

Kuzma 4POINT 14 tonearm

by Roy Gregory

While many UK audiophiles are still struggling to come to terms with the notion of 12" tonearms that resolutely refuse to mount on their LP12s, those driving this particular arms race are already moving on to bigger and (they assume) better things, with arms as long as 16" becoming if not common, then far from the unusual sights they once were. It's a situation that makes Kuzma's

innovative, musically remarkable, and thoughtfully engineered 4POINT, with its 11" effective length, look almost conservative. Combining easy, repeatable adjustability of all geometric parameters with the sort of physical integrity and rigidity more normally associated with Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the 4POINT's relatively modest 280mm effective length is coupled to an offset pillar that allows it to use the same mounting geometry as a standard 9" arm. This incredibly sensible arrangement keeps the effective mass manageable, even if the arm's total mass is on the high side. It also contributes to a performance whose balance of virtues exceeds not just the other Kuzma arms (a range that includes both 12" and linear-tracking designs) but most other tonearms to boot, making the 4POINT a genuine benchmark product. ▶



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▶ Given the high regard in which the design is held, together with the dogma that afflicts so many audiophile buying decisions) I’ve been half expecting a 12” version of the 4POINT for some time: what I wasn’t expecting was a 14” version! For what is already a physically big arm, adding another three inches to the arm-tube – along with the larger counterweight to match – creates an absolute monster. Effective length is now 353mm: effective mass rises to 19g, making this the preserve of truly low compliance cartridges only (despite differential horizontal and vertical damping) and overall weight is now 2150g. The good news is that mounting geometry is now 291mm, equivalent to many 12” arms, so as long as your turntable will take a foot-long tonearm, the 4POINT 14 should fit. Best of all, at £6,250 the 4POINT 14 might just be the best arm out there, and in a world where arms can now cost close to £30,000, it represents great value. But, is more necessarily better or, when it comes to tonearms, is it possible to have altogether too much of a good thing?

As I’ve already noted, the 291mm mounting distance means that the 4POINT 14 should mount on any deck that will take a standard 12” arm. Having said that, the offset mounting means that the arm’s bearing housing itself and in particular, its extremely long counterweight stub, extend well beyond most armboards/towers, so you need to make sure you’ll have enough room to accommodate the beast, not only when parked but when it swings into action. I used a pre-cut arm block to mount the arm on the Kuzma Stabi M – in place of a standard 4POINT – and getting the arm under the ‘table’s lid was a considerable challenge. Even so, I could only run it with the lid open, although the security offered

while the arm was parked was still extremely welcome. The use of the pre-cut mounting saved me from the second practical challenge. Kuzma mounts look like standard Linn pattern six-bolt cutouts: they aren’t. The Kuzma mounting collars have larger diameter extensions (a full 40mm) than the Linn ones, so you’ll need to get a board cut specifically – a standard Linn mount won’t work, even if the geometry is correct. Once you’ve got the mount in place, you still need to set the pivot to spindle distance, which at 342mm exceeds the beam length of tools like the SMARTractor (although I have a special, longer beam on order). That makes setting the pivot point somewhat hit and miss, and also means that you are limited to using Kuzma’s own two-point protractor. Nothing wrong with that, unless of course you want to use something like UNIdin geometry as opposed to the Kuzma’s Lofgren A. Finally, we come back to the question of effective mass. Don’t assume that just because your cartridge is happy in the standard 4POINT, it will be equally at home in the 14. The Lyra Dorian, which is perfectly happy in the standard 4POINT proved marginal, helped by its own low mass, when installed in the 14 for comparison purposes. Even the Fuuga, with its stated compliance of 7cu (at 100hz) generates a fundamental resonance around a low but acceptable 9Hz. You have been warned... Fortunately, the 4POINT 14’s incredibly adaptable damping will solve many problems, but it’s another thing you may find yourself having to deal with. Ohh... and don’t go thinking that you can simply lift a cartridge and headshell out of the 11” arm (assuming that you’re lucky enough to own one) and drop it into the 14”: the headshells might look identical and they certainly fix in the same elegant manner, but the off-set angle is different (19.5° as opposed to 15.35° for the longer arm).

Given the stellar, standard-setting performance of the 11” 4POINT, is the 14” version worth the bother? In the right system and given the right cartridge, the answer to that is definitely a yes. First listen was with the Dorian and I was totally unprepared for the sheer substance, power, energy, and drive generated by the longer arm, even with this accomplished but fairly modest cartridge (less than £500, remember). Adding just a touch of vertical damping brought extra stability, security and transparency to the picture, reinforcing just how critical arm and cartridge matching can be, but swapping between the standard 4POINT and the longer arm with Dorian’s in both simply served to underline the extra presence and musical authority produced by the 14. It was already hinting at greatness before I mounted the Fuuga, but that’s when things got really interesting. The Dorian serves as a perfect all-rounder for back-to-back comparisons between arms or turntables, but a product with the stature and ambition invested in the 4POINT 14 deserves something considerably better – which is exactly where the Fuuga comes in.

In many ways, tonearms work at a significant disadvantage. Their contribution is entirely passive and in a very real sense, they exist only to serve: ▶

▶ in this case allowing the cartridge to do its job. Bearing in mind just how crude the actual mechanics of dragging a rock along a trench really are, helping the cartridge to be the best that it can be is a considerable challenge. Yet, the more you listen to the 4POINT 14 the clearer it becomes that this is exactly what it achieves. Just as the Dorian generates a shocking degree of musical authority, with bandwidth, dynamic range, and substance that go way beyond the pick-up's asking price, the Fuuga (a cartridge that already excels in those regards) brings a presence and substance to musical performances that really set them apart: apart from the norm – but more crucially, apart from the process of reproduction and the system itself. Install the 4POINT 14 and it brings with it a sense of unfettered dynamic range, limitless energy, absolute stability, and total musical integrity, allowing the performers and the performance to be completely separate from the system. Sound is no longer projected from the speakers, but rather takes on its own, completely independent existence within the room. Just as the 14 removed the dynamic and bandwidth limitations I'd always attributed to the Dorian, allowing that cartridge to grow and project, so it gave the Fuuga (and the Etna) an expressive and spatial freedom that was so free of system limitations that it moved the resulting performance much closer to the live event and the experience of the real. In the simplest possible terms, each of the cartridges used sounded like a bigger, better version of itself, with the result that they communicated more

directly, making your brain's interpretive function considerably simpler: as a result, you heard less system and a lot more music.

It would be very easy to get reductionist about this: it's the reduced tracing error; it's the increase in effective mass; maybe it's all to do with the reduced offset or the almost 30% increase in the fineness of VTA adjustment. I really don't think that it's that simple. Instead, all of these factors (and a few others besides) are working in unison to elevate the tonearm's performance and eliminate it as a limiting factor. The result is an arm that has the musical ease, flow, spatial security, and expressive temporal integrity of arms like the FR66fx or Dynavector DV505 – tonearms rightly lauded for their natural, communicative qualities – combined with the power, precision, and focus of the standard 4POINT. Throw in the 14's party piece – seemingly limitless quantities of sheer musical energy and utterly unimpeded dynamic response, and this is one seriously impressive performer. Put a 4POINT 14 in your system and sit back as your speakers apparently expand in size (at the same time as they disappear), your cartridge grows in power, and the musicians on your records don't just wake up, they decide that today is the day. "Emphatic musical delivery" doesn't even start to cover it. The power and sense of purposeful momentum are what you'll notice first, but after that comes the realization that you've also gained subtlety, intimacy, immediacy and poise. There's a more apparent range of tonal colours in play and a rhythmic fluidity that is as unforced as it is seductively involving.

The 4POINT 14 isn't an arm for everyman: not because everyman won't appreciate its qualities, but because not everyone can accommodate it. It's demanding of space and it works best with exactly the sort of big, heavy, low compliance cartridges that attract big, heavy price tags. The Fuuga is a natural partner, as are Kuzma's own excellent CAR pick-ups. I'd love to hear this arm with one of the platinum magnet Koetsus and the rejuvenated Kisekis beckon also. But if you have the space to mount the arm and the cartridge to partner it, then what the 4POINT 14 delivers is all of the practical benefits ▶



Four points about the 4POINT

One of things that set the 4POINT arms (both the standard and 14" versions) apart from the competition is the way in which they manage to combine adjustability of all geometrical parameters with a rigidity that at least matches and probably exceeds all even remotely flexible alternatives. Typical gimbaled arms, like SMEs or Linn tonearms, don't allow on-the-fly trimming of VTA and simply can't offer azimuth adjustment, while the complex structure of an arm like the TriPlanar introduces its own set of compromises. The structure and engineering of the 4POINT is an object lesson in functional elegance, offering a range of simple, repeatable adjustments that allow users to achieve far more accurate set up and, as a result, significantly better sound.

The massive tonearm assembly might look monolithic but is actually a complex and carefully considered component. The headshell is removable, allowing you to mount cartridges and even rotate between models, if you so wish – although that will require resetting the arm's balance, bias, and headshell wiring. The tube itself is split just ahead of the bearing housing, where a long sleeve joint allows you to loosen the front section and precisely rotate it using an Allen key to achieve continuous yet incremental adjustment of azimuth. The counterweight assembly is a composite arrangement. The large, low slung weight allows you to alter its mass with the range of supplied rings that simply screw onto the stub and lock together, keeping it as close to the pivot as possible to help maximize tracking performance. The small weight in the upper position is used to set tracking force, its two parts lock together allowing you to vary the resistance to rotation. That might seem like a small thing, but when it comes to making those "so small you almost can't feel them" adjustments to VTF that are the difference between a performance that is great and one that is truly magical, that and the simple red dots that provide a rotational reference are what make it happen. Finally, it's possible to remove the entire arm-assembly, keeping all the adjustments intact and replace it with another complete unit with cartridge installed. It's not as straightforward as the same operation on the VPI JMW, as Kuzma requires you to unlock the cable-retaining stub with an Allen key, but that also allows the use of a straight-through wiring harness, eliminating at least one junction in this critical, low-level signal path.

Arm-height can be set using a locking collar, but thereafter, a cam-locked VTA tower allows in-play adjustment of this critical parameter, without any compromise in rigidity. Whether you are a "tickle it for every record" kind of listener, or simply want to optimize arm height when switching between standard and 180/200g audiophile pressings, it's simple, incredibly precise and brilliantly effective. My only complaint? I'd like a finer scale on the rotating dial to make tiny shifts more repeatable, but that aside, the 4POINT is the very model of analogue set-up sanity. It allows you to optimize the arm for the chosen cartridge and then set that cartridge up, with every parameter separate, independently, and easily adjustable. If only all tonearms worked like this, the world would be a better place!

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: 14" tonearm with unique Kuzma 4POINT bearing system

Arm mount: Kuzma

Mounting distance: 291mm

Spindle to pivot: 342mm

Effective length: 353mm

Effective mass: 19g

Removable headshell: Yes – Kuzma type, spare supplied

Fingerlift: Removable

Adjustments available: Overhang, bias, vta, azimuth, vertical damping, horizontal damping, c/w mass

Cable: Kuzma silver – optional cables and configurations available

Arm mass: 2150g

Price: £6250

Manufacturer: Kuzma Ltd, Preddvor, Slovenia

URL: www.kuzma.si

UK Distributor: Audiofreaks

Tel: +44 208 948 4153

URL: www.audiofreaks.co.uk

▶ that helped make the standard 4POINT so attractive, along with a level of performance that, like the VPI JMW 3D tonearm before it, raises the level of musical invisibility possible from a tonearm. Until you hear an arm like the 14 you have no idea just how audible an impact your tonearm is having. The standard 4POINT is a very, very good arm; in fact, it is the most consistent, musically convincing, and engaging arm I've ever used at home – until now. The 4POINT 14 isn't just better; bigger, heavier, and longer, it is both reductionist and pointless trying to put your finger on what exactly makes that difference, but it's a difference that's way too big to ignore. Is more necessarily better? I don't think that's a given, but once you hear the 4POINT 14, it's awfully hard to go back. +