

AS FEATURED IN
PRO DETAILER
 MAGAZINE



HLR 15
 HLR 21



Rupes aren't usually one to be last to a party – or even fashionably late - but they are quite a way behind the “pack” now in bringing a cordless version of their champion range of machine polishers to a detailing market hungry for the tech. Finally, they have now, with the impending release of their HLR15 & HLR21 iBrid polishers.

That description actually does the brand a disservice. In a way, they were also first to the party – bringing out the iBrid Nano some seven years ago. They were briefly a trend setter in battery powered machine polishers beyond simple rotary machines, such as spot repair polishers, and since then their HLR75 battery polisher has launched to great acclaim as a small area DA. But it has taken them a long time to transfer the tech up to their LHR 15 and 21 models, on which the foundation of Rupes' modern detailing reputation is built - So, have they come too late to the party, or have they arrived exactly when they intended?

When others were launching full sized cordless machines, we did ask Rupes the question (several times) *“Are you next?”* and the answer was always

“No, the technology isn't good enough for us”.

In many ways they were right. Whilst battery machines are useful, not one we've encountered thus far has been better than a corded version of the same or similar machine. They offer an alternative that is sorely needed in some situations, but if the choice ahead of a 6 hour polishing session was between a battery machine or a corded version, no one without a chip in the game would honestly choose the cordless option if the other was available and convenient.

From a corded point of view:

PROS:

POWER = INFINITE, TORQUE = HIGHER,
 CUT = CONSISTENT, WEIGHT = LOWER.

CONS:

YOU NEED TO TOW A CABLE...

That's it. Unless towing a cable, or access to a plug socket is a problem, there's no aspect of a professional corded machine that underperforms against a cordless at all, and many cordless versions are hugely detrimental to at least one, if not all the corded's pro-list.

There are now a vast range of battery powered machines on the market from many different manufacturers – DeWalt and Milwaukee are two of the more household names, whilst China exports a brand for every day of the week. Flex ironically now falls into the latter category, but maintains its reputation for quality, and, to be frank, it's the one the Italians are going to be going head-to-head with in the detailing market having grabbed the lions share early on. So, four years of tech on from the release of the battery powered XFE, what have the Italians been able to improve on to convince them the time was now right?

Rupes have had their work cut out for them – the LHR15 and 21 are much loved machines, and transferring that into a cordless platform is a challenging task. They've had to use their experience initially built from the brushless Skorpio sander to transfer technology over to the larger machines with an all new brushless motor designed for the larger tool. Slash the weight to accommodate the extra heft of the battery. Redesign the backing plate to a lower profile unique to the cordless machines. Use an entirely new polyfibre material throughout the gearbox for noise and comfort improvements. Source battery tech that not only runs long enough to be usable, but doesn't decline output with use. And on top of all of that, find somewhere for the carbon fibre styling and blue led strips to fit!

Without beating about the bush, Rupes have flattened the now four year old Flex - and every other full size battery DA on the market - in all meaningful categories applicable to a DA battery polisher.

Four years in tech is seemingly an age in terms of advancements – similar to the dog years multiplier - and the differences are astonishing. Weight saving doesn't just come from within the body, but even something as simple as the 10 cell 5Ah battery is precisely 100g lighter compared to the latest 5Ah version Flex offer, and the total machine weight including battery is just 2.5 kg – that's 100g lighter than the Rupes Mk3 LHR15 corded.



Torque is as consistent and powerful as a corded machine, even under load, and genuinely doesn't leech out as the battery depletes – it even runs longer than the XFE, giving around 40 minutes of constant use (load dependant), whilst only taking marginally more time to charge. It's quiet too, at only 73db @ 1200hz, it's a noise rotary users will be familiar with – more high pitch and less rattles than a dual action.

If you're still on the fence about cutting the cord though, this is the machine's *pièce de résistance* – or at least it will be in later in 2024 when production starts – a corded transformer like that in the HLR75 and original iBrid nano, so you can use it like a corded machine if you don't want to worry about changing batteries occasionally. That is the final objection cut from the knees of anyone who didn't want to make the leap to cordless, and one trick every other manufacturer without known exception has missed, and will hurt from at every future comparison test.

As with any tool, there are some observations it can improve on – and I'll preface this by stating we were testing **demo machines** which were still undergoing final refinement, so don't take these comments as accurate to the final versions set to be available from early 2024.

1. The studded grips are a little too pronounced in my opinion, and could do with shaving down a bit so as not to leave imprints in your hands – they'll wear down naturally over time and become a softer grip, but it's a tactile feeling which doesn't give the greatest comfort from the start.
2. Low frequency vibration in the tool has been massively reduced to become non-existent – a great achievement for any random orbit tool – but when we tested there was a very high frequency vibration in the HLR15 which left our hands buzzing intensely after use.

The fact this wasn't present even slightly in the HLR21 we tested side by side suggests this more likely is an early platform issue, and the HLR15 we were using is due an updated body in its upcoming development revision [a diagnosis Rupes HQ have since concurred]. Changing from the harder Rupes pad to the softer did also reduce the vibration slightly, cushioning the effect somewhat, so hopefully this is one to be ironed out pre-release.

...These lists usually come in threes, and for the life of me - and I'm leaning back in my chair thinking back to our usage of it earlier today - I can't think of a single other thing I can criticise about either machine!

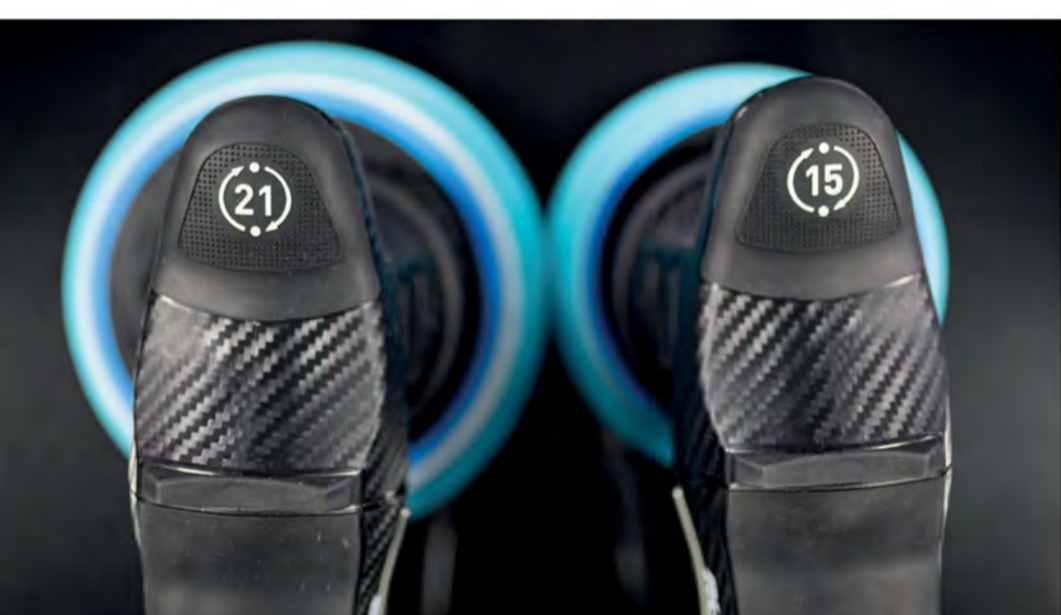
I had to inconvenience myself slightly when locking the trigger on due to the aforementioned grabby grip not allowing my hand to slide round, but then I'm being really picky... In terms of cost, RRP will be around £750 for the HLR15 kit, potentially a bit more for the HLR21, which isn't bad for a professional tool with the latest tech and all the associated benefits – barring the corded adaptor, which won't be immediately available upon launch.

Not bad either when you take into account the extras you get in the box - knock off the £100 nominal pad value and you're only about £50 off the price of a Flex kit with its older hardware and single slot battery charger. And if you already have the battery packs from one of the kits, the bare body machine for the twin HLR of the pair is set to be half that price.

On performance; the torque output from the machine didn't dip once during testing - I literally buckled the test bonnet and it refused to give in. The HLR21 machine felt beautifully balanced, capable and comfortable, as I expect the HLR15 will once the vibration is out of the equation. I could honestly use it for hours on end without being concerned I was wasting time a corded machine could have made up.



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Other neat little touches on the tools are the Tron-bar led lights running along each side, which lights up neon blue when the tool's trigger is pressed, and flashes when the battery is getting low to give you a hint to change. It's also supposed to flash when the motor is overloaded due to excess pressure, but we were unable to make it do that, so either my entire body weight is too little for the motor to care about, or it just wasn't playing ball – as demo machines are liable to from time to time. If the final version does that then it's potentially a great indicator for end users to help preserve the machine life and obtain better results through correct usage.

The thumb wheel seems to have grown larger still, and is clearer than ever to read, though it did move around a bit laterally when pushed, so could be more tightly secured. The progressive trigger seems even more responsive to input than ever, to the point you could accurately play a tune from the change in motor tone – probably the theremin-based Dr Who theme, given the tone.

The back of the body retains the rubber stands for the machine to rest on – as the battery is angled away from the body, it won't stand straight up on end as other machines do, but this is, I feel, a better solution regardless as it's a more secure resting stance and less liable to fall over and damage itself/something else.

Ultimately, Rupes have been proven right to wait for the technology to catch up, but it's not just the advances in motors or batteries – just changing the hardware alone won't help the competition reach parity.

The whole machine is holistic and is made for detailers – something no other machine manufacturer does. From them, you always feel as if your tools are being adapted from a sander, or a grinder, or as part of a larger range of tools to fill a demographic.

With Rupes, they've made a tool specifically tailored for detailers and body shops, and the work style and results required in their environments, and the results are truly epic.

