



the VAC phono stage is so lush, rather than hygienically forensic, that it was more of an exercise in degrees of analogue excellence. In other words, it tested the cartridges as much as it did LP-vs-tape.

CRY FREEDOM

Let's just say that this was the closest I've heard yet of an LP approaching the utter command of a tape. The inherent

BELOW: Rear of Signature 200iQ power amp hosts balanced (XLR) and single-ended (RCA) inputs, stereo/mono configurations and choice of 1-2ohm, 2-4ohm, 4-8ohm speaker outputs

ABOVE: Inside the Signature 200iQ power amp showing tube PSU board [top] and L/R audio boards [bottom]. Again, note full-sized components and comprehensive hand-wiring

weaknesses of vinyl (no, I'm not gonna launch into that diatribe) were minimised such that the TechDAS TDC01 Ti MC [HFN Sep '14] displayed remarkable dynamic swings and attack I hadn't accessed before. Allied to the inherent silkiness and warmth of the VAC Master Preamp, with the seemingly limitless power reserves of the Signature 200iQ, it was a sound that proclaimed freedom from constraint, with



KEVIN HAYES

During our review, editor Paul Miller took the opportunity to talk with VAC's co-founder and guiding light, Kevin Hayes. We discussed Kevin's studied application of what – to the casual observer – might look like a nest of multi-coloured point-to-point wiring [see left] to 'fine-tune' the performance of both pre and power amp, before moving swiftly on to the enviable power output achieved by the Signature 200iQ's seemingly modest array of tubes. Are these running particularly hot?

'With respect to overall power, it's generally been forgotten that very soon after the inception of the KT88, nearly 70 years ago, the GEC/Genalex data sheets showed a 100W/pair operating point in its application circuits' says Kevin. 'In practice, we find that some pairs of KT88s will exceed 100W. The KT88 delivers exceptional sound under these conditions and, in our circuits, average tube life is quite good – typically 6000-8000 hours.'

VAC's custom output transformers are also core to the amp's 'real world' performance. 'In stereo mode the taps are effectively for 2, 4 and 8ohm; in mono, a parallel operating configuration, they are effectively 1, 2 and 4ohm. So, in mono mode [as tested here] the maximum power, lowest distortion, and widest freq. response occur into a 4ohm load on the top tap, which is labelled "4-8".'

'Most audiophiles will try more than one tap to see which best suits their loudspeaker (with its varying impedance curve), so we label the taps with a range rather than a single number'. PM

