

# Clean Easy

**It was January 1969 when Keith Monks launched his legendary record cleaning machine. It went on to become the most respected device of its type. Now, exactly forty years later, comes the brand new Omni from a revitalised company run by his son Jonathon. David Price scrubs up...**

**R**think this machine is a very important product. Let us not forget, vinyl is no longer made in serious quantities, forcing analogue addicts to buy ever more second-hand discs. As used black plastic becomes ever more popular, then so prices creep slowly up – or in some instances, not so slowly! The temptation then is to buy cheaper vinyl and put up with the snap, crackle and pop. Well, if you've got one of these, the chances are good that you can restore even 50p charity shop records to better than new condition.

Of course, if the surfaces are scratched or worn, even a Keith Monks machine won't help, but given a decent basic disc, this gizmo can work wonders. Moreover, it doesn't just clean the surface, but does a 'deep clean' in the groove(s), removing some of the gunk that's been stuck in there since the day it came off the press. The result is that the record can (and often does) actually sound better than new...

Of course, as they say, "other record cleaners are available", but the Keith Monks was always the one that serious record collectors recommended – and record libraries of august broadcast organisations such as the BBC used. A serious record cleaner such as this, therefore, 'unlocks' all those dog-eared old LPs and singles in your local second-hand shop – making them bargains to be had that most other buyers wouldn't consider so much as useable. In truth,

it is an essential accessory for truly serious collectors and (because it doesn't just clean, it removes the residue from the presses) audiophiles alike.

## DESIGN

Although working the Keith Monks is quite simple and relatively foolproof, the machine itself is quite a complex piece of good old fashioned mechanical engineering. It has a number of subsystems, all of which have to work together – a bit like a great big Meccano project. Built with professional broadcast organisations in mind, it gives the impression that it's built to last, and feel almost over-engineered for domestic use.

The heart of the machine is the turntable motor, which is a heavy duty direct drive affair designed for continuous operation. This drives the platter, on top of which is a special new design of mat made of rubber, and triangulated so any excess cleaning fluid lying on is going to drain into the mat's recesses while the points of the hundreds of small rubber triangles support the record itself without getting it wet.

This main motor is used to spin the record on both wash and dry cycles, but there's another, smaller motor which works on the dry cycle only, driving the suction arm via a small thick flat section belt, pulling it from the inside 'run out' groove out to the outside 'lead in' groove as it sucks up the fluid. Working in conjunction the arm drive is what Jonathon Monks calls, "probably the biggest, coolest, quietest vacuum pump in the industry". It's a German made medical grade design, used for kidney dialysis machines, and so is used to continuous operation. This sucks the fluid up from arm on the



drying cycle, and is set to work at 20in Hg – in accordance with the original Percy Wilson design. Jonathon Monks adds that any more suction can exert too much force on the record and make the nozzle leave spiral marks on the disc. As with the arm drive motor, the suction pump only works on the dry cycle.

The final part of the equation is the wash pump. Although the cute little retro-styled knob is the only thing visible to the machine's user, underneath lies the same compact hand pump used in the classic Mini motor car, before it went to an electric device in the early nineteen seventies! Actually, although it's manual, it works effectively and is all that is needed to do the job of wetting the bristles of the fine artist's brush hair cleaning block.

Just like a car bonnet, the top of the Keith Monks machine pulls up and rests on a stay. Performing this relatively simple operation (with the aid of the chromed handle in the middle of the fascia) exposes the innards of the machine, showing the various pumps and motors in all their glory, along with the bobbin that holds the thread that runs, one quarter inch per operation, past the tip of the suction arm. You also get easy access to the fluid jars; one to supply the special cleaning fluid, the other to collect the dirty stuff that comes off the disc via the suction arm.



