

productreview

Furutech Accessories for Vinyl Lovers

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Do you have a precious collection of LPs? If you do, you're probably fighting an uphill battle against dust and static. You may even have some discs that are unplayable because they won't lay flat any more. If this description fits you, or if you are new to the vinyl scene, Furutech has designed some audio accessories to give you the upper hand over Mother Nature.

You may ask why you need to remove static electricity at all. First, the electrical charge can lead to pops and crackles during playback. Second and more importantly, the static charge attracts dust into the grooves like a magnet. Dust will give you more interference and will build up around your stylus as it traces the groove.



Furutech SK-II Electrostatic Brush

The simplest and most essential accessory is a good record brush. It should remove both dust and static, be gentle enough not to damage the grooves and should not leave fibers of its own on your precious record collection. I've used the Decca Record Brush for this purpose for the last 25 years but Furutech's SK-II Electrostatic brush is both easier to use and more effective. You can hold it above the spinning disc like a paint brush and the fine goat-hair bristles pick up the

loose debris and reduce whatever static charge your heating system and the LP's plastic protective cover have conspired to induce. This brush can also be used to clean CDs and your stereo components, and you can wash the bristles to restore a pristine condition. The SK-II sells for \$111. Like the other Furutech accessories reviewed here, it's made in Japan.



Furutech Destat

If dust and static are still a problem, and they certainly are for me, Furutech has developed a very effective high tech solution, the \$405 Destat. This battery operated device looks and works a bit like a portable hair dryer, only instead of blowing hot air it blows a mix of positive and negative ions over your records. In ten seconds it removes both static and dust without ever touching the grooves. I have a Zerostat gun which also uses a stream of ions to remove static charges, but it is only marginally effective and doesn't remove dust. The Destat is a much more serious device altogether. It takes its power from four AA batteries. There's only one button to master - push it and a fan spools up and the ions flow. Just hold the unit a few inches above the record or CD. It works very well on my records, reducing static noise more effectively than the SK-II brush or my Zerostat, but I

don't notice any effect on CDs. I also tried it on my wife's clothes - yes it even eliminates static cling! You can use the Destat to remove static and dust from your audio components too, but remember to turn them off first.

I am pleased with the way it works and how easy it is to use. But at this price the level of fit and finish should be more impressive, especially in the battery compartment where the battery holder is connected by two thin wires that look rather fragile. You won't be changing the batteries very often, but put long lasting ones in there to be on the safe side.



Furutech DFV-1 LP Flattener

The most interesting of the three accessories is the Furutech DFV-1 LP Flattener at \$1552. This device is designed to remove the warps from LPs. While I could find LPs with static, and I could leave some LPs out of their protective covers for long periods of time to cover them with dust, I take such care over my collection I just don't have any warped discs. So how could I test the machine? I decided I had to sacrifice some discs to the cause, so I left some out overnight by

a hot air duct. The next morning, those poor LPs were still flat as pancakes. More extreme measures were necessary. I finally succeeded in warping the discs so they were unplayable, but I won't tell you how!

How should a record flattener work? The problem is to apply the correct amount of heat and pressure to restore a warped disc to its original shape but not so much as to damage the delicate grooves. That is easier said than done. Remember that there are various different qualities of vinyl, plus large variations in thickness and profile.

Profile? Yes! You might expect all records to be flat, but almost without exception, they are in fact thicker at the outer edge where there is a slight lip, the groove guard, and in the centre where there is another rise, the label ramp. In between these two points the vinyl is thinner, a process that is imposed by the record stamper. There are two reasons for this profile. The first is to save money. The groove area does not need to be very strong since we don't handle records by

the grooves (or at least we shouldn't) so that area can be thinner, using less material. The second is to avoid damage when the records are stacked on an automatic record changer. The raised labels would come into contact with each other, as would the outer lip, but the groove area in between would be concave so the grooves would never touch.

The exceptions are Classic Records 200 gram non groove guard pressings, Sheffield Labs LPs without groove guards and certain BMG-UFA records. Furutech could have produced a device to flatten these flat-profile LPs, but then it would not work with the vast majority of records. My thanks to Furutech for including a warning to this effect in the instructions.

So the Furutech device is designed to accommodate standard profile discs. You can think of it as a pant presser big enough to hold a 12" pair of pants. The special requirement here is how to hold the disc safely in the central position. Furutech provides a two piece metal spindle that clamps to the centre hole of the record, and this spindle fits snugly in a recess in the centre of one of the flattening surfaces. The machine holds the record vertically, which is the best way to give equal treatment to both sides of the disc, besides taking up less space on your table. The machine doesn't open very far, and it is not always easy to see exactly where that centre recess is. Furutech could simplify this by some astute colour coding but the low tech solution is to feed the disc in under a bright light. You close the machine with a couple of simple latches and you are ready to start.

When you power up and press the start button you can just walk

away or by pressing that button multiple times you can cycle through various heating times. The default setting is 90 minutes, but you can select 60, 90, 120 or 150 minutes. A status screen will tell you what the machine is doing. Don't worry, it's not going to melt your record - the heating cycle barely warms the disc above room temperature. Then there's a two hour cooling cycle before you can open up the device. Some of my LPs made such good contact with the walls that it was tough to pry the record out simply by pulling on the spindle. The solution was just to lift from any point on the rim and the disc comes out easily.

I found my seriously warped discs came out so flat I couldn't tell where they had been warped. See my before and after shots. They all played just fine. I also tried some discs with very minor ripples, not severe enough to upset my cartridge, but large enough you could see the arm rise over that spot in play, like a gentle wave. These discs were not affected by the flattener, even after repeated cycles. I'm sure Furutech has erred on the side of caution here. They don't want to apply the amount of heat or pressure that would eliminate tiny defects that don't affect the listening experience in any way. They could easily have done so, but that might risk damaging some fragile discs. So I'm very happy with the compromises they have made.

The fit and finish on the Record Flattener is superb, as it should be at the price. Not everyone needs one of these, but if you do, this will do the job.

It's good to see vinyl lovers have someone looking out for them. A for effort.



Warped record before being flattened



The same record after the LP Flattener treatment!

quick info

Furutech
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