

# Audioplan FineFilter, PowerStar & PowerPlant - Cleaning Up My Power

Review by: Inearspace.com  
Date: June 11, 2015  
Reviewer: Sonny Trigg



Back when portable audio was my main focus, everything was battery powered and items to clean the power were not even a thought. By 2013 when I was getting a bit more into desktop audio I remember seeing Isotek's display at the Bristol Sound & Vision Show and what a dramatic difference a clean and isolated power supply can make. I was aware and of course understood there could be benefits but as always, seeing, or in this case hearing is believing. Fast forward to 2015 and my digital desktop system is at a very good place indeed, I have some great components, Nordost covering all my interconnects and both a pair of speakers and headphones I love. The last correction in my mind was of course sorting out the power supply, especially in a digital system.

## Innovators:

Audioplan were an unknown to me this time a year ago, not because they are new (they were founded in 1980) but because of my lack of knowledge regarding HiFi companies (I let Josh handle that domain until more recently). But when I contacted Audiomat in France regarding one of their DACs, I was forwarded to Ikon Audio Consultants which is run by Ion Koussaniotakis in Josh's hometown, Ipswich. This just so happened to be my first exposure to Audioplan.

With companies such as Isotek known for their products being power cleaners and the likes, it is probably quite unknown that Audioplan were a pioneer in this area of the industry and also one of

the first to take cabling and other tweaks a little more seriously as well. This all comes from a desire to create great sound in their own reference listening room back in the early 80s, which was what they also used for research into their speaker designs. They started off making speakers, which they still do as of this day but in 1982 they were finding strange sound fluctuations due to power supplies in their speaker research lab, thus creating the original PowerPlant. Now in my mind that is the best way a product can come about, if a company sees a gap in the market for something and decide to fill it, then there is a chance it wont be great or even snake oil. But when something is designed to solve a problem and enhance their ability to create great sound, there is a good chance it does what it says. That is the case here, its creation wasn't Audioplans way of branching out their portfolio, it was them creating a better more stable environment for them to design their speakers, and they just realised that others may also be need of better power that doesn't fluctuate.

Now if you have been following Inearspace for a while you probably know I love my tweaks and mods and am willing to try anything at least once to get better sounds. Now what I did not anticipate when coming into this review was that I would be dealing with a company who pretty much started this area of the hobby making upgrade cables, doing power conditioning and even selling isolation platforms back in the early 80s. You taking these guys a little more seriously now? I certainly am.

### **Perfect Power:**

So for this review I have been testing 4 components, all which intertwine to give you the most perfect of power, or that's the plan, the Audioplan. Everything starts at the FineFilter SII (there is now an upgraded SIII model) which comes in at £455 and this is a box that plugs straight into the mains and has its own British 3 pin power outlet but for my worldwide readers I can imagine your distributors will have it in whatever the standard you need and that goes for all these products. This is the first step into better power and you can stop there, plug a component straight in or use your own power socket splitter but if you want to continue with Audioplans recommendations you will then get the £395 PowerStar SII, which is their outlet splitter, obviously in a star shape and allowing 7 components to now use the FineFilter, which should be enough in a HiFi or headphone system but if you have a home cinema system, another one may be in need. Again like before you can call it a day here but for another £435 you can get the final product, the PowerPlant 100S. This is something you can have as many as you want of, ideally they are used for your digital components such as a CD Player or DAC but apparently an analogue component will even notice a difference. As with anything there is the additional icing on the cake and that comes in the PowerCordS, Audioplan's £165 upgrade mains cable obviously with the ability to have with every component you use.



So let's talk about everything in a bit more detail.

*FineFilter* – This is a small little box with dimensions being 12 x 8.5 x 22 cm. The idea is that it filters your mains of audio interference so everything will be getting a clean power supply. Worth noting is the filter has a low impedance, so it will be able to give the correct power to any component, no matter how big and grunty. Obviously this is prepared for any situation and has a built in safety reserve of 25 ampere. In the UK we don't have situations where mains power can become damaging but this will also let current peaks flow naturally and not at all be restricted by the filter. To make sure everything is tip top as well the cable coming out of this too the mains power is a PowerCord, so you are getting a high quality cable attached.

The FineFilter also has some switches to boot, firstly an earth filter that I left off but also an ability to change the mains filter so that is can shape the characteristics of your systems sound. It has a bass, neutral and presence option. Let's get to that later.





PowerStar – This is the unit I am by far the most skeptical about, especially at the price point. It is in simple terms a 7-way outlet splitter, a fancy one but in function nothing more. It doesn't have any circuitry or do anything to the current. Obviously they have their reasons of justifying its need of involvement and more so than trying to improve performance, it's actually just trying to eliminate any loss from having a splitter. One of the features really does have my backing and that is using silver plated copper solder and internal wiring to minimize resistance and also reducing soldering point, as the less the better, that just goes without saying. They have got it down to 3 soldering points, power plug to cable, cable to conductor star and conductor star to outlet.





Now this is something you can accept or completely reject as an idea but AudioPlan say that positioning of plugs completely effects the sound of a system. I will let them explain why:

“The reason for this is the equalizing currents, which flow through the audio frequency lines to compensate for dynamic potential differences from the power mains end.”

This is why they have used a star shape, not just as a pretty design and to give it a cool name, who would have guessed. This shape is actually ideal not only because it minimizes difference in potential but because of the middle outlet, being directly related to all of the 6 surrounding outlets. Why does that make a difference? Well it is not just a case off sticking all of your components into the outlets, no there is method to the positioning. Now that middle outlet is where you place the most important component, which according to AudioPlan is the pre-amp or integrated amp, depending of course what your system uses. You then have the rest of the components surrounding. I will let you make your mind up on that....

Again this brings in some other Audioplan technology, the included cable is of course again the PowerCord and they also have given this AntiSpike feet and used that same material for the bottom plate of the PowerStar. For those not sure what AntiSpikes are, they are a sold separately isolation feet for Hifi components and as you can guess aren't spikes. They use Siocim and can be adjusted under the PowerStar for further optimization.



**PowerPlant** –This actually decouples an individual component from the power supply, keeping that horrid RF interference from getting involved. This is something that is mainly recommended for digital components because they are known for having huge quantities of bad stuff going back and forth from the power supply. That is why they have implemented a reverse filter that actually filters what's going into the electronics and what's coming out of them.



*PowerCord* – The power cable actually as a unique internal design with it having 4 signals, instead of the usual 3 and yes, like a balanced headphone cable, this has an extra ground, running opposite to the other ground. Obviously you can't have a balanced power cable as such and AudioPlan call it a Quasi-Symmetric arrangement. For materials this uses silver plated copper in a litz arrangement. It specially isolates each signal apparently eliminating the need for shielding, but when has shielding not helped?





## How I Worked Them in:

For context I guess it makes sense for me to talk through how I have set these all up. I have used this in my desktop set up. Now I have a bit of an unorthodox way of things in this regard at the moment. I use my BMC PureMedia as my source/server with the option of also using my late 2013 iMac. Then I use the totaldac d1-tube-mk2 as my DAC (although others have been used) and that outputs into a pair of Amphion amp100 mono blocks (for speakers) and a Questyle CMA800R (for headphones). Obviously the initial set up will be standard for anyone, FineFilter into the wall then the PowerStar coming out of it. Then things start to become a bit more tactical and I had to choose by main component to have that middle spot of the star. As I do more headphone listening than speaker listening I chose the Questyle to dominate that middle spot. Also as the Amphions are power amps that would not be recommended for the middle either so they site round the edge. I then have the PowerPlant coming out and I stuck with the digital parts for them, choosing the totaldac to go with it, which I also use as my pre amp. I used the PowerCord with the totaldac as well but I think that may be futile having just the one and not using it with everything.



As I am in a desktop situation, having them seated on the floor directly under my amps and DAC worked just perfectly, all the power cables were the right length and while I never found myself lacking outlets on the PowerStar, I always had them full up, which I think is ideal and for an audio system, I think 7 will always be just enough. Worth noting is that both the PowerPlant and FineFilter are really HEAVY.

One thing that has some pros and cons compared to the usual is the form factor of these. Most power conditioners or filters I have seen before tend to be an all in one unit, regardless of what role they are doing. Imagine it, a Siocim unit with AntiSpikes, that has the FineFilter built in, all your power outlets in the form of a star with two of them being dedicated for digital using the PowerPlant, or you can have a base price without PowerPlant outlets and pay increasingly more to

add them. Just some food for thought Audioplan, I would love to see something less like a jigsaw puzzle offering the same performance. That all being said even though this method takes up more real estate, it does give you the option to pick and choose what you want from the range and also seems to have a positive impact on price.

### Some Experiences:

Before we get down to what actual impacts I found from removal of these components, lets talk about some stuff I noticed when living with these products in my system.

The first time I was mythed by something since having installed them was when I was doing some USB cable comparisons. Now I had just reviewed the totaldac d1-USB cable which had proved to really have a positive impact into my system before adding Audioplan stuff, probably due to the inline filter getting rid of the gunk from my source, at the time an iMac. Now after the review and adding Audioplan I found completely different results in the USB cables, with the Totaldac having considerably less impact. Why do I see this as a good thing? Well the Totaldac cable was obviously allowed to have such an impact because of all the interference in my system but now with the Audioplan power system, its job has been stolen, there is now a lack of interference to rid my DAC of and I think that shows the Audioplan stuff is doing its job.



The second finding was when I was doing some DAC comparisons. I had one DAC plugged into the PowerPlant and the other directly from the PowerStar. Regardless of which way round of it, the background was so much quieter when using the PowerPlant. In fact it made you struggle listening without it, because everything just felt noisy maybe even erratic. With the PowerPlant for my DAC though my system just tightened up, instruments were more defined and isolated and the soundstage tightened into place because of how clean a canvas we had for the music. This is also when you start to realize how much this may well be doing and you start to become dependent on it.





You know how much I hate tunable gear right, well Audioplan love this sort of thing and did it way before it was a trend. Yes these guys have been doing all sorts of tweaks for ages, they even have different speaker terminals on their Kontrast V loudspeaker to change their sound (and they work really well). Now I had originally not planned on testing this function but one day I was looking at the FineFilter and must have accidentally switched it to bass. Now I didn't notice anything that day (things take 24 hours to impact) but when I awoke the next morning, I was like, where has all this bass come from, in complete shock. It actually took me a while to even realize that it was the switch but I had more depth to my bass and more power. It worked well although honestly isn't for me and I returned it back to its original medium setting. The next day I decided to go for the presence mode. I awoke to a sound were everything tightened up, the sound was leaner and more forward and I actually found myself enjoying this new found signature a little more. If the filter can change the sound in anyway at all, it must be doing something right?





## Going Back to the Mains:

This was going to be hit or miss, I was going to move my main system back to the mains with a cheap, pound shop power outlet splitter and see what differences this made. While it takes 24 hours to get the effects into the system, they should be removed immediately.

Ok I was a little shocked, I don't know, maybe I wasn't expecting much but all sense of body in my music was gone, as where the dynamics. I was using my headphone system and generally enjoying the sound but as I have clearly become accustomed to the Audioplan stuff having lived with it for multiple months, I was obviously taking it for granted. The biggest difference I noticed was the body, I don't know why this is, to me it doesn't even make much sense, but everything felt thinner when I went back to the ordinary people power. I think there was a little bit less warmth and also a more brittle treble that contributed to the thinness and also a colder sound. In a sense everything was a little tinnier and just didn't flow. Because of this, we had harder edges on the music and everything was just a bit more work. It wasn't as effortless. It was jagged. Ouch!

The sound was smaller as well, I don't mean in the sense that we lost absolute size in the soundstage, but we lost a sense of scale. Nothing hit as hard, nothing was as bold and it made my music just sound less empowering and captivating. Funnily enough though it wasn't lots of teeny weeny differences that added up to an obvious difference, in fact to my ears it was pretty much just a few big differences, which impacted hard. These impacts in my mind made the products worth reviewing. They prove these are benefiting and also back up the experiences I had along the way.

Now with this being my first product of this category, I can't compare to other but I can say this does its job. That being said if the filter on this can be changed to adapt the sound signature, I can see different brands of this product having an altogether different impact, maybe for the better, perhaps for the worse.





## But The Price:

I agree, these aren't cheap and I will be blunt, as much as I wouldn't want to go back to the sound without these I think for their price you can achieve a lot in a singular unit for something like an amp or a DAC. If you have your end game system and don't have a power supply, then this is a no brainer. If you have a system that isn't much more than this as it is, then this is just pointless. One thing this does do well in providing though is something to build upon. It is something that will be stable in your system be it 10 grand now and end up 100 grand, power conditioning will always be important. This isn't the trendiest of gear, it is simple (black boxes with a sticker on, yes a sticker) and clearly performance motivated, unlike some in their fancy lacquered housing and flashing lights, that's why mine are all tucked under the desk, I don't feel a need for them to be on show, I just want them to do their job, and clearly it is doing something. Obviously all these things work as a system but it seems like the FineFilter is the workhorse, the PowerPlant rids digital products of any noise and the PowerStar is the final piece of the puzzle. While I have only really isolated the three products in certain ways, I would say if you can only afford two of the three, it would be the Powerstar that gets the boot but at the same time, I am beginning to trust what Audioplan are doing.

Review available here:

<http://www.inearspace.com/#!/Audioplan-FineFilter-PowerStar-PowerPlant-Cleaning-Up-My-Power/c112t/55781faf0cf2312d797b07bb>

Manufactured by: [www.Audioplan.de](http://www.Audioplan.de)

Available in the United Kingdom & Ireland form

**Ikon Audio Consultants**  
*Affordable audio excellence*

Web: [www.IkonAudioConsultants.com](http://www.IkonAudioConsultants.com)

Telephone: +44 (0)7956 476299

Email: [info@IkonAudioConsultants.com](mailto:info@IkonAudioConsultants.com)

Address: Ikon Audio Consultants  
Ipswich  
Suffolk  
England  
United Kingdom

