

Zanden ODC-1 optical disc cleaner

by Alan Sircom

The senior service in domestic digital audio – the Compact Disc – turns 40 next year. While there are many now who have moved past physical formats into downloaded and streamed music, the humble polycarbonate music and data carrier still holds a place in the hearts, minds and racks of many an audiophile. However, dealing with the format in 2021 is not without its hair-pulling moments, as those long-loved discs and highly-prized transports fall into the ‘curmudgeonly’ dotage.

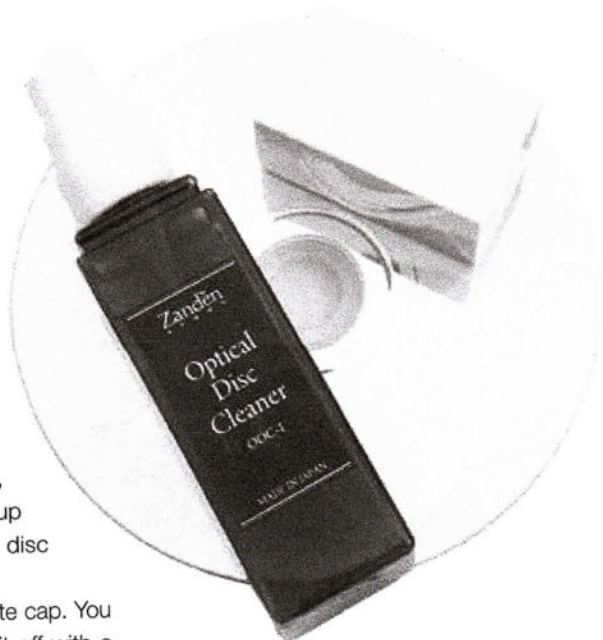
Many a seemingly unplayable disc can be brought back to life with the judicious use of a shirt-sleeve, but that isn’t always enough. While many rely on spray screen cleaners and the rest, there are also audiophile options, and some of them also end up sounding good, which is where Zanden’s new ODC-1 optical disc cleaning fluid comes into its own.

The ODC-1 fluid comes in a rectangular blue bottle with a white cap. You spray several squirts on the playing surface of a disc then wipe it off with a soft tissue. The single small sheet of paper warns you against spraying it in your eyes or drinking it and recommends using gloves if you have sensitive skin, but there is absolutely no mention of chemical construction, and it has no discernible odour. Spraying it on a disc leaves what looks like a cloudy residue that disperses over a few seconds and the end result is extremely clean. From observation, the mystery liquid does have some anti-static properties, it seems, and overspray from the cleaner onto my thumb leaves the feeling of a very thin dry and completely transparent coating.

Here’s the first part. It cleans the disc and makes it playable. It does that better than a sleeve and even slightly better than a wipe over with a Zeiss lens cleaning cloth (they are on a par in terms of initial playability of cruddy CDs, but you can play a Zanden-treated disc many more times than a Zeiss-cleaned disc before you need to retreat the disc). So far, so good.

Here’s the second bit. It makes that disc sound better. Using a disc that doesn’t cause a transport to cough [*Fated* by Nosaj Thing, Innovative] seems to make a recording delve deeper into its dynamic range, makes the music seem less ‘peaky’ and bright and that bit more analogue-y sounding. Soundstage, detail levels and overall tonal balance don’t seem to be influenced by ODC-1, but this is entirely understandable; this is more about getting more of the recording off the disc than performing some magic tricks to the recording itself. What’s interesting, however, is how many musical components we ascribe to ‘digital’ might just be more to do with disc release agent residue than ‘digital’ per se.

The difference is marked; a treated recording sounds a little more dynamic, less harsh, bright and thin sounding. I tried it on several recordings and on



as many disc players as I could find and the improvement was consistent and repeated plays of a disc suggests the improvements don’t go away quickly.

This might seem like sugar-frosting on the CD cake, but Zanden’s ODC-1 shows it’s a cake is well worth trying. Those who have no intention of waving goodbye to the format just yet... congratulations: thanks to Zanden, CD replay just got better. +

PRICE AND CONTACT DETAILS

Price: £39

Manufacturer: Zanden Audio Systems
URL: zandenaudio.com

UK Distributor: Audiofreaks
URL: audiofreaks.co.uk
Tel: +44(0)208 948 4153