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Made just for you: the SME

Model 60 One of One

SME Model 60 One of One turntable

Alan Sircom

The SME Model 60 turntable is not just a product. You don't purchase an SME to gain bragging rights or to join the turntable-of-the-month club. Instead, the SME Model 60 is your LP zenith, a sign of you reaching the vinyl summit. The SME Model 60 One of One turntable is the ultimate seal of that 'forever home' deal.

The SME Model 60 comes in anodised black and silver with contrasting black detailing in its standard guise. But 'standard' is the wrong term. It's exceptional, a mark of quality that transcends the audio world. Even renowned automotive and aerospace companies have sought SME's expertise for their top projects. This turntable is a testament to British engineering and craftsmanship, exuding confidence and assurance in every detail. >>





Each colour is unique, and that colour will never be used again; it only features on your turntable.

» In addition to the standard finishes, the SME Model 60 is also offered in premium machined honeycomb in black, blue, and silver... and the polished aluminium diamond series with a unique cosmetic machined pattern and hand-finished. The blue chassis sparked an idea at SME: what if you could make your turntable even more 'you'?

One of One

This bespoke colour and pattern concept originated SME's 'One of One' concept. It was mastered by the SME works chemist who developed a unique range of anodised colours. These aren't just RAL colours to let your turntable match your Lamborghini. The company's resident Walter White of the pigments has cooked up 75 colours, celebrating three-quarters of a century of SME. Each is unique, and that colour will never be used again; it only features on your turntable.

The bespoke nature of the SME Model 60 One of One extends to the hand-finished chassis. The premium finish models' diamond and honeycomb patterns are available and inspire more options. Fans, geometric patterns... anything this side of turning your turntable chassis into a Kandinsky composition is up for discussion with SME.

What's not up for discussion is changing the core of the SME Model 60. I know this seemingly goes against the concept of 'bespoke', but let's work that through. If you buy a bespoke suit from a reputable tailor, it's made to their design and specifications. It will be made to fit you perfectly, and you will choose the material. However, ask them to add insane lapels or some ornate button arrangement, and they will politely refuse. This isn't because they lack the skills to make your suit but because they know what does and doesn't work. It's the same here; a 12" arm or second armboard will change the dynamic of the Model 60. It would be a different turntable.

Simply the best!

The SME Model 60 is, quite simply, the best turntable the company makes. It synthesises and refines all the lessons learned from designs like the Model 30. While it has the same four suspension tower arrangement from older designs, it's an entirely new turntable.

The SME Model 60 uses an intelligent suspension system that allows control in both vertical and horizontal planes. In fairness, most suspended turntables get the vertical plane right. However, they often act like jelly trying to skateboard on an ice rink while drunk horizontally. By

controlling the horizontal and the vertical, you reach *The Outer Limits* of suspension effectiveness.

That's not all! The main bearing uses a clever silicone fluid dampening system, further developed and advanced from the sister turntables Model 20 & Model 15. Add in an acoustically treated main chassis, sub-chassis, and platter. The result is a turntable as isolated from its surroundings as possible.

The main turntable sits on decoupled adjustable feet with multipoint isolation. The outboard independent speed control further decouples the power transformer from the main turntable. It places the two in separate boxes and provides precision speed adjustment for the AC motor.

The word 'precision' is redundant with SME. It's all 'precision'. It's baked into the very fabric of the company. However, it also applies to the Series VA tonearm, which is only available on the Model 60 and Model 60 One of One. Derived from the evergreen gimbal bearing Series V tonearm – which has been in continuous production for 40 years – the 'A' suffix stands for 'advanced'. It uses a non-metallic armtube made from an advanced polymer resin prized for its high density and rigidity.

This material has a significantly reduced resonance signature over the already low-resonance magnesium arm of the regular SME Series V arm. It's also acoustically inert and capable of being CNC machined. Its properties mean the SME Series VA can be used with a wider range of cartridges than the Series V, which is already an extremely accommodating arm. The arm terminates at the chassis-mounted RCA or XLR outlets so you can select your own cables.

The turntable and arm arrive assembled, set up involves lifting the unit out of the box, removing the transit bolts, levelling the turntable and motor, adding more oil to the spindle bearing, fitting the drive belt and mounting the platter. Then, set up the tonearm, adjust the suspension height, connect the LEMO cables between the three devices (power unit, speed control unit and turntable) and you are done. Forever. Periodically clean the belt. Every thousand hours or so, replace the belt. Leave instructions in your will about where your relatives can get new belts. Insist they leave similar instructions for their grandchildren.

The tonearm is a little more involved. However, anyone who has ever fitted a cartridge and set up an SME Series IV or V tonearm over the last 40 years will tell you that it's easy. Especially as the tonearm is pre-fitted and not designed to be removed.





Everything down to the mounting kit is made in-house and designed to fit perfectly. Including the instruction manual, which is as thorough as it is timeless.



» Nothing is left to chance, even the tool kit and parts supplied with an SME product echoes the company's uncompromising approach. Everything down to the mounting kit is made in-house and designed to fit perfectly. Including the instruction manual, which is as thorough as it is timeless. The only wiggle-room here is the amount of damping fluid applied to the tonearm. The reservoir is filled to the same level regardless, and you can adjust the degree of damping by adjusting the dip-screw to the front and left of the arm base. Otherwise, the arm is so well designed that you can apply VTF by gauge alone and not worry about double-checking with a stylus pressure gauge.

A pinnacle turntable with an equally pinnacle tonearm demands a cartridge of equal gravitas. The joy of the SME Model 60 in all its guises is that it is the universal platform for playing records. Most of the character comes from the cartridge. In our case, that cartridge was the excellent MC A95 from Ortofon. This is a perfect partner because both align in striving to remove the tonal signature from their link in the chain. The SME Model 60 is sonically a minimally intrusive turntable, and the Ortofon MC A95 is a minimally intrusive cartridge. Add some equally minimally intrusive Siltech cable, Nagra HD amplification and passive ATC SCM150 loudspeakers, and you have a system where the record does all the talking.

That certainly seemed to be the case. The turntable formed the cornerstone of a system so neutral that changing from one LP to another was clearly audible. The pressing quality was immediately identifiable from the run-in groove, and the change of mix, musicians, and team was more abruptly noticeable than most systems. In short, the SME Model 60 One of One let you drill down to the foundations of what was on that vinyl.

The first record played was Lana Del Rey's 'Norman F****g Rockwell' from the album of the same name. This was extremely confident-sounding, with excellent separation of instruments in the mix. It was as solid as a rock, too, but not in a dull way. Voices and instruments sounded visceral and physically 'there' in the room, and there was a perfect rendition of reverb tails. Vocal articulation, in particular, was excellent; you get the music's sarcasm and humour coming through. In short, this first track showed the SME Model 60 as extremely precise and authoritative but not authoritarian.

Bass depth was excellent, and the very low levels of self-noise meant the surface noise of the record was at once in sharper focus and yet not as intrusive as many decks. While this sounds like a paradox, the more you listened, the more you realised this unforced, uncolored presentation meant the surface noise was just absorbed into the music itself. "Life is surface noise" as the late John Peel once said. »



If you like the control and grip that any SME turntable and arm brings to music, you are already in the market for a Model 60.

» Ghosts

Flipping over to 'Ghosts' by Anna B Savage [*in/FLUX*] showed this wasn't a lucky first record. Once again, there was incredible control. It had almost a 'dry' presentation but always stayed on the right side of extremely accurate. Her voice is believable and plaintive to the point of despair. This track can so easily run away with itself and sound 'whiny' instead of 'spooky', and here it's presented beautifully. Even her spoken word parts are given the right amount of diction. Normally, when evaluating equipment, I stop there, but I feel the need to keep on listening. Playing 'I Can Hear the Birds' further into the album felt mandatory because to stop listening to the album would be rude. This sense became heightened as the SME Model 60 gave an uncanny sense of her being 'there' in the room. This turntable unlocks a lot of LP.

A lot more albums were played. Prince's 'Avalanche' from *One Nite Alone* initially sounds a little audiophile, with its excellent imaging and tinkly piano extension. And that's why it's so useful. In most systems, that's all you get. Through the SME Model 60 you get the intensity of the voice and the dynamism of his playing. You know he's not 'phoning it in' and singing and playing with passion and so much intensity. You have to give the loudspeakers a rest after this track so they can calm down.

To rest them, out came *Penguin Eggs* by Nic Jones. My guitar playing days are long behind me, but 'Canadee-I-O' still has its original effect; the clock is ticking before you look to your hands and ask, "How?" How did he play that, and how come you can't?" Normally, this takes about a minute or so. I was staring at my fingers five seconds in (hint: the tuning helps, but that's not it). However, beyond the guitar wrangling, it's the ability to articulate his voice, which tends to sound a bit too 'Arran sweater, finger in ear' folksy. Here, it's just entertaining and detailed. And that damn guitar playing remains stunning!

Piano torturer

As a sign-off, I played Stravinsky 'Three Scenes (Petruska), played by Alexander Toradze. Toradze died in 2022, and a million piano keys cried out in relief. The SME is dynamic enough to cover his assault on the keyboard, but it is also subtle enough to show he's more than just a piano torturer. And that's excellent. Usually, it's just all attack, but this shows there's more to the pieces and the player than just an onslaught. It's still an unrelenting piece of music – it's supposed to be – and that explains how good the deck gets. It has the grip to keep Toradze in check but is not so suppressed that it sounds like he's been physically restrained. And it allows his softer side out, too.

This is a review of two sides; the Model 60 and the Model 60 One of One. Fortunately, they converge in 'SME beyond parallel' performance. Put simply, if you like the control and grip any that SME turntable and arm brings to music, you are already in the market for a Model 60; you – and your bank balance – just don't know it yet. As to the One of One, you already know this is the last turntable you'll ever buy, so why not give it some unique pizzazz? The only downside to the One of One project is if you want a specific colour and it's already gone... tough! Given how limited these colour schemes are, I'm surprised the price premium over the SME Model 60 is so small, and that means they will be popular. So get your order in quick! +

Technical specifications

Turntable Speed Error at 33.33rpm: 33.33rpm (-0.005%)

Time to Audible Stabilisation: 5 – 6 seconds

Peak Wow/Flutter (Peak weighted): 0.01% / 0.02%

Rumble (silent groove, DIN B weighted): -75dB (-75.4 dB with Clamp)

Rumble (through the bearing, DIN B weighted): -76.5dB

Hum & Noise (unweighted, relative to 5cm/sec): -62.5dB

Power Consumption: 18w (1w standby)

Tonearm Effective Mass: 10g – 11g

Cartridge Balance Range: 5g – 18g

Vertical Tracking Force: 0.0g – 3.0g (30mN)

Maximum Tracking Error: 0.0120/mm

Internal Wiring: Crystal Cable 0.1mm Mono X-Tal

DIMENSIONS:

Turntable Height: 212mm (top of the clamp), Width 557mm, Depth 417mm

Speed Control Unit: Height 87mm, Width 170mm Depth 295mm

Power Unit: Height 83mm Width 190mm Depth 243mm

Platter: 330mm

Spindle to Arm: 215.35mm

Weight: Turntable: 48kg

Speed Control Unit 2kg

Power Unit 4.2kg

Boxed Shipping Weight 86kg

Price: SME Model 60: £49,950, \$71,000, €59,900

Premium finish: £54,950, \$81,900, €64,900

One of One: £59,950, \$88,900, €74,900

Manufacturer SME Ltd

🌐 www.sme.co.uk