



EQUIPMENT REVIEW

The Quadraspire Q4EVO and Sunoko-Vent SVT Racks

by Roy Gregory

Since they first appeared in 1995, Quadraspire's elegant, versatile and compact racks have been my default choice for accommodating hi-fi equipment, especially where price and funds are at a premium. The attractively understated modular approach also allowed users to grow their rack along with their system.

The original Q4 rack has evolved somewhat over the years, but the elements that made it work in the first place – the veneered MDF shelves and modular aluminium uprights – are still present and correct. In fact, its biggest single failing as a hi-fi rack was that it was too small; perfect for the likes of Naim or Audiolab, anything that stepped outside those dimensional norms was always going to be a struggle to accommodate. That problem was solved by the arrival of the Sunoko-Vent, a bigger brother to the Q4 with a larger footprint, thicker shelves and thicker, solid aluminium uprights. Designed from the ground up as a hi-fi rack, it also incorporated slots cut in the shelves to help ventilation. Together they offered affordable and attractive solutions for almost any system situation, be it a plethora of black boxes littered with green lights or a smaller number of much larger units, filled with glowing bottles. And so things might have stayed, but for Quadraspire's search for even better sonic performance. Enter the Q4EVO and Sunoko-Vent SVT.

At first glance the new models are indistinguishable from the originals. In fact, it offers an upgrade option, but we're getting ahead of ourselves.

It's not until you flip the Q4EVO over that you see the difference between it and the original. The underside of each shelf is deeply scored by a series of grooves, spreading out from the centre point and augmented by a quartet of organic loops in between the spokes. The intention is to break up the dominant resonance within the MDF structure and sonically there's no missing the benefit. Working with a basic two-box system based on the Creek Destiny products, moving from an original Q4 to the EVO delivered a noticeably cleaner and crisper sound, with an increase in both micro and macro dynamics and a welcome gain in instrumental colour. Playing the SACD release of Genesis' *Selling England By The Pound*, the dense layers were noticeably better separated, their individual textures more distinct. The complex, overlapping ▶

▶ sounds that create the opening to 'I Know What I Like' are clearly defined, both in character and space, while the ticking track that heralds the vocal moves much more definitely across the soundstage, left to right in an arcing path. When Gabriel's vocals start, spoken and intimate, not only are they held apart from the backing, but they are much more immediate, the transition from speech to singing more natural and more obvious. These changes are all about degrees of expression and contrast rather than wholesale transformation, but they're well worthwhile – enough to make a replacement shelf or two for core components worth considering.

The changes to the Sunoko-Vent table are similarly unobtrusive but rather more far reaching. It too gains from grooving on the underside of the shelf, although the parallel ventilation slots that already exist mean that the remodelling can be far more subtle, with a fan of grooves cut across the underside of the ribs, subdividing them into different lengths. The other big change is hidden away at the interface between the shelf and uprights. Here, a brass insert allows much greater tension to be exerted when tightening the legs while the additional material interface is claimed to help dissipate energy into the structure more effectively. With a mix of original shelves, shelves with inserts and shelves with grooves, it's easy to hear what each mod is doing.

Of course, there's also the question of how the larger table relates, sonically speaking, to the original. In reality, the choice of support will probably depend more on the equipment being supported than anything else, but it's worth noting that even in their original forms, the Sunoko-Vent enjoyed a worthwhile edge in terms of transparency and the tonal separation of instruments over its smaller brother. The new Q4EVO actually demolishes that difference, but then, the revised Sunoko-Vent has its own cards to play.

One of the things that I like about the big, Quadraspire table is its inherent sense of confident stability, a quality that extends to its sonic character. Ironically, the new brass inserts on the SVT shelves detract slightly (very slightly) from that four-square stability – physically at least. On a standard, low table you'll barely notice, but build five or six shelves high with longish spacers and there is a definite flexibility in the overall structure. The good news is that it doesn't extend to the sound, which is bigger, bolder and even more confident than before. However, if you are supporting large, heavy units then two lower racks might be a better way to go – not that that is exactly news!

The brass inserts have a very worthwhile effect on the sound of the rack, bringing a clarity and sense of added purpose to the sound. They make the original shelves sound congested and a little muddled, so that on a track like the aforementioned 'I Know What I Like' with its dense and murky bottom end, it becomes much easier to separate the bass guitar and keyboard lines from one another (and Phil Collins drums) once the inserts are in place. Likewise the multi-tracked vocals on Moby's 'Mistake', where the fan of additional chorus voices behind the central vocal are far easier to pick and separate from each other. No, it's not night and day but it is worthwhile, releasing more of the performance from the electronics, more of the performance from the artists.

Moving up to the latest shelves with the additional grooves in their underside, once again you get a small but noticeable improvement. This time it has more to do with texture and instrumental identity, but taken with the improvement that comes with the inserts the results are definitely worth having. Familiar recordings like the Du Pre/Elgar Cello Concerto sound much more like themselves – remember that we're talking a pretty modest set of electronics here – with the solo instrument rich, woody and vibrant, the string and woodwinds much more distinctly voiced in support. Dynamic contrasts,

so critical to this emotive performance, are more dramatic, as is the sense of musical light and shade. Finally, when things get really busy (the crescendos in the Elgar, or the *ffff* passages in Holst's Mars [The DG Steinberg, replayed on the VPI Classic] an underrated performance if ever there was one) the system manages to sound less strained, less on edge, less likely to lose control. In fact, while I would call this an evolution rather than a revolution that doesn't undermine the value of what's been achieved; these changes are entirely to the good, with no downsides whatsoever, and that itself is pretty unusual.

If you already own a Quadraspire table, should you rush out and upgrade the shelves? Any new shelves you need will be of the new type anyway, and it would certainly be worth making sure that those go under the key components in the system. Likewise, if you are going to go to the expense of upgrades to your equipment, then it might be worth including the cost of a new shelf too. Worthwhile with the original shelves, the increase in dynamics and transparency that Stillpoints couplers introduced was greater with the later versions of both Q4 and SVT, underlining the fact that these racks are an excellent basis for future upgrades. +



SPECIFICATIONS

Q4EVO: £95 per shelf

Sunoko-Vent SVT: £200 per shelf
(both including columns)

Manufacturer:

Quadraspire Ltd

Tel. +44 1179 863228

Net. www.quadraspire.com