

The Cosmos Potentiometer on Trial

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There's a new pot on the block in the form of a carbon track Tocos Cosmos. But how does it stand up to the competition? Neville Roberts investigates...

Potentiometers have more of an effect on sound quality than you might expect, which, on reflection, is not so surprising when you consider that they are often directly connected in the signal path. Furthermore, they usually consist of a carbon track where the signal is extracted from the track by means of a metal wiper that runs along the track (or around in the case of a rotary potentiometer), so it is not difficult to appreciate how they can contribute to overall sound quality of a system.

Many people prefer to use a stepped attenuator which uses a selector switch to route the signal through an appropriate fixed resistor. However, if you want a smooth volume adjuster with no steps to click between, then you have no choice but to consider a volume potentiometer for your system.

A newcomer to the Hi-Fi Collective potentiometer collection is the carbon track Cosmos, available in 10K, 20K, 100K, 250K and 500K versions. 50K to follow shortly.



The Cosmos Potentiometer

Of course, 'new' doesn't necessarily mean 'better', so how does the Tocos Cosmos compare with the opposition?

There is some stiff competition out there in the form of the well-known Alps Blue, the TKD and the Noble varieties.

The Alps Blue

I decided to start off with the Alps Blue, as it has a good reputation and is a reasonably priced. The Alps is a well-made unit and there should be little problems with fitting into existing equipment.

Listening tests proved that, overall, it has an open sound. However, it is very bright and borders on harsh-sounding when listening to a solo violin piece. Furthermore, with a full orchestra, I would say that it is a little bass-light.

The Noble

Noble by name and noble by nature! This is a great-sounding potentiometer, beautifully made and, again, should not cause a problem fitting it into existing equipment. This 'Jake the Peg' of the potentiometer world (because it has an extra leg!) is smoother and more open-sounding than the Alps. Also, the bass reappeared and sounded very natural. Incidentally, the outside 'leg' on the left in the picture is the one that is not used.



The line-up consisting of the TKD, the Alps Blue, the Noble and the Cosmos at the front

The TDK

This is the smallest of the range on trial and has the advantage of being able to fit in equipment where space is limited. Also, the pin configuration would lend itself to mounting directly onto a printed circuit board. All-in-all, a very versatile potentiometer!

Auditioning the TDK with a similar range of music to the Alps Blue showed the TDK to be a good all-round performer, without the tendency to be over-bright or harsh-sounding. I also felt that, like with the Noble, the bass

was more extended with the TDK. However, on the downside, I found the sound stage rather flat and two-dimensional.

The Cosmos

Again, this is a very well-made potentiometer and the pins are of the more conventional 'solder tag' design. It also has a nice long-threaded shaft making it very easy to fit into existing equipment.

I have to say I was delighted with the sound of the Cosmos and it presented the best sound stage of the four on trial. As with the TKD, it sounded much more neutral than the Alps Blue with no hint of harshness to the sound and it was up there with the Noble in this respect. I would say, however, that the bass was a little more constrained than with the Noble.

Conclusions

For me, the winners of the trial were the Cosmos and the Noble. The tight and well-controlled bass of the Noble was a real winner, as was the openness and smoothness of the top end. Similarly, the Cosmos was just as open and smooth, but scored over the Noble with its clear 3-dimensional sound stage.

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