

# Darth Insidious

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## IsoTek Super Titan Power Conditioner

By Paul Rigby

When most audiophiles are ready to upgrade their hi-fi, they immediately look towards the principle components: turntable, CD player, amp, speakers, and the like. It's an obvious move, but is it the right one? Are you, for example, absolutely sure that you're even getting the best out of your current system? While unbeknownst to many users, multiple varieties of distortion prevent stereos from performing at their expected capability.



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Noise arrives in two flavors—differential and common. When your fridge switches itself off, do your speakers make a noise? If so, you've experienced differential noise, or distortion. This form of noise also derives from the less-obvious electronic switching of power supplies. Common noise applies to more subtle variants, and derives from point sources such as radio transmitters. These dual forms aren't related. But both diminish systems' abilities to resolve fine detail. Moreover, you usually don't realize such noise exists until it's eliminated.

Differential and common noise arrive via the live and neutral lines within your mains cable—precisely where the IsoTek Super Titan and its Direct Coupled Design circuit come into play. Providing nine-section multiple filters in a series parallel combination—and doing so in a truly balanced supply—Super Titan aims to remove the noise by cleaning your mains supply without disturbing the natural transient musical information. It also supplies impressive back-up figures that keep everything safe (a rated figure of 4,600W) and a fusing unit that handles enormous transient overloads.

Weighing in at a beast-like 30kg (66 pounds), Super Titan offers a quick and efficient way to gain your first hernia. Spanning 500 x 500 x 300mm, the unit works with its smaller brother, the already established Aquarius (£700). The latter can be used as a standalone power conditioner but reaches new heights when used as part of a team alongside the Super Titan.

“Super Titan is designed for high-current product such as power amplifiers and electrostatic speakers,” explains Keith Martin, founder and Managing Director for IsoTek.

“The Aquarius (a six-outlet, full-system power conditioner featuring two high-current outlets rated at 16 amps and four medium-current outlets rated a 5 amps) sits on top and is used for front-end equipment such as CD players. As you go up the IsoTek range, we split our boxes into two for high and lower current, as you would a preamp and power amp.” IsoTek is currently working on a rack that will neatly hold the power conditioning boxes in place.

Martin claims the best reason for splitting the power

conditioners into two boxes relates to the different current demands associated with source components and power amplifiers. “Plug your CD player, et. al. into the Aquarius because the CD player will only draw around 35W,” says Martin. “It won't demand power in transients, which is what a power amp does. A power amp, when faced with dynamic pieces of music, gulps current and power. That creates noise of its own. So you need the additional bandwidth that the Super Titan supplies for the power amp.”

You can also run your turntable and CD player off the Super Titan, but it won't be quite as effective as opting for the two-box approach: You need a different class of filtering for front-end boxes. That's why the Aquarius has two high-current outlets and four medium outlets to provide different filtering. Super Titan is optimized for high-current applications. Indeed, it can handle 32 amps of continuous current.

“We were looking at the nature of the amplifiers coming through on the high end,” notes Martin. “Big amplifiers from Levinson, MBL, and such require huge power delivery. With that in mind, we built a true 32-amp power conditioner for the extreme high-end user. The Super Titan will run happily on a normal feed, but having the extra capability matters—we designed this product to be future-proof.”  
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### Amps and more

IsoTek's monstrous, two-box power conditioning system works just as well in practice as in theory. I chose Skunk Anansie's *Stoosh* as a test CD, and fed it through an Icon CD-X1 CD player within a valve system. My basic reference system presents tight, thumping bass with a dynamic rhythm guitar, smoky vocals, and discernable acoustic guitar and cymbal elements located on the periphery of the soundstage. When the Aquarius mains conditioner is introduced into the chain, the latter yields a more focused soundstage replete with centrally placed rhythm guitar and bass. The downside?

A slight lift to the upper mid-range. Still, the reduction in distortion, improved bass grip, and added acoustic guitar and cymbal effects are promising.

Swapping the Aquarius for the Super Titan (and beginning with only the Icon monoblock power amplifiers connected) transforms the lower register of the system without slowing pace or rhythm. Bass guitar and drums remain sprightly and melodic, with more authority throughout the range. Plucked bass strings possess extended decay and claim deeper extension.

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Plugging the Quad 57s into the Super Titan provides noticeably less upper-frequency distortion, revealing soundstage structures I've never before experienced. The improved focus produces genuine 3D effects, complete with textural contours and layers. Bass stays powerful and authoritative. But it also assumes its place within the mix with a graceful coherency far preferable to just simply dominating, as it does when the Super Titan is absent. Midrange and treble frequencies are also markedly smoother, boasting excellent clarity. It's as if the music is scrubbed clean and sports a new sheen.

Please note: A tinge of upper-frequency hardness remains when the Super Titan is paired with the monoblocks alone. Connecting the Quads to the Super Titan offers maturity and drastically reduces such hardness, resulting in a rich, deep sound that unveils expressive musical elements.

Used as intended, the full IsoTek system produces an effortless sound—there's no stress or strain to be found. Don't confuse such ease with a lack of dynamics, power, or excitement. On Skunk Anansie's "Hedonism", Skin's lead vocals benefit from a fresh bank of vocal modulations, sounding almost choral. The bass-shy Quad electrostatics present a proud, full lower register full of grip and true authority. Such power affords the bass a grand magnificence and tonal accuracy.

Midrange frequencies also exhibit thrilling transparency, claiming a fuller palette of tonal colors and silkier treble. Every conceivable tremor of Kate Bush's delivery on "Bertie" (from *Aerial*) comes across stacked with emotion and nuance. Moreover, with the IsoTek combination, the soundstage is noticeably more natural and able to resolve low-level detail.

### **Wash, Condition, and Go**

The Super Titan and the Aquarius are sonic wonders. If you haven't addressed power delivery, get to know your system on a more intimate basis and consider adding these IsoTek components. Only then will you discover what your system can really deliver. ●

## **IsoTek Super Titan**

**MSRP: \$9,398/€6,886**

### **MANUFACTURER**

IsoTek Systems

### **CONTACT**

[www.soundfoundations.co.uk](http://www.soundfoundations.co.uk) (UK)

[www.soundorg.com](http://www.soundorg.com) (US)

### **PERIPHERALS**

#### **Digital Source**

Icon Audio CD X1

#### **Analog Source**

Avid Acutus, SME IV, Benz Glider

#### **Phono**

Icon PS3

#### **Preamplifier**

Aesthetix Calypso

#### **Power**

Icon MB845 Monoblocks

#### **Speakers**

Quad ESL-57

#### **Headphones**

Sennheiser HD650

#### **Cables**

Avid SCT, Avid ASC