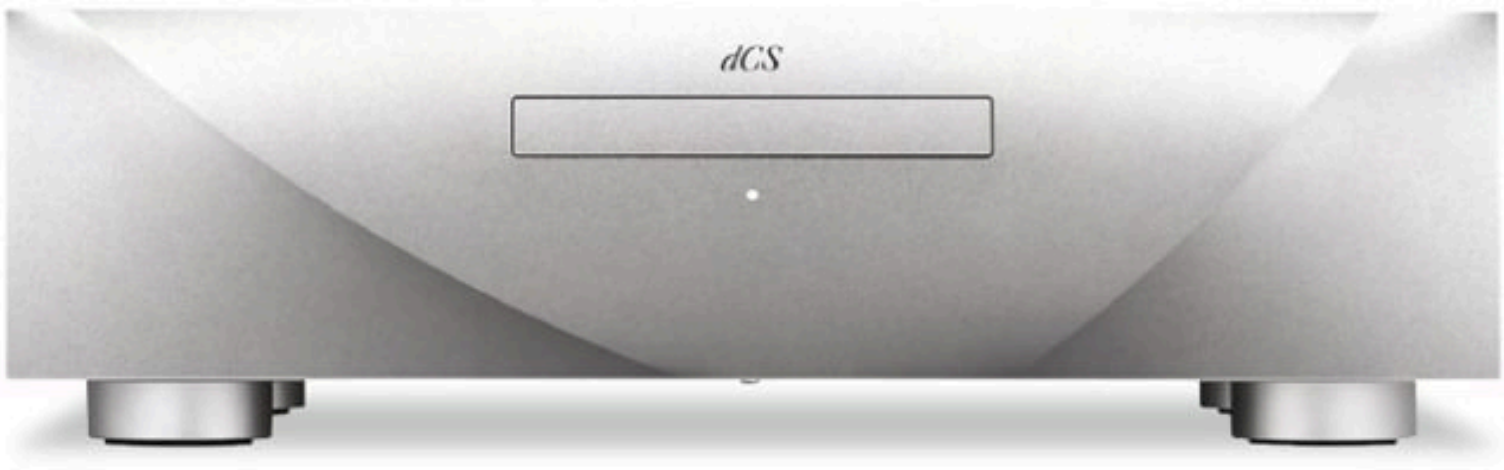
AUDIO FILE

CD/SACD transport
Made by: Data Conversion Systems Ltd, Cambs
Supplied by: dCS Ltd
Telephone: 01954 233950
Web: www.dcsltd.co.uk; www.absolutesounds.com
Price: £32,500

hi-finews YEARBOOK 26 OUTSTANDING PRODUCT



dCS Varèse Transport

The arrival of dCS's Varèse CD/SACD transport should come as no surprise to followers of its flagship digital solution [*HFN* Feb '25]. Bringing the complete Varèse 'stack' to a total of six units – the User Interface, Core, Master Clock and dual Mono DACs – the eagerly anticipated Transport also lifts the all-up price just north of £260,000.

The name is self-explanatory, but there's a lot going on inside what dCS calls its 'quietest, lowest-vibration' disc transport to date. Playing 44.1kHz/16-bit CDs and SACDs in their native formats, the Transport interfaces with the Varèse Core using the company's ACTUS link. It's controlled from the touchscreen of the Varèse User Interface module, the Varèse remote, or the dCS Mosaic ACTUS app, where it simply appears as another input option. There are no physical controls on the unit itself.

'Switching to the SACD layer delivered a more organic sound overall'

The disc mechanism, sourced from Marantz/Denon parent Sound United, was chosen for its ability to offer 'bit-perfect disc-reading and output', and is paired here with dCS's own dual VCXO clock circuitry to reduce jitter. Care has been taken in the mounting of the mechanism to mitigate against vibration and get the cleanest possible read of the disc – especially critical with the higher rotational speed and finer data pit structure of SACDs. Inside the Transport's heavyweight casework, the disc mech and control PCB get their own solid alloy subchassis, separated from the unit's electronics, which are combined on a single circuitboard.

ALL SYSTEMS GO

The quick and easy answer to 'how does the Varèse Transport sound?' is that it doesn't. Comparing CDs to streams at the same resolution showed any differences to be so vanishingly small, if even there, as to be entirely irrelevant, leading to the conclusion that the main influence here was the digital capability of the full Varèse ensemble. The Transport, just like the Varèse's streaming implementation, simply offers a clean datastream to the Core and DAC(s), and they get on with the job of delivering a world class musical performance.

Playing the Danish Chamber Orchestra's recording of Brahms' First Symphony [Naxos] saw the Varèse revealing the clean, bright and detailed performance and recording. There were fine dynamics, punch and lyricism in the playing of the chamber orchestra – smaller forces than are usually deployed for these works. It was insightful and involving, but switching to Tidal's lossless stream showed the presentation also lost nothing in translation to streaming over wired Ethernet.

With a more intimate piece, pianist Jan Gunnar Hoff's take on The Beach Boys' 'God Only Knows' [*Stories*; 2L], the Varèse ensemble proved the quality of the recording, with both a close focus on the instrument and obvious ambience from a CD-res stream. The same was true of the CD layer on its hybrid SACD release, but switching to the SACD layer delivered both additional warmth and space in the piano and a more organic sound overall. There was a greater sense of the ambient acoustic as notes decayed, the SACD giving more of that 'instrument in the room' feel.

Salif Keita's rendition of Cole Porter's 'Begin The Beguine', on the *Red Hot + Blue* compilation [Chrysalis], sounded as joyous and vibrant played from CD or streamed. Similarly, U2's cover of Porter's 'Night And Day' failed to elicit any repeatable differences between disc and stream, despite its powerful droning bass, Bono's recessed vocal and The Edge's guitar interjections.

Playing Vivaldi's 'Violin Concerto in A major' [*The Trondheim Concertos*; 2L], the sound was tight and clean. The stream via Tidal matched the CD playback, but the SACD encode opened up the performance, making even more of the reverberant church acoustic.

ABOVE: Fitted with the familiar Varèse faceplate, the upper and lower halves of the Transport chassis are both milled from solid alloy. The open/close and other disc transport functions for the SACD/CD mechanism are hosted and controlled via the dCS Mosaic ACTUS app. The Transport has a single ACTUS connection that carries control data (play, pause, eject, *etc*) across the Varèse system – there are no I²S, S/PDIF, USB or HDMI ports here

VERDICT

Clearly the rest of the Varèse 'stack' does a lot of the heavy lifting here. Nonetheless, the Transport shows its true abilities with SACDs, when it really shines, and so for a Varèse owner with a large disc collection, this really is a no-brainer.

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Maximum output level / Impedance	5.88Vrms / 550mohm (XLR)
A-wtd S/N ratio (CD/SACD re. 0dBFs)	118.2dB / 118.2dB
Distortion (1kHz, 0dBFs/–30dBFs)	0.00008% / 0.0003%
Distortion & Noise (20kHz, 0dBFs/–30dBFs)	0.00028% / 0.0005%
Freq. resp. (20Hz-20kHz/SACD to 100kHz)	+0.0 to –0.02dB/–8.4dB
Digital jitter (CD/SACD)	116psec / 25psec
Resolution (1kHz @ –100dBFs/–110dBFs)	±0.1dB / ±0.1dB
Power consumption	30W (2W standby)
Dimensions (WHD) / **Weight**	444x131x437mm / 20.1kg