

YOUR IMPORTANT GUIDE TO BUYING A VINTAGE RECORD PLAYER

That Dansette you've got your eyes on may appear good superficially, but there's much more to consider, as Tutti Audio's Bob Amos explains...

It may look cool but make sure it doesn't get you hot under the collar by following some straightforward and less straightforward, honest advice. Unarguably, electrical safety should be a prime consideration when buying a vintage record player.

Context

Chances are that over time the player you have in mind has received attention from the trained and untrained. In all probability, it has stood idle for a few decades having been stored away in a loft, garage or even a garden shed. Unlike modern day 'solid-state' electronics operating at low, intrinsically safe voltages, thermionic valve technology requires far greater voltages to function. Moreover, electrical safety norms have come a long way since the 50' and 60's when these players were designed and built. Buying from a private seller; Remember, you have no comeback or guarantee of it being fit and safe for purpose. Before using the player, get it checked out by a competent electronics engineer conversant with thermionic valve technology. Get it updated as much as reasonably possible, by ensuring the following points listed immediately below are used as a checklist.

Buying from a company, dealer or trader

Safety first

Whether new or second hand, all electrical goods sold must meet the Electrical Equipment Safety Regulations 1994 (Low Voltage Directive).

1) We will never sell, restore or repair the Dansette models listed below on the grounds that they are intrinsically unsafe to use, as they do not incorporate a mains isolation transformer. Their early topology utilises what is known as a hot (live) chassis, whereby the common ground including the amplifier's chassis metalwork is directly connected to one half of the 240V mains supply. This should be the NEUTRAL line but faulty player, plug or house wiring or damaged/incorrect rated safety 'Y' capacitors could be lethal. Furthermore, there's no way that without a mains isolation transformer being retrofitted the models listed below can meet modern day electrical safety norms (Low Voltage Directive).

Just one simple example of the potential danger is illustrated by using one of these players with a broken control knob (very common on vintage equipment). The metal control spindle protruding from the player will be directly connected to one side of the 240V mains supply!

Some of the popular models that do not include a mains isolation transformer include:

Dansette Viva

Dansette Thames

Dansette Tonesta

Dansette Conquest Non Auto (The later Dansette Conquest Auto's are perfectly safe in this respect)

Dansette Popular

Dansette Prince

Dansette Junior

Dansette Transit

Dansette Capri

This list is not exhaustive so it's always wise to check before purchase. A good indicator will be the valves (tubes) incorporated in the player. If their designations start with 'U'; UL84/UY85/UCL82 for example the record player will have live chassis topology. Valve designations starting with 'E'; EL84/ECL83/EZ80 for example your Dansette player will be fitted with an isolation transformer.

REST ASSURED, EVERY DANSETTE MODEL WE SELL IS INTRINSICALLY SAFE TO USE AS THEIR DESIGN TOPOLOGY INCLUDES A MAINS ISOLATION TRANSFORMER AND ALL METALWORK IS SAFETY EARTH BONDED.

Other important aspects to consider...

- 2) Make sure an up to date modern, three core mains lead is fitted (brown, blue, green/yellow) with a minimum rating of 3 Amps
- 3) Ensure internal mains power is supplied to the amplifier via an isolation transformer. This is usually intrinsic to the original design, whereby many comprise a transformer with separate primary and secondary windings. However, some players simply have a mains dropper/auto transformer set up and unless they are retrofitted with a dedicated isolation transformer, they cannot be intrinsically safe – the Dansette Viva model is one example. See 1 above for detailed explanation and list of 'live chassis' Dansette players.
- 4) The plug top is fitted with a maximum 2A fuse (not 3A or higher as the fuse must be rated lower than the current rating of the mains cable).
- 5) A label is applied to the plug top advising a maximum 2A fuse.
- 6) The main amplifier chassis is independently earth bonded.
- 7) The metal turntable assembly is independently earth bonded (see also 1 above)
- 8) The motor casing is independently earth bonded.
- 9) The earth bonding resistance/continuity is checked through to the earth pin on the plug top.

10) Due to the hazardous voltages inside, a suitable warning label is applied. Internal wiring integrity is thoroughly checked through.

11) Two stage valve amplifiers (pre amp anode to output stage control grid) are coupled via a high voltage rated capacitor that often fails with age – as a matter of course it is strongly recommended to get this replaced (Dansettes – typically 10nF to 47nF/600V).

Other important housekeeping matters

12) Get the amplifier discrete components checked out – there's not many of them but old carbon resistors frequently increase in value and electrolytic capacitors may need reforming or changing.

13) Ensure the cartridge is compatible with stereo recordings. If it is an original mono only cartridge, the chances are the stylus will have no vertical compliancy, which may damage stereo records.

14) Get the stylus force correctly set in accordance within the cartridge manufacturers recommendation – too heavy can cause excessive wear.

15) A good repair company will have a special gauge for this. BSR and Garrard turntables have proven to be amazingly robust and reliable given their age.

16) The vast majority of issues are attributed to thickening of the grease applied when new. This needs to be carefully removed, the mechanism cleaned and lightly re-lubricated with fine oil.

17) Control potentiometers (volume & tone) that cause a crackling sound from the loudspeakers when turned is invariably due to tarnishing/dirt on wiper/contacts within the control itself – exacerbated by lack of use. Correct cleaning usually cures this problem but occasionally the control will need replacing.

18) House cladding or render can hide a multitude of sins so can new Rexine coverings. It is not uncommon to find old players riddled with holes from wood boring insects. Therefore it's always worth checking this less obvious aspect as well. After all, many would have been stored in lofts, garages and barns.

19) Finally...Don't forget that when transporting your player, to make sure that the two turntable transit screws are turned fully anticlockwise so that the turntable is hard to its mounting board (not springy). They will of course need releasing (clockwise) before operating the unit again.

Why risk it? When buying a Dansette from Tutti Audio you can be assured that all of the above has been properly attended to.

What's more you'll receive a detailed report to prove it. We're always available, 7 days a week, daytime and evenings to answer any questions you may have. Our advice is totally free and without any obligation whatsoever. You could say it's our passion!