

stereonet

SEPTEMBER 2017

Sort Kones

A SCEPTICS BACKFLIP



NORDOST

Sort Kones

A SCEPTICS BACKFLIP

Distributor: Advance Audio Australia

“this is one area that I've been reluctant to invest in”

Well-known American brand Nordost, has more than made a name for itself across an extensive range of affordable, right through to ultra-high end and accordingly priced cables.

But it was at the Sydney HiFi Show last month where the brand genuinely attracted my attention. I'd been covering the event and was invited by **Nigel Ng**, the National Product and Operations Manager of Nordost's Australian distributor, Advance Audio, to sit in on a demonstration.

The demo would involve Nordost's Sort Kone, which Nordost themselves best describe as:

“A directly coupled and mechanically tuned resonance control device, using a sophisticated new approach to the problem of supporting sensitive electronics.”

Essentially, it's 56mm stand or 'foot' that you place 3, 4, or even more, under your component which props it up off your equipment stand or rack.

To set the record straight, once upon a time on my audiophile journey I swore cables, over a certain point, made little audible difference. And while this was quite some time ago now, I may have also argued that vinyl was wildly inferior to digital as well. We're all capable of change.





And while my own reference system, listening space and even my own listening and ability to analyse what I am hearing has evolved, I've remained fairly sceptical of these types of products.

There's many audio systems I've heard around the world that for me, are amongst the best I've heard. The brands and components themselves varied - digital and analog, valve and solid state, bass reflex and open baffle. I'm of course still of the opinion there's no one perfect audio reproduction system.

But one thing remained the same across the vast majority of those systems; a high-end rack. For me this is one area that I've been reluctant to invest in as the serious coin that is quite often asked is not only as much as a small imported car, but simply beyond my financial means.



“despite my best efforts this sceptic was losing the battle.”



I use what I consider a more realistically priced Solid Tech Hybrid rack, which for many enthusiasts would still be considered quite an investment at around \$800 per shelf.

It looks good, provides a solid and stable platform and is modular allowing for system evolution, as mine so very often does. It's a far-cry from the exotic racks that have been modelled, feature built-in resonance and vibration control and all the fancy materials that do their best to justify the asking prices.

But back to the demonstration. Nigel would go through a process of playing their demonstration system which could only be considered ultra-high-end, and track by track would place Sort Kones of varying combinations under the components being used.

Truth be told, after three days of hanging out a hotel HiFi show I was tired and even a little disinterested. But what I heard during this demo was enough to get my attention

and even with an unfamiliar system and unknown tracks.

A week later, the very same sets of Kones arrived at **StereoNET** HQ. They weren't sent as a commissioned review, but the result of a conversation with Nigel where I'd agreed that I'd heard quite a substantial improvement, but I wouldn't sign off until I heard them in my own system. He knowingly smiled and asked me to remind him of my address.



There are four models in the range, each featuring a different post material and coupling ball:

- **AS** – aluminum post and base combined with a hardened steel coupling ball. (\$100 each RRP)
- **AC** – aluminum post and base in combination with an upgraded ceramic coupling ball. (\$130 each RRP)
- **BC** – bronze post and base elements combined with an upgraded ceramic coupling ball. (\$210 each RRP)
- **TC** – titanium post and base in combination with an upgraded ceramic coupling ball. (\$599 each RRP)

I received a combination of all except the BC version. Nigel's tip was to experiment with a combination of the different models under the component as it's said that each material offers different acoustic properties and resonance control.

Despite my interstate enthusiasm, I was still sceptical but open-minded as I sat listening to familiar material in my own system.

Once convinced I'd refreshed my reference I began placing three Kones in random combination under my AVM Ovation PA8 preamplifier. What followed was a subtle, but clearly distinguishable improvement in clarity. Yes.

Female vocals were more clearly defined in their position, while the separation of instruments and vocals simply became clearer. I'm trying hard at this point to be objective but despite my best efforts this sceptic was losing the battle.

Like McGregor after 10 rounds with Mayweather, I conceded defeat and placed another three Kones under my Meitner DAC2X DAC, and then another combination under my DIY Linux based Streamer (which uses a heavy duty linear power supply and chunky transformer).

Track after track delivered more emotional renditions of familiar music, clearer harmonics in acoustic pieces, and an overall feeling of a system that had just found perfect phase. The width and depth of the soundstage had

increased and the ever-telling foot-tapping had started.

There's all sorts of noise and vibration generating components in our audio gear from the buzzing transformers to the capacitors and the PCBs themselves. What's not realised though, at least for me, is just how much audible effect this has on what we hear from the loudspeakers.

Sure, you could likely achieve the same results from a \$20,000 high-end rack, but that's crazy when you could just add Sort Kones to your existing components.

I'm still experimenting with which combinations work best for me and I haven't yet tried the BC Bronze version. In my mind though, it's a small outlay that yields real-world results, substantially cheaper than a component upgrade.

WORDS/IMAGES: Marc Rushton

“a subtle, but clearly distinguishable improvement in clarity”

