

Power to the people

Hi-fi sounding lethargic and congested? Isol-8 would like a quiet word, says *Jimmy Hughes...*

Isol-8's MiniSub Wave is a simple passive 'plug and play' mains conditioner that replaces the original MiniSub. While some advanced active devices (such as Isol-8's PowerStation) alter the frequency of the AC mains from the UK's 50Hz to something higher, this isn't possible with the MiniSub Wave – it's purely a mains-cleanser.

Passive inductive filtering is employed to lower mains noise without compromising current delivery. Although the MiniSub Wave is a lower-priced unit, Isol-8 claim its performance is not too far off their more expensive SubStation units. The MiniSub Wave is the basic model, with the MiniSub Axis a more expensive alternative at £999.

Common to both models is isolation between all six mains sockets. This helps reduce cross-contamination. It's not only noisy mains you're fighting against, but self-noise generated by the power supplies of the other equipment in use. With each socket isolated this problem should be reduced.

Some mains conditioners only deal with common-mode noise, but Isol-8's MiniSub Wave is designed to tackle both common and differential mode noise. The more expensive MiniSub Axis also deals with DC offset – something that can cause

mains transformer buzz, and limit currently delivery due to magnetic saturation. The MiniSub Wave has six standard 13a UK-type mains sockets. These feature a hinged protective cover to prevent dust from contaminating the pins, while keeping out tiny fingers! There are four 6amp sockets for low-current components, and two higher-current 10amp sockets for things like power amps.

The Isol-8 MiniSub Wave is housed in a steel box with CNC-milled front panel. Components are housed on two circuit boards, with PTFE insulated silver-plated copper wiring for connections between sockets and motherboard. The components are not 'potted' in resin, so you can see what's there. The front panel has a brushed surface which looks simple, but attractive. Internally, the circuits are neatly laid out with plenty of space between the different groups of components. During use, the MiniSub Wave does not get hot, nor could we hear any noise or buzzing sounds emanating from the casework.

Given good build quality and high-quality components, Isol-8's MiniSub Wave offers good material value. But, value must also take into account how big a difference the unit makes to the sound of your system. Suppose you hear no improvement; is there

DETAILS

PRODUCT:
Isol-8 MiniSub Wave

ORIGIN:
UK

TYPE:
passive mains conditioner

WEIGHT:
6.5kg

FEATURES:

- upside-down mains sockets – help manage thick cables
- technology borrowed from Isol-8's more expensive conditioners
- CNC-milled front panel

- silver-plated PTFE insulated internal wiring

- Isolates each hi-fi component from its partners

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any point buying something like this? Actually, the answer is yes... Better sound quality aside, a MiniSub will protect your equipment from voltage spikes and power surges.

Sound Quality

The degree of improvement heard depends on how dirty your mains supply is, and how sensitive your equipment is to mains noise. Many find their hi-fi sounds different according to the time of day. Things often improve after midnight – as people switch off and retire for the night. On installing Isol-8's MiniSub Wave, I felt the music sounded cleaner. It was slightly better-focused and more immediate, with crisper transients and greater ambient depth. The upper treble definitely seemed smoother and cleaner, with less edge and reduced congestion. The improvement was definitely worthwhile, but a day or two later I felt things had moved to a different level. The music seemed to flow better, and was somehow more lucid and coherent. You could follow individual voices or instruments more easily.

It's as though you're suddenly hearing your equipment as it was meant to sound, without unwanted grunge getting in the way. The sound has increased clarity, so that fine detail tells more effortlessly. You should find you're able to play music at a slightly reduced volume setting for the same subjective loudness. Try listening with the MiniSub Wave connected, then take it out of circuit.

Conclusion

Because mains quality varies according to location, products like the Isol-8 MiniSub Wave really need to be auditioned in situ. Nevertheless I'm confident that most hi-fi enthusiasts will find this unit delivers very worthwhile benefits, even to those with fairly clean mains. ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ | LIKE: Improves your hi-fi, irrespective of mains quality |
| VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ | DISLIKE: Nothing at the price |
| BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ | WESAY: Adding an Isol-8 MiniSub Wave should give you better sound quality and improved day-to-day consistency |
| FEATURES ★★★★★ | |

OVERALL

