



► DETAILS

PRODUCT
SME Model 35**ORIGIN**
UK**TYPE**
Belt-driven
turntable**WEIGHT**
38kg**DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
480 x 270 x 430mm**FEATURES**
• 33 and 45rpm
electronic
speed control
• SME Series
Vi tonearm
• Separate PSU**DISTRIBUTOR**
Cadence
Distribution**WEBSITE**
sme.co.uk
cadencedistribution.
co.uk

Model behaviour

SME's turntable and tonearm evolution – revolution? – is complete with the launch of its new Model 8 and Model 60-inspired '35, the latter equipped with Series Vi tonearm

For a hi-fi company that previously was apparently not in a huge rush – it took some three decades before introducing its first turntable, followed by a seven-year wait between the second and third models – SME seems to now be moving at a lightning pace. The flagship Model 60 arrived back in 2022, followed swiftly by Mk2 versions of the Models 12 and 15 over the next two years. And now it has added two more turntables to its portfolio – the Model 8, replacing the Model 6 as the company's entry-level unit, and the Model 35 seen here, slotting in below the Model 60.

Retailing for £36,000 in Black or Silver finishes and £38,000 for the anodised Midnight Blue or the

steel-blue-tinged Gunmetal option of the unit you see here before you, the family resemblance of the Model 35 to the Model 60 is clear. The deck supersedes the Model 30 in the range, which has been moved to the 'Legacy' section of SME's website, along with

The Model 35 makes many other turntables sound flat by comparison

the Model 20 and 15. That said, all three of those have received the 'Mk2' motor and PSU upgrades from the Model 60, and according to Cadence Group, owners of SME, can still be

purchased on special order, complete with full warranty.

Given that the non-legacy products now comprise the Model 8, Model 12 Mk2, Model 35 and Model 60, along with the Synergy package, there's a noticeable gap in the range. SME is remaining tight-lipped whether a 'Model 25' is in the pipeline for the future, but we'd be surprised if there weren't a series of sketches on a drawing board somewhere...

The Model 35 takes its inspiration from the Model 60, but with some changes in a few key areas. Firstly, let's get out of the way the areas that remain the same. The 24-pole AC motor, and its external control boxes – one containing the mains transformer and unregulated DC

power supply, the second sporting the turntable's on/off and speed controls, and housing the regulated PSU and DSP motor drive circuitry. The enclosure of the latter item looks slightly different to that of the Model 60, but its contents are the same.

Also inspired by its range-topping sibling are the Model 35's decoupling feet with multi-point isolation. These are adjustable for levelling but, as the eagle-eyed among you will no doubt have noticed, there are only three of them. This means that the turntable's footprint is a good deal smaller than the Model 60's, a deliberate choice to make it more rack-friendly. Meanwhile, the rear foot has been neatly tucked under the platter to reduce the overall depth. The suspension top cap fixings have also been hidden for cleaner lines in these areas.

The Model 35's main bearing is again a high-carbon steel type

The Model 35 echoes the Model 60's realistic handling of low frequencies

spinning on a precision ball bearing, with sintered bronze bushings. This bearing is located in a silicone oil damping bath, which is identical in principle to that of the Model 60, albeit slightly different in design.

As before, its aim is to absorb any spurious resonances resulting from the rotation of the platter, including motor noise transmitted via the belt. Machined from aluminium alloy and weighing 4.6kg, the platter features an integral iso-damp mat, diamond-



turned with a fine scroll, in its playing surface. The Model 35's threaded centre spindle, combined with SME's usual record clamp and support washer, closely couples the record to the platter's surface.

In suspension terms, the Model 35 doesn't use metal springs, but instead employs 15 firm, rubberised bands per tower to support the upper plinth of its dual-layer chassis. Each tower is undamped and, in another departure from the Model 60, not fitted with any lateral support bands. One is fitted underneath the upper plinth to steady the chassis along the axis of the motor, but there is no other

horizontal stabilisation. And while there are rubber 'bumpers' inside each suspension column to limit movement, the deck must be set up so that these are not in contact with the central pillar in each housing. As a result, the Model 35 is a touch more complex to install than other SME turntables and levelling of both the mounting surface and the turntable chassis, are critical. It's the sort of job that's perhaps best left to your dealer if you're not fully confident of your own ability to do it correctly.

Another headline upgrade of the Model 35 is that it comes fitted with a brand-new SME tonearm. The Series Vi ('Improved') will also be available on the Model 12 Mk2 going forward and effectively replaces the Series V, although the standard variant will continue to be fitted to the Legacy models.

The Series Vi retains all the original features of the Series V, including fine control over vertical tracking force/angle, but the tube is now a CNC-machined HD polymer, as introduced by the Series VA arm of the Model 60. Other than this, the design is identical, with a tapered, circular cross-section main armtube, high-specification ABEC 7 bearings and magnesium alloy bearing yoke. Internal wiring is from Crystal Cable, and this terminates in a small junction box on the lower chassis with two well-spaced phono sockets and a chunky grounding terminal.





Sound quality

With an Ortofon Cadenza Black (HFC 483) moving-coil cartridge installed in the Series Vi arm, and the Model 35 connected to a reference Yamaha C-5000/M-5000 pre/power amplifier combination, the result is a

The Model 35 comes up trumps when dealing with any 'lesser-quality' LPs

system sound that enthralls from the first few bars of music. There aren't many turntables that offer the dynamics, solidity and sheer scale of an SME design – and these characteristics are very much present and correct in the Model 35's performance. Such is its dynamic

range and sense of effortlessness, it makes many other turntables sound flat by comparison.

The essential character of the Model 35 is seemingly very neutral, no doubt informed by its excellent pitch stability. Musical information is extracted from the LP grooves without any feeling of artifice, leading to a realism that is quite astonishing at times. Many good-quality turntables will leave you thinking: "that's a superb representation of a double bass in front of me". The Model 35, however, is more likely to leave you convinced that there's a real double bass in front of you.

Listening to *It Had To Be You* from Lyn Stanley's recently released *Tribute To 1924* album, the Model 35's vivid evocation of her jazz band within the space between and in front of the loudspeakers is jaw-dropping. This is

a first-class pressing, with mastering by Bernie Grundman, but we've not yet heard it 'come alive' in such a three-dimensional manner.

Helping here is the openness that the Model 35 exhibits across the midband and treble. SME's Series V arm has always been a master of this, but the new Vi takes it one step further, bringing even greater clarity. Softly tapped cymbals and tinkling percussion can sometimes tend to float around the extremes of the soundstage, hoping to be noticed, but the Model 35 makes sure they are an integral part of the listening experience. Tracks like *Isn't It A Little Late?* from Eleanor McEvoy's glorious *Yola* album seem to be better focused across the board, as the Model 35 pulls all of the jittering percussive elements, behind her echoed vocal, firmly into place.



THE MODEL 60 FLAGSHIP REVEALED

Launched in 2022 to mark its Diamond jubilee, SME's Model 60 assumed flagship duties from the Model 30/12, which was itself the evolution of a turntable first debuted over 20 years earlier. While ostensibly similar in its suspended dual-chassis design, and even retaining its predecessor's slightly oversized 330mm platter and clamp, the Model 60 represents a comprehensive upgrade, and was declared by our sister publication *Hi-Fi News*: "the most pitch-stable belt-driven deck we have tested". This all-important quality is shared by the new Model 35.

Among the Model 60's raft of refinements are the suspension systems built into its four, height-

adjustable towers, which feature an inverted, larger version of SME's signature O-ring isolation. The high-carbon steel bearing has also been refined, gaining a silicone oil-filled damping bath, while the Model 30/12's DC motor has been replaced by a 24-pole AC type with external two-box, power/DSP supply, also now leveraged by the Model 35.

Emphasising its top-flight status, the Model 60's aluminium alloy chassis is available in a choice of Black, Silver and Blue Honeycomb finishes, a 'Diamond' version, plus a limited edition series of 'One of One' colours.

Pricing starts at a cool £55,900.

As well as this excellent clarity and eye for fine detail, the Model 35 impresses with its space and imagery. Some turntables project out at you, some stretch images wide, and both are always enjoyable, but SME's new model can't be pinned down to a simple single character trait – it just follows the material. Playing Jennifer Warnes' version of *Bird On A Wire* from *Famous Blue Raincoat*, the Model 35 is in wide mode, as this performance offers a great swathe of information broadly stretched across the soundstage.

In contrast, William Ackerman's *Visiting*, from the 1985 *An Invitation To Windham Hill* sampler is much more of a 'front-to-back' delivery, its recorded acoustic being less broad but blessed with great depth and subtle emotion. The turntable makes this easy to appreciate and remains composed at the track's crescendo when acoustic guitar, fretless bass and electric Lyricon are giving it all they have. Each instrument keeps its

place in both spatial and rhythmical terms, avoiding crumbling into a disjointed mess.

Across all of our test tracks, the Model 35's low-end handling remains a head-turner. The introductory bass guitar line on the title track of Donald Fagen's *Morph The Cat* is about as deep, fruity and taut as anyone could possibly hope for, but it's surprising the way in which it remains so when Fagen starts to sing.

Pace setter

The Model 35's drive system and the pace with which it whips the platter up to speed are reminiscent of a direct-drive design – so much so that it has many of that technology's sonic hallmarks. Bass is almost endlessly deep, but tight, rhythmical and blessed with insight. There is a small frisson of warmth at all times, which is pleasant and a family trait shared with the Model 12 Mk2.

This does serve as a subtle reminder that this isn't quite a Model 60; SME's

flagship turntable still has the edge in terms of sheer neutrality. But elsewhere the performance of the Model 60 is echoed in the way the Model 35 sounds realistic in the low frequencies. *Duet* from Rob Wasserman's *Duets* features just the man himself playing his bass, and the texture in each note is fully revealed. Moreover, not only does it convey his hand running up and down the instrument's neck, you can clearly hear the change in height as this happens.

Feeding a deck like this a diet of audiophile pressings highlights its best abilities, but how 'lesser-quality' records are dealt with is equally revealing. The Model 35 comes up

There aren't many turntables that offer SME's dynamics, solidity and scale

trumps here, picking the maximum music and rhythm from an old 7in copy of Real Life's *Catch Me I'm Falling*. Synth bass and drums are punched out with verve and the whole track romps along cheerily. SME's turntable does not attempt to disguise the flattened depth perspective or the slightly ragged top end, but still pulls every ounce of musical enjoyment from those much-played grooves.

Conclusion

SME has only gone and done it again. The Model 35 turntable and Series Vi tonearm are brilliantly engineered and turn in a magnificently musical, poised and joyous performance. The level of insight and dynamic effortlessness that they offer is rarely short of incredible. Even better, the Model 35 gives a strong flavour of the Model 60's capabilities at less than two-thirds of its price. That sounds like a bargain to us! ●

Hi-FiChoice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Beautifully engineered; magnificently musical

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Nothing at the price

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: A flavour of the flagship Model 60 at a fraction of the cost

FEATURES



OVERALL

