

ISOL-8 MINI SUB AXIS

AC Power Line Conditioning

Isol-8 is a British company that has been operating since 2003, producing filters, power accessories and regenerates and is the other half of designer Nic Poulson's work. The other half is none other than the well-known Hybrid Trilogy enhancers, which were introduced into our country several years ago in the 90's and served the logic of a more sonically neutral hybrid compared to, for instance, Pathos. The British designer is a sound engineer with a long experience, having worked for the BBC in the 80's and as an electronic circuit designer, with considerable experience in airport lighting systems. He places great emphasis on power supplies and was one of the first to diagnose that there is a need in the market for high-quality power filters, after all he was the main person responsible behind the establishment of the well-known company Iso-Tek, which he left to start Isol-8. These two brands are today among the most famous in the field of audiophile filtering and inevitably carry the common DNA of Mr. Poulson, but of course their current products, based on our experience, only themselves are not sonically. The British approach is given in terms of finesse and tonal equilibrium for the Isol-8 and the Mini Sub Axis under test, with the circuit for blocking DC and the Transmodal Filter technique for the suppression of differential mode noise (which we can describe as asymmetric input of noise into the power lines, requiring more complex solution techniques), it is one of the most influential we have heard, causing significant differences in the sound of the system it is called to treat. Depending on the type of system that will be connected – and as is always the case with such products – these differences may more rarely manifest as net improvements in all areas or, more commonly, come along with variations in tone and temporal character that need to be carefully assessed by the owner of the system. Practically, however, the biggest problem faced with such products by the prospective buyer is the need to "layer" them before they are assessed, which may require several weeks of operation. The Mini Sub Axis, for example, has excessive acidity in the treble in the first few days in the stream while other filters can, on the contrary, sound rather dull at first, such as the Furman I use, etc. In other words, it is a process that takes time and a lot of patience before we form a definitive opinion on whether such and such a filter makes us.



by Paris Kotsis



English nobleman...

... Designed and manufactured in England, not even in the UK! This is written on its back, under the socket for the socket and the grounding terminal, which is useful in any case, e.g. when no machine is connected to the grounding of the house through its socket. The aluminium façade and dimensions of the Mini Sub Axis, as well as the build quality of the chassis, allude to a small British final amplifier. Its backrest includes six suco sockets with lids, two for large consumptions of 10A and four for 6A. As we look at its back, the test screwdriver should be lit at the right exit of each socket (phase), if it is upside down we should also turn the filter socket upside down, in the socket from where it gets current. There is no ignition switch or circuit breaker, just a fuse in the IEC slot. The company refers to protection against spikes and overcurrents at the entrance, with a "energy absorption" circuit, usually based on sacrificial MOV (metal oxide varistor) components. This is followed by a board for blocking the DC, which includes many small electrolytic capacitors (24 pieces of 3,300µF). Then the filtering is divided into low current and high current. The first section is implemented on the large board, with independent filtering for each of the four outputs of 6A (to reduce the interactions between the sources) and the transmodal filtering stage, with two large Mundorf coils and Rifa's PHE film capacitors. The second part is based on a few more Rifa and a large custom coil that, according to the manufacturer, does not limit the dynamics of the final amplifiers, where clearly the manufacturer has avoided the technique of transmodal because it would probably need very large coils in this position. Overall, judging by the materials

and the appearance of the layout, the Mini Sub Axis presents an audiophile image that is far from the industrial standards of the genre.

Renaissance!

The Mini Sub Axis arrived in my hands along with the Iso Link cable, to which it was connected throughout the test. It had already taken a few dozen hours of operation and, for a start, was asked to power the smallest system in the house, the AV, which includes audio and video devices and plays directly plugged in, without a filter. There he stayed for ten days, giving with good morning deeper black, cleaner and brighter white, more vivid colors and more detail on TV and Blu-ray player. Sonically, this system lost some of its warmth (it plays with low-cost chip amp amp of 6.5W and wide range 12incha loudscore loudscorks of the 60's with alnico magnet) and dried slightly in the middle ones, but gained considerable extent and vibrancy in the treble, while the resolution and dynamic range across the spectrum increased relatively. The soundstage as if "unstuck" more than the speakers, gained depth and height and the idols shifted slightly further back, acquiring an interesting hologram with very good focus. The speed increased as a perception, writing more intensely and sharper the pace but also losing some of the freedom of flow of the one-way speaker. The low frequencies finally cleaned and spread out in space with cleaner fronts, although they lost something of their weight. Overall, in this system, I had remarkable profits with audiophile criteria, but in the end I did not need them, since its pleasant character declined without any significant additional information (which this system does not have anyway). When I removed the filter, the richest and juiciest sound of the system came back, although now it seemed noticeably more fluffy and noisy to me. Ignorance is bliss! Conclusion: Isol-8 wants a system significantly superior to the basic one.

So I continued with the next system, which may have a similar composition (70's Sansui 2x25W amplifier fully refreshed in capacitors, one-way speakers in a quarter wave cabin with the top 5incho of Fostex) but the components are much-much better and there is a remarkable analysis of the timbro and the time values. Here acts as a filter the small Furman AC-210AE replaced by isol-8. Now the important effect of the English filter has become much clearer and the system has literally been transformed, but slowly and exruciatingly passing through various stages. For a week I waited for the treble to fall and then I waited for it to come out low, that when it happened the treble was lost for a while! Finally, somewhere in 15 days the filter seemed to stabilize its behavior with bass-medium-treble in good balance between them. The significantly improved level of quietness, compared to the low-cost Furman, this time found information to reveal analogous to the improvement of the ratio s/n . I literally got fun of the analysis and the "light" in the treble, from the pheasant purity of the low, which thus seemed to justify the slightly less gravity in the first octave, from the incarnable dynamics, from the delicate and colorful harmonics of the middle region and its endless texture, from the lack of stress and mechanicality to the transitional ones. My Sansui was now playing like a modern, quiet triod! But in this system it also seemed that the whole scene is shifting slightly further back and Fostex's line in the mid-highs, which can be made from penetrating to annoying, now sounded somewhat domesticated and laid back. The lower bass and the upper treble were an idea further out of the middle, creating -in combination with the extra information that emerged from the very low noise threshold- a hi-rez file scene with candle-like beauties. This result left me ambivalent, since here I have been set up so that I can hear retro solid state. If that was my only system, though, I might not let isol-8 go! In this system, then, the character became even more pleasant and at the same time more technically impressive, but it moved a little away from the aesthetic data of the system.



Then something happened that left me speechless.

With the Isol-8 in place, I sat down after a long time to hear the big system of the house (Ocellia-Bluenote, again with Furman filter) and noticed that it does not play as I remember it! The bass was now cleaner and leaner, albeit less bulky and heavy, the middle ones more triodic and the treble more intense and bright, perhaps even an idea glossy (Ocellia's treble with Bluenote are matte and slightly dark). I immediately realized that the English filter "speaks" from the next room, and then I rushed to unplug it and put in its place again the little Furman. The sound of Ocellia then returned to the style I remember! If this makes you for a small comparison, then we can say that although Isol-8 is much more effective in reducing noise, thickness and... blackness of the current, but it is also a little more "directorial" tonally and temporally than the little Furman. That's what I understood when I heard the second system again, with its own AC-210AE. With Fostex/Sansui this didn't bother me that much, but Ocellia and Steroid don't lift a fly on their sword! I think, however, that this would not only work in one direction: If there was a small conflict between the filters of the two manufacturers hanging in the same house facility (but in different fuses), then the three Furmans of the house may also have bothered, interfered with isol-8's work (but I admit that I did not bother to disconnect them all for a few days, so that I can see).

Regardless of this, however, the above test conditions are anyway very hard for any filter, so we typically do it a disservice. Fortunately, the house also has a more conventional-monitor-ambitious installation, with a three-way speaker and a transit (Tripath TA2020). In this system, then, we have only good words to say about the changes brought about by Isol-8. Here the triodic transformation in the middle ones worked much more neutrally and discreetly, the vivid treble and bass did not pull the tonal curve in more commercial directions and the low of the open baffle sounded for the first time so deep and clean, full of crystal clear harmonics, I wish I had two more ears to enjoy it! The large monitor yielded significantly more resolution to the mid-range without drying them out and generally took advantage of the great quietness of isol-8 to give even more volume and more detailed sound, without moving tonal and temporally. But this system, like 99.9% of the market's multi-way roads, is not so "fresh" and free in time, therefore so vulnerable tonal, but is set up to give a lot of dB of dynamic range across the spectrum, equally comfortably delivering sounds from whisper to explosion, so noise – despite any manipulation – is its biggest enemy.



But how does it do it?

Conclusion? The Mini Sub Axis does a crazy job! Its ability to dissolve noise between... molecules of music and to eliminate the transistoral darkness from the silence between the intertransient silence, making it an organic, bright harmonic aura rather than a black hole, makes it unique for my experience so far with the various filters of the market. Isol-8 will take a system with very good specifications and turn it into a protoclclassato, giving triodal virtues of transparency and description to the mid-range, an extremely stable and focused scene and levels of resolution and dynamic range, especially at the ends of the spectrum, which clearly belong to the now, the era of hi-resolution. And although he knows of tonal beauty as little as he still does, he will not impose it unconditionally, revealing without hesitation the weak links of a system. So, if we exclude the most highly minimalist systems that have a very strong, non-negotiable sound aesthetic and, not accidentally, often associate us with the past with individual elements of authentic rendering, then I cannot imagine a modern hi-end system (the school of "divide and rule") that does not benefit dramatically from the presence of the Mini Sub Axis. Yes, it's that good!

With most filters you have the initial impression that something bad is being removed and then you try to figure out if... along with the bathwater were burned and the baby. The Mini Sub Axis works differently: it automatically transfers you to another space-time, away from the contamination of the outlet, in complete isolation if you will from the evils of PPC. Even on the worst day in terms of current, it just played a little drier on the middle, and we forgot for good what it means to dullness and blur in the treble, thickness and ambiguity on bass. Attention, the dose of improvement is very strong and the choices you have made for the system will shine in all their dimensions...



Isol-8 Mini Sub Axis, 6-position multi-socket and power filter/overvolving protection, (4 low/mid current sockets of 6A and 2 high current sockets of 10A). Dimensions: 44,4x 8,5x30.5 cm. Weight: 6.7 kg. Face in black or silver on demand.

Representative: Audio Harmony, tel. 210,810,1800 Price: 1,500 euros.