



KEN KESSLER

Is tweaking still alive and kicking?

It's time to make the most of tweaking says Ken Kessler as he recounts his experiences with 'near-freebie' improvements and tells you his hot tweak recommendations...

Is tweaking alive and well, or is its seeming demise an inevitable part of the malaise affecting audio? Has a large segment of the audio community forsaken the pursuit of 'near-freebie' improvements, ironically at a time when everyone is belt-tightening?

A couple of occurrences related to my hi-fi show demos at Heathrow suggest to me that tweaks have never been more necessary nor more welcomed.

Take, for example, the Golden Sound chip (GSIC) (see my June 2005 column), the one that 'treats' CDs in under two seconds. I, plus a host of other respected listeners, heard genuine and for the most part beneficial changes, but I was wary of reporting the experience. Clearly, I have been forgiven, if not quite exonerated, as my carcass remains free of both tar and feathers.

NOOSES & BRICKBATS

Never happy with a calm life, I risked all by demonstrating the Golden Sound chip at the show, with audiences of upwards of 50 listeners. There I was, within reach of nooses and brickbats, not protected by print on a page. I don't recall anyone reacting violently. I can't remember any cries of 'Bollocks!' Instead, a handful of visitors whispered that they had already bought GSICs and were amazed by the results, while others told me emphatically that they would be trying them in the near future.

Their ears told them it was worth doing and at a cost of less than 90p per disc for an audible benefit you can see why



ABOVE: The wonderfully named Feet of Silence, left, and the IsoClear feet, right

affordable tweaks are a much-needed tonic during these – how do I put it? – truly shitty times.

The demonstrations yielded a second taste of beer-budget benefits because I sorely needed some equipment supports for a pre-amp on the floor. As the AudioValve Sunilda had to be raised above the carpet, I sought something like an IsoPlat (how's that for a name from the past?) or other single-component platform to lift it above the cut-pile, merely for safety's sake.

To the rescue came Solid Tech. I had used the company's crazily expensive chrome-and-steel-and-rubber Feet of Silence before, which worked well but struck me as fiddly and decidedly 'overkill' – not what I wanted. All I needed was some means of raising the pre-amp off the floor by an inch or two.

Solid Tech's Björn Ohlson arrived with a bubblepack containing four round IsoClear feet, 2in across and 1in high. They consist of two 'sandwiches', discs of Perspex holding some black, rubbery damping compound, the sandwiches separated by coil springs. He priced them

at 10p each (plus 10p per foot; you buy extras) supports a massive 25lb per foot – enough for most power amps.

SOUND BENEFIT

All I wanted was physical clearance between pre-amp and carpet. What happened was a benefit to the sound that I simply did not anticipate. The Sunilda is a robust, beautifully made, all-valve phono stage with no obvious problems. And yet placing it on the IsoClears lowered the noise floor quite audibly. Background silence simply became quieter.

I took the set-up home, not wanting to rely on a hasty assessment amidst hi-fi show chaos. I stuck with components weighing around 45lb, including small, integrated valve amps. Every time, a clean up on a par with better mains cables.

I don't remember precisely what Björn said they cost, but I seem to recall the IsoClears were cheap, under £50. Alas, there's no UK distributor listed, so either phone 0046 40 491 352, fax 0046 40 491 352 or e-mail info@solid-tech.net. Or check out www.solid-tech.net. I can't recommend them highly enough. Just one thing: Björn, can you please make the top surface less slippery? ▣

'I was wary of reporting the experience, but I have been forgiven as my carcass is free of tar and feathers'

apart, played with the spring positioning, reassembled them, and placed them under the Sunilda. Problem solved.

On closer examination, I learned the feet can be fitted with between one and seven springs, determined by the weight of the product to support. One spring per foot will support 3.6lb per foot, while an IsoClear with seven springs (the standard kit is supplied with three

KEN KESSLER'S FAVOURITE 'CHEAPO' TWEAKS

- Blu-tac – this is still the best damping material to use between speaker and stand. The Faber-Castell brand tends to be popular.
- Kontak or any other plug/socket cleaner. Don't forget to clean all plugs and sockets at least once a year!
- A record clamp – if your turntable doesn't come with one (a la SME), buy one. It mates your LP to the platter.
- The Golden Sound GSIC chip – treats your CDs, but I don't know how it works!