

SCALE MODEL EQUIPMENT COMPANY • ENGLAND

Retro roundup

UK engineering meets world class workmanship... **John Howes** on the history of SME

The original Scale Model Equipment Company was founded by Alastair Robertson-Aikman in 1946. Its first products included wooden-bodied racing cars in kit form. Alastair had a passion for hi-fi and, in 1958, being disillusioned with the tonearms available at the time, decided to design and build his own. This prototype evolved into the Model 3009 and, with its superb looks, finish and sound quality, became an instant success.

In 1960 the 3012 12in pick-up arm sold for £20.12s.6d plus £6.17s.6d purchase tax, making it one of the most expensive models available. Nearly 50 years later many of these arms are still cherished by their owners and the arm remains much sought. With original box it can fetch up to £1000.

It was in 1961 that the company shortened its name to SME and moved from Charlton Street to a purpose built factory in Mill Road, Steyning, Sussex. The Series I arm was superseded by the Series II in 1962, the earlier steel arm tube being replaced by a lighter, polished bright-anodised aluminium tube. Between 1962 and 1972, around 180,000 Series II arms were manufactured



ABOVE: Series II 3012/Thorens TD124



ABOVE LEFT: A sales leaflet from 1972 showing 3009 Series II improved 9in arms
ABOVE RIGHT: Series II 3012 arm

giving a good indication of their success.

Released in 1972 the lower mass Series II improved arm was available with a choice of fixed or detachable headshells. Five years later the Series III arm made its debut utilising a detachable titanium arm. The wall thickness of this arm was just twice the thickness of a human hair!

PERFECT FIVE

Always in pursuit of perfection, Alastair introduced the Series V pick-up arm in 1986. Uniquely it featured a one-piece pressure die-cast magnesium arm combining incredible strength with minimum weight.

Alastair's son Cameron joined SME in 1990 to carry the family tradition forwards. In 1991 the Series 30 turntable made its debut, weighing in at 42kgs! Having a high mass and novel rubber suspension, new levels of vinyl replay were achieved. The release of the Model 20 and, later, the Model 10 turntables enabled SME to appeal to a wider market. What is not generally

known is SME's involvement in supplying specialist parts for Formula One racing teams, aerospace companies, medical and laboratory equipment.

Earlier this year I was given a guided tour of the SME factory. The investment in

'Nearly 50 years on, the 3012 arm can fetch up to £1000 with its original box'

the latest machinery is everywhere to be seen, with 'In house' facilities for die-casting, injection moulding, anodising and plating. The commitment and job satisfaction shown by all the company's workers made me feel proud to be British. It is refreshing to see that despite a global recession, SME is still busy exporting top quality British made products all over the world. ☺