. Recordings that seemed densely packed to the point that they were tough to listen to will prove easier to listen to and more relaxed in their presentation.

That's it. And that's all a great power conditioner should do. There are a lot of \$10,000 power conditioners that *can't* do this simple thing. The IsoTek succeeds brilliantly at "doing no harm." Even in the context of a modest system, comprised of a Rega Brio integrated amplifier, Simaudio 260D CD player and a pair of Totem Signature One loudspeakers, (Total system cost, about \$7,000 with cables) the Aquarius offers a component level upgrade. While it is always tough to place a percentage on this kind of thing, I feel the IsoTek makes at least a 100% upgrade. It's as if you stepped up a notch on all three components.

If you aren't feeding your system clean power, you aren't hearing what you've spent your hard earned cash on. The IsoTek Aquarius delivers the goods, and at a price that is approachable for nearly all audio enthusiasts. We are happy to award it one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2017. ●

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