

Lateral LAS-4 Integral equipment stand

by Alan Sircom

The name sounds a bit like a piece of military hardware, but the Lateral LAS-4 Integral is, in fact a high-performance and inherently upgradable equipment support.

Equipment supports seem to be evenly divided between those that are affordable and lightweight, but a bit rudimentary, those that are expensive and heavyweight, but also a bit rudimentary, and those that actually try to address some of the demands placed on an equipment support by the devices that rest upon it. Lateral is very much in the latter camp.

The Lateral LAS-4 Integral is a two-to-five tier equipment support system that uses a combination of oak-veneered machined birch ply/mystery lightweight wood platforms with machined solid oak legs. Each of these platforms is CNC milled not only for the basic shape of the platform, but to mill out the two crescent shaped spaces cut into the centre of the platform, which are designed to lower resonance and vibration (the ideas come from the aerospace industry, in particular how modern jet engines manage to be both more fuel efficient and quieter using similar anti-vibration techniques).

Assembly is almost straightforward, and shows the, er, lateral thinking involved in the platform design. Quite literally; faced with a set of long bolts and uprights, you might be forgiven for thinking they screw-in top and bottom to each leg. In fact they bolt the legs to the platform at a 90° angle. This is far smarter than just a design feature, as it means the interface between platform and upright is a classical tensioned bolt arrangement. If you want to know why that's important, go



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▶ to a modern city and look up; those cranes rely on tensioned bolts to prevent them from disintegrating when lifting a heavy load. Here it means the mass of whatever sits on the stand is limited by the sheer strength of the bolt, and it's an excellent way of getting vibrational energy away from the equipment itself. The 'almost' part comes in because until you bolt top and bottom platforms together, the whole thing acts like bagpipes in the wild.

If you have more than three tiers, you connect the separate sections (think of a four tier stand as two sets of two-platform tall stands) with four dedicated leg cones that you set between sections, then ensure everything is as level as possible (that is vitally important) and tightened. The leg cones are not designed to be an interference fit. A good plan here is to 'offer up' top section to base and then insert the cones one at a time. We come from an industry that equates 'tightened' to 'near breaking point' – Lateral takes a more common-sense engineering approach to tightening bolts.

The whole stand rests on four spikes, and Lateral suggests leaving the stand to 'settle' before installing equipment: how much settling time is not given, but I'd give it enough time to enjoy a rewarding cup or two of tea.

Once installed though, the Lateral system makes a lot of musical sense. There's a stated goal of Lateral to help bring out the best from reasonably priced audio equipment, and the Lateral system achieves that goal almost perfectly. There's a lightness of touch to the sound; not insubstantial (in fact bass is clear, distinct, and deep), but deft and fleet-of-foot. The sense of rhythm is entirely unconstrained and the stand helps bring out the best of that aspect in any component it rests upon. One of my most recent tests in this is to try and decode the frankly crazy *Flamagra* album by Flying Lotus [Warp]. It's not the best mix on the planet, but there is a lot of stuff going on in that mix and any help in teasing apart the compressed sound is worth noting. Here, playing on a Primare I25, the sound was more separated, melodic, and easier to follow. It was more spacious too, although the platform doesn't fill in the blanks creating a soundstage where there is just a wall of sound. With better quality recordings (such as the ECM recordings of Schiff playing Beethoven Piano Sonatas), that lightness of touch coupled with a soundstaging boost made the system seem just that bit more 'real'.

There is also more substance to the sound, alongside the lightness of touch. Music rises from a darker sounding background, and the placement of instruments within the musical presentation seems more solid and precise, yet at the same time more detailed and airy. Even on the orchestrated retro-bleeping of Nils Frahm's 'All Melody' [Erased Tapes], you got the feeling of a more coherent overall performance rather than any kind of disassociation between the instrument voices. This is a subtle nudging of the system into a more musical and beat-driven direction, but the effect itself is not subtle!

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Dimensions (WxD): 65 × 49.5cm

Height and weight dependent on specification

Two, three, four, and five tier versions available, four tier version tested

Height (as tested): 89cm

Maximum shelf load: 50kg (bottom tier), 30kg (upper tiers)

Finish: oak as standard, black oak

Prices: from £1,300 (price as tested, £1,800)

Concert Isolation platform upgrade for LAS-4 stand: £400

Manufactured by: Lateral Audio Stands

URL: lateralaudiostands.co.uk

There's an upgrade path too. You can add Concert isolation platforms to one or more standard Integral shelves. Along with the platform itself, the £400 Concert is supplied with three cup-ball-puck cone feet and one that is effectively a cup with a rounded tip threaded height-adjustment. This is icing on the cake, but it's one hell of a good icing! There is even an additional option that removes the original Integral shelf and replaces it with a centre-less shelf base with a black anodised front panel for an additional £200. If Concert is icing on the cake, this is the cherry on the top of that icing. Both options are worth taking as both give benefit, but it's Integral that does the heavy lifting.

Lateral's LAS-4 Integral stand is British engineering in the Lotus tradition, but in a good way. It's the 'simplify, and add lightness' kind of engineering, rather than 'at the roadside with a carrier bag full of sheared gearbox parts' version. In its Integral guise, it's a consistent performance boost without an electronics swap. Adding Concert improves on that improvement. What more can you ask of a support system? +