

finite elemente pagode Edition mkII Carbon Equipment Supports

by Alan Sircom

Almost a year and a half ago, in issue 185, we reviewed the latest generation of finite elemente pagode equipment supports in its very best 'Edition' specification. At the time of that relaunch, finite elemente was also offering a small selection of noticeably superior sounding (and suitably more expensive) carbon fibre platforms (shelves) that could be ordered instead of the standard "wooden" ones. Encouraged by the positive sonic contribution these carbon shelves brought into play, Luis Fernandes (alpha and omega of finite elemente) embarked on a much more demanding experiment – to implement carbon fibre material into as many areas and places within the entire equipment rack in order to ascertain the magnitude of further improvements this could bring.

What do we know about carbon fibre? Apart from the fact it is extensively used in aeronautical engineering and all over Formula 1 cars, we know it weighs very little, is virtually non-resonant (and what little it does resonate is well outside the spectrum one cares about in audio), it happens to be extremely rigid and stable and, last but by no means least, costs a fortune.

Fernandes decided to try and cut segments of carbon fibre, which comes in fairly large sheets and has to be shaped and cut in a very specific manner in order to preserve the woven directional pattern. Errors in cutting are potentially catastrophic as there is no way to repair and prevent unnecessary waste of (expensive) material. Regardless, the work on 'carbonising' the frames of each and every level from top to



bottom of a rack, started. And, when completed, a lengthy series of internal listening tests and laboratory measurement evaluations in direct comparison with the standard version took place. The very fact finite elemente decided to launch the new flagship tier of its pagode mkII products as a 'Carbon' range indicates how satisfying and encouraging all the experiments and evaluations must have been.

We were sent two very representative and, in all likelihood most frequently asked for, models from the existing pagode mkII Edition collection. One ►

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► (HD02MR Edition mkII) with three tiers and suitable for a single source + preamplifier/ integrated amplifier components and the other (HD10MR Edition mkII – L) being a dedicated floor platform for large(st) power amplifiers. The suffix ‘L’ means it is to be used front-to-back, with ‘Q’ variant (left-right) also being available. After having spent an extended amount of time over the past year with the standard pagode mkII Edition products and the optional Carbon shelves, there was more than enough in the memory banks to enable realistic and valid comparison between ‘wooden’ and ‘Carbon’ versions. While the same products were used on both platforms, direct A-B comparisons fail to accommodate for electronics settling times and lower back recovery periods.

I have to admit a fair amount of initial apprehension before the listening sessions started. Apprehension that could have easily transformed into prejudice, had I not had ample previous experience with finite elemente designs over the past couple of decades. Generally, when Luis Fernandes changes an existing design or develops a new one, improvements of many kinds are evidently present and not difficult to perceive. But, this was something else; in essence, the same concept and design in both variants with ‘just a few bits’ of a different material encapsulating a solid maple wood framework!? What to expect? Will it be sufficiently different and, if so, in what way?

It did not take long to put my mind at rest, at least in as much as to hear that carbon fibre implementation made a difference to the overall sound. And that, in itself, was a good start. Before anything gets unnecessarily overcomplicated, the bottom line is yes, more extensive use of carbon fibre definitely does improve the overall sound of the products sitting on the equipment support systems. And improves it very much along the same lines we have clearly heard when carbon fibre shelves replaced standard ones within the ‘ordinary’ pagode mkII Edition racks before.

But here is where one needs to be careful. Not so much in describing the nature and manner of improvements – that is easy; just as with the carbon shelves, carbon fibre treated frames, subframes and side pillar damping elements reduce the overall noise floor of any music played further by reducing and eliminating even more unwanted resonances than carbon shelves on their own. That achievement, in turn, opens up other areas of sound to ‘more music’ reaching the listener’s ears. And more music inevitably means a higher degree of natural dynamic ability, finer nuancing between quiet and not-so-quiet passages, higher degree of overall (natural) transparency and, as final by-product of all that, an even easier to hear and “see” holography of the soundstage with better layering and unforced clarity. Yes, carbon fibre most certainly does help and, at least so far, the more of it the better.

Now, all this sounds very good and gloriously exciting. And no, I am not going to switch over to caveats and negatives now as there are none to list (except the cost!). There is no question that carbon fibre version of the pagode mkII Edition equipment support represents a substantial audible improvement over the standard design without and, to a somewhat lesser extent, with

carbon shelves. There is also no question that state-of-the-art audio components used with the full carbon fibre stands and/ or amplifier platforms will yield a noticeable and most enjoyable positive shift towards the ultimate in performance. And, as always, the more capable your audio components are, the more exponentially rewarding the sonic return and your musical pleasure will be.

Philosophically speaking, that increased sonic reward on its own, sufficiently warrants the very existence of pagode mkII Edition Carbon products. There is no ‘value for money’ to be mentioned as it would be sheer delusion to take that route when costs are high enough one way or another. A substantial surcharge for plenty of carbon fibre will certainly make a mark on even the most frisky of bank balances, but if you do already live stratospherically, maybe it’s time to light the afterburners once again because Luis Fernandes has shown carbon fibre will make your musical life so much more enjoyable. However, don’t be that distracted; the ‘standard’ pagode mkII Edition (or ‘just’ Master Reference) equipment racks and amplifier platforms remain at the top of the tree. It’s just there’s now a taller tree too. +

PRICE AND CONTACT DETAILS

Price: pagode HD02MR Edition mkII

Carbon: £17,495

pagode HD10MR Edition mkII

Carbon – L: £5,295.

Both standard specification;
high-polished metal parts option
available at additional cost

Manufacturer: finite elemente

URL: finite-elemente.eu

UK distributor: Audiofreaks

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