

EXPOBAR OFFICE LEVA (DUAL BOILER)

A CLOSER LOOK



[HTTP://WWW.BELLABARISTA.CO.UK](http://www.bellabarista.co.uk)

Overview

Unfortunately, this machine cannot be called the Expobar Brewtus III as it is called in some other world markets, hence the rather uninspiring name used in this review. This is an update of the previous Brewtus II dual boiler machine. The previous machine did suffer from problems mainly the AKO temperature controller failing and an inappropriate expansion valve (OPV), these came to light some months after the review. The Brewtus II also had some quality control issues I thought were one off's, but this proved not to be the case. This made me much more cautious, to ensure everything will be OK with this revised model. The review has been extremely thorough and the machine well tested for many weeks.

Standard of assembly is greatly improved from the Brewtus II and I found only 1 minor quality control defect (impressive)!

The machine arrived well packed in a very sturdy cardboard box with shaped polystyrene as a packing material. This machine is unlikely to get damaged in transit especially as Bella Barista also double box the machines. The build quality is good with good quality (industry standard) components. **The standard of assembly is greatly improved from the Brewtus II with only 1 very minor quality control defect!** Constructed using heavy gauge mirror finish stainless steel, the Expobar Office Leva (Dual Boiler) is almost certainly the best value for money prosumer dual boiler PID controlled machine currently on the market.

Dual Boiler machines can be quite complex internally, with a lot of electronic cleverness, Expobar have wisely avoided too much of this, creating a machine that's easy and economical to maintain.

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The details were correct at the time of writing, but the manufacturer and Bella Barista reserve the right to change the technical specification of the packaging, machines and any accessories supplied with the machine (including quantity and type of accessories supplied)

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Overview –cont.

It is simple to operate, with single On/Off switch, with steam, hot water or espresso available at any time and a few simple button presses to set any desired brew temperature. The Expobar Office Leva (Dual Boiler) automatically maintains the water level in the boiler as required, if run low on water in the tank the machine switches itself off as a safety precaution.

Some coffee enthusiasts buy second hand commercial machines to make quality beverages at home. They are very large, heavy, need to be plumbed into the mains and have 3–6kw heating elements in 5 litre or larger boilers. This gives the same or better quality, without the hassle. It requires no specialised power supply and has a maximum wattage draw of only 1250W, as only one boiler heating element can be active at any time.

Lifting the Expobar Brewtus II from the box is a bit awkward. The best method is to lay the box on its side, slide the machine out in its polystyrene shells and then flip it upright. It's heavy and solid, but easily handled by one person.



Well packed inner box, protected by double packing in an larger air-cell filled outer (inset) by Bella Barista

Bella Barista provides comprehensive documentation covering all aspects of operation, routine maintenance and production of espresso based drinks. A valuable addition to manufacturers written user guide.

Even if you are completely new to coffee making and this type of machine, you will have no problem making all those great coffee drinks in a very short time. The Expobar is easy to keep clean, a quick wipe with a damp cloth and a buff with a micro fibre cloth keeps it looking great. More complex tasks, backflushing, group head cleaning descaling etc. are actually very easy to do and explained in the supplied Bella Barista user guide.



Positioned in the corner of my kitchen

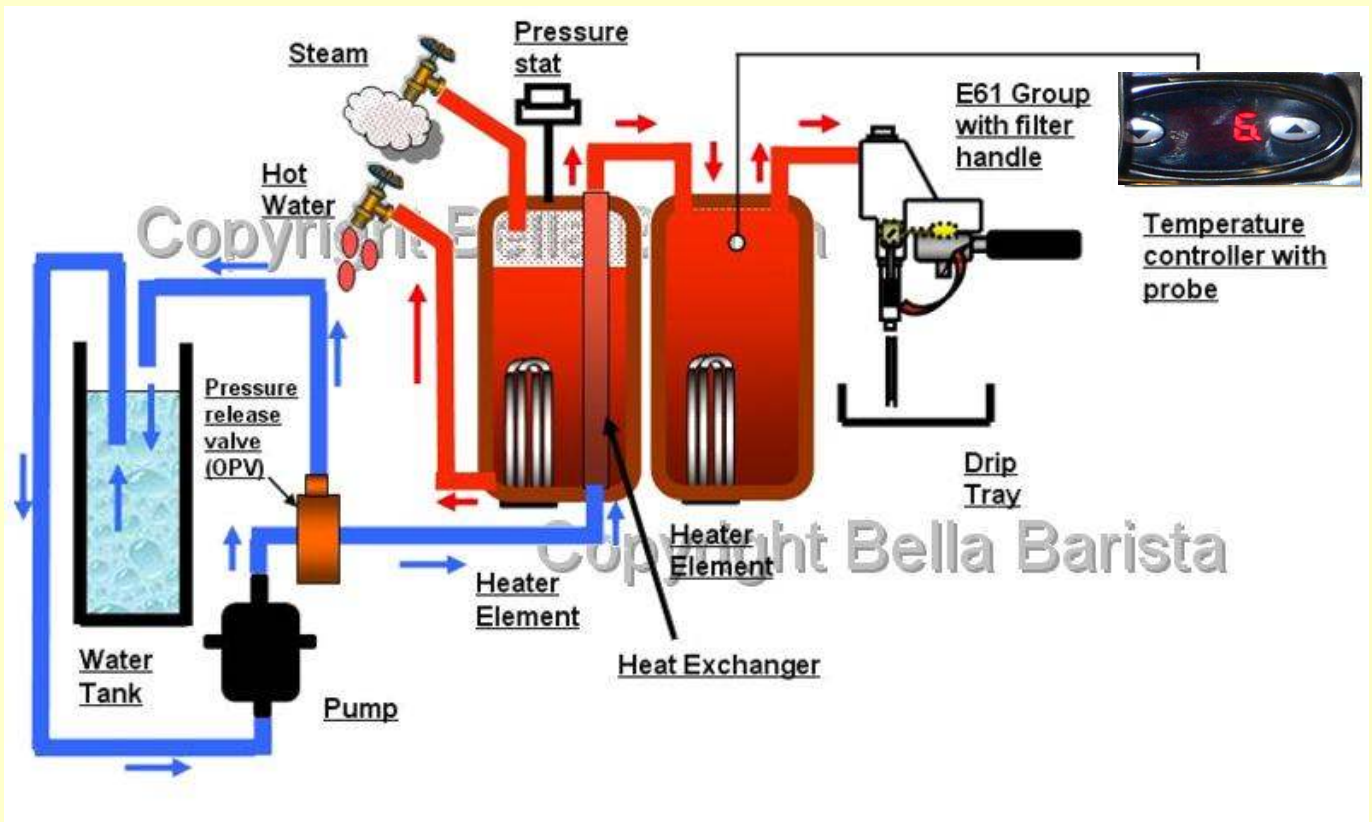
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How it works



The cold/hot water (steam) pathways shown in blue/red respectively..

The sensitive thermostat is located in the water of the brew boiler; its temperature is controlled by a proportional-integral-derivative controller (PID controller). A PID controller uses three separate parameters; the Proportional, Integral and Derivative values. These determine the level of reaction to any the large temp change, a correction factor that is applied the nearer we get to the desired value and damping to reduce over/undershoots, or oscillation around a set point. The rapid on/off switching of the brew boiler, due to the PID, is controlled by a 25AMP solid state switch; these have a very fast switching time which aids temperature control.

The E61 group is warmed by a very efficient thermosyphon. Lifting the lever starts the pumping of brew water, lowering the lever stops the pump and additionally releases the pressure (all 140 psi of it) from the group, so you can remove the filter handle safely, (the excess water goes into the drip tray when pressure is released)

Cold water in the brew circuit is preheated via a custom heat exchanger within the 1.5l Steam/HW boiler, allowing the brew, boiler to maintain a very stable temperature. Coffee brew water for the group comes directly from this temperature controlled brew boiler

The pump keeps the Steam/HW boiler about 50-60% filled with water that is heated and kept at a pressure of 0.8-0.9 bar. The temperature of this water is above boiling point and has an area of steam above (similar to a pressure cooker).

Steam: The pipe for the steam wand is at the top of the boiler (in the steam area) as the steam tap is opened, steam is forced through the steam pipe and as the pressure drops more of the water instantly flashes to steam, giving a continuous supply.

Hot Water: The pipe for the hot water tap is at the base of the Steam/Hot Water boiler. As the hot water tap is opened, steam pressure forces the hot water from the boiler through the pipe and out of the hot water outlet.
Coffee Brew Water

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Inside the Expobar Office Leva (Dual Boiler) – Is it complicated?

In a sense little has changed from the previous model and that's actually OK, because when it worked, it worked well

Good internal build quality, heavy gauge copper tube and brazed fittings, with good attention to detail. Components are well positioned and it has been neatly assembled

Some internal shots below, good quality components, Giemme, Gicar, Parker and a nice view of boilers, great how they got it all in there.



Somehow they got it all in!



Large 12mm diameter thermosyphon pipes. Nice quality braided wiring, very easy access for maintenance.

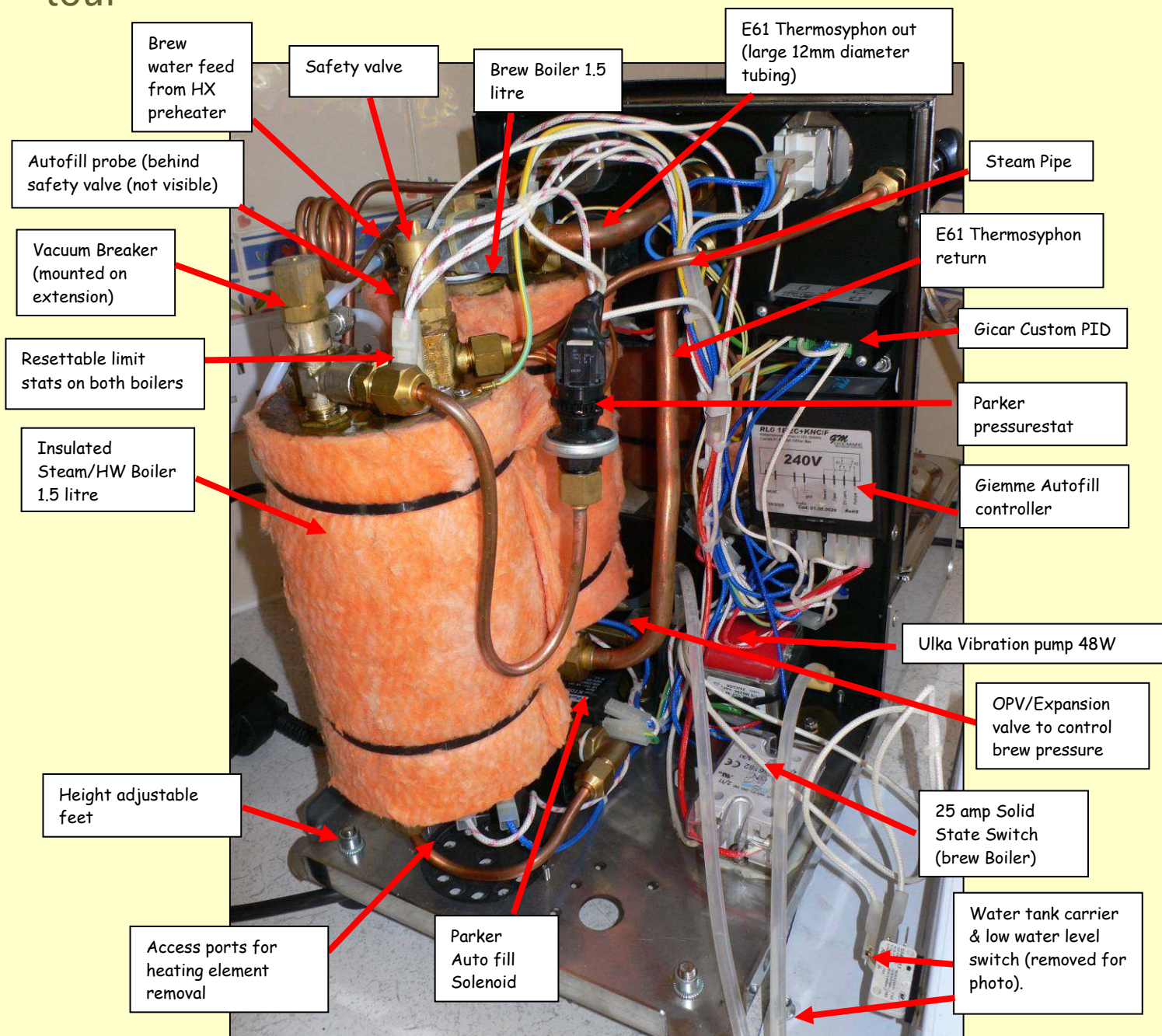


Reliable, easy to replace and low cost Vibration pump, plus SSR relay for noiseless brew boiler heating element operation. The 25 amp shielded SSR is particularly well heat sunk



I admire the simplicity of the water tank level sensor. A mechanically very simple, effective and reliable system of a; flap, switch and single spring!

Inside the Expobar Office Leva (Dual Boiler) - A detailed tour








Both Boilers have resettable limit stats, but you can only see the Steam/Hot water boiler one in this picture. Above is almost a total strip down for access and can be achieved in a few minutes. Easy Access to the internals has always been a feature of the Expobar machines. The brew boiler does have a drain plug, but unfortunately it is a little impractical for descaling, as there is not much space underneath for a catch tray and you would get descaler everywhere.



Maintenance is very easy; descaling is detailed in the Bella Barista User Guide and is possible without having to remove the case, but is a bit of a pain for the very large brew boiler. Better to use boiler safe water, good advice that applies to all espresso machines.

Key features

- Ability to change brew temperature at the touch of a button
- No cooling flush required (although 1 oz is advisable for good temperature stability)
- Good quality standard 58mm portafilter
- Separate brew and boiler pressure gauges
- Ball Joint steam and water arms
- No burn Steam wand
- Heavy Gauge stainless steel case and part of frame
- Brew Boiler can be independently turned off
- Gicar custom PID Temperature control. P, I & D parameters can be modified, offset can be programmed (can display C or F)
- Brew Water Preheat via HX
- Solid state switching of Brew Boiler heating element
- Nice large thermosyphon pipes
- Brew pressure can be adjusted without case removal
- Low wattage requirements, will run on 1250W circuit. Important if using in a mobile operation.

Item/Description	Picture	Comments
<p>The little pipe behind the group vent is not used in this variant. It isn't long enough to be over the hole in the drain rack over the drip tray, but of course that doesn't matter.</p>		<p>There are some models which allow for plumbing in/tanked operation and these would use this vent.</p> <p>This variant does NOT have the mains plumbed/tanked switch at the base of the machine. It is possible that this could be retrofitted by the purchaser if a kit was available. Or if Bella Barista decide to make it a special order option, at increased cost.</p>
<p>High pressure pump lines were simple high pressure plastic tubing not the steel braided pipes seen in some machines.</p> <p>The same system is actually used in the Andreja Premium (a well respected machine), with no problems.</p>		<p>These were only a problem on the previous model when they were being over tightened at the factory. It is however a very simple 5 minute fix if one ever leaks. Simply trim off 1mm with a sharp Stanley knife, place over the fitting and retighten the nut...but not too tight. The tube will flare and form its own seal and fitting.</p>

<p>They needed a bit more space for the SSR which was mounted below the water tank. To do this they had to grind the lifting lugs off to gain those extra centimeters.</p> <p>Be careful when filling, too much and the water can weep from those holes!</p>		<p>I have no problem with this sort of inventiveness by manufacturers, however, I am not impressed when they leave the plastic shavings in the tank and round the holes.....it's just waiting to clog something up in your machine.</p> <p>Rinse the tank out and clean off those bits thoroughly before using (this was my only minor quality control issue).</p>
<p>When low on water machine just switches off. Annoying if it decides to run the autofill when your not there, just goes to empty and switches off. You return for a coffee and to a COLD machine!</p>	<p>A warning bleeper like the Vivi which starts beeping even though the machine switches off. I mentioned this in my review of the Brewtus II. It seems the comment has been ignored? In addition a machine such as the Duetto only switches off the Steam boiler in this situation (and has a warning buzzer), personally I think a much better strategy.</p>	
<p>I did notice an annoying tendency for the autofill to kick in after steaming and a lot of the time this is during the shot. This is because you will usually steam the milk first then pull the shot.</p>	<p>I think this could be solved by the manufacturer (they need to alter the delays built into the Giemme, another reason I like the Gicar boxes). Until they do this, after steaming draw a little water to encourage the auto fill if it's a problem on your machine.</p>	
<p>The badge looked great, not all metal, but looked the right size and quality for the machine</p>		<p>One of my pet hates, are these cheap looking labels some manufacturers use. This badge looked nice on the machine!</p>
<p>Removing the outer case was easy</p>	<p>There are 5 screws, and the water tank platform (which may also need to be removed) has two screws and a couple of hex screws (puzzling why they decided to use 2 hex screws?).</p>	
<p>Wiring all braided and high quality</p>	<p>It's good, not as neat as an Izzo, but then so far no machine has come close to the neatness of Izzo wiring</p>	
<p>The all important rating plate, visible when the drip tray is removed.</p> <p>Brew pressure can be adjusted via the Expansion valve located behind the drip tray....no need for case removal....great!</p> <p>I found brew pressure quite adjustable, the test machine was running at 12.4 bar and I reduced it to around 10.8-11 bar.</p>		

<p>Steam boiler is probably around 1.4 litres rather than 1.5, due to the HX unit taking up around 100 cc of the volume.</p> <p>380 ml from 8C to 65C in approx 70 seconds</p> <p>This makes it a Moderate steamer, perfectly OK for home use, but perhaps not a steaming monster like the Duetto.</p>		<p>The steam boiler runs at around 0.8-0.9 bar which is on the low side for a boiler of this size. The pressure could easily be increased, but I suspect care would have to be taken to ensure brew water is not overheated by the preheat system in the steam boiler.</p>
<p>The new twin hole no burn steam wand/tip is a great improvement on the single hole tip used before. In fact with the pressures the machine was running at, without a 2 hole tip, steaming would probably have taken longer.</p> <p>I love the fact that the steam wand is nice and long!</p>		<p>A much more vertical orientation of the steam wand is required for successful microfoam, but there is no trouble in getting the milk swirling nicely and producing a good texture.</p>
<p>The vibration pump actually seemed quieter than on the previous model, with no significant rattles from the test machine</p>	<p>This was unexpected, but welcome, because I would not see any reason why the machine should be any quieter...but it is.</p>	
<p>Nice Beefy thermosyphon pipes of 12mm diameter...wider than many machines.</p>	<p>Great for faster heat up of the brew group and also the ability to maintain temperature. It also accounts for the smaller offset required on the Brewtus PID. The factory default offset was 10C; I personally found an offset of 9C to be correct for this particular machine.</p>	

The cup tray has holes which would allow you to fit a couple of handles if you wanted to



Apparently many DIY shops have steel handles which would fit.

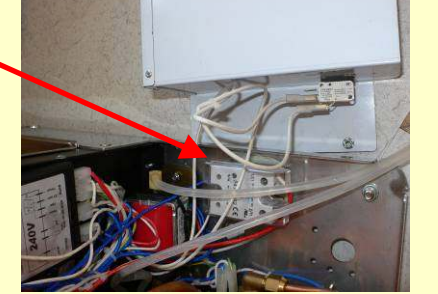
Under the cup tray. It's a shame, I know it's hidden under the cup tray, but I wouldn't build something like this. Scratched and bent.



It does not affect the operation of the machine, but with a very small amount of care, this sort of thing need not happen.

I know you can't usually see it, but that's not the point, perhaps this will shame Expobar into taking more care!

SSR was well mounted in a cool location under the water tank platform, the case here forms an excellent heat sink. **In addition they used an SSR which would accept AC control voltages, eliminating the need for a transformer and another potential cause of failure.**



Try not to spill any water when refilling, although it is covered with a protective plastic shield.

I love the mechanical simplicity of the low water level detection platform for the internal water tank. It's always proved to be quite accurate as well. The plate I am holding simply pulls out as only a tab at the far end holds it in place



The thermosyphon pipes are quite beefy compared to many machines at 12mm diameter. This should facilitate a fast group warm up and good temperature stability.



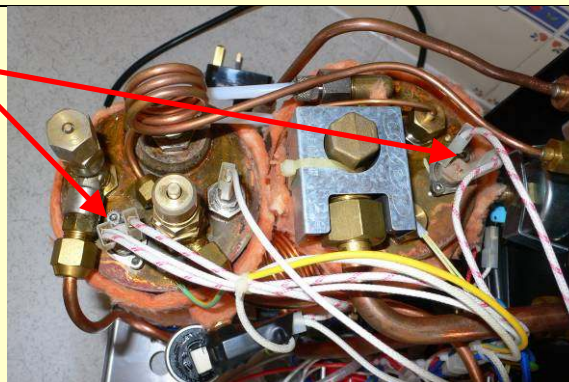
This explains why the offset is relatively low at 9C for the length of thermosyphon tubing used.

Vibe pump has a de-aerator fitted to assist priming, also a good view of the heating element access port. The adjuster can be seen pointing to the hole in the front panel for brew pressure adjustment without the need to remove the case.



Top view of the boilers, with the two resettable limit stats.

The large silver metal assembly is actually a magnet at the top of the thermosyphon loop to reduce scaling. Expobar have these on all the domestic consumer machines I have reviewed and I suppose feel it's going to help...I prefer boiler safe water!



The water feed tubes are quite long and have square cut ends. While the in-line water filter is on, there is not a problem. When removed (as it will be when exhausted or 1 month old I recommend cutting the tubes as shown to avoid them getting "sucked" onto the side of the tank and restricting water flow.



Drip tray is nicely finished and blends well at the front. In addition it's a very generous size and actually holds a **massive 2.5 litres!**



The feet are height adjustable, not the most attractive things I have ever seen, but much better than the ones fitted on earlier models!

The Expobar is heavy so to help pull it out from under any kitchen cupboards to fill it, some cheap felt pads can help. For a few pounds. Stick 4 of these little felt pads on the feet. Alternatively use Teflon "glide pads" and you can slide it around with 1 finger!



I like the balljoint mounted steam and hot water arms

Separate brew pressure and steam boiler pressure gauges, the brew pressure gauge facilitates the easy check and adjustment of pump pressure, or diagnosis of brew group problems



Gicar PID unit, specifically built for Coffee machines

I love the 2 simple buttons allowing all functions to be programmed, yet keeping it very simple to operate.

Values that can be adjusted in addition to the brew temperature,, assuming your dealer permits it (although I don't recommend the machine is left unattended until you know an adjustment is sound) are:

Proportional - the gain of the controller, size of response within the proportional band to get back to the desired temperature, large values can cause overshoots, small values can make the controller slow to get back to the setpoint

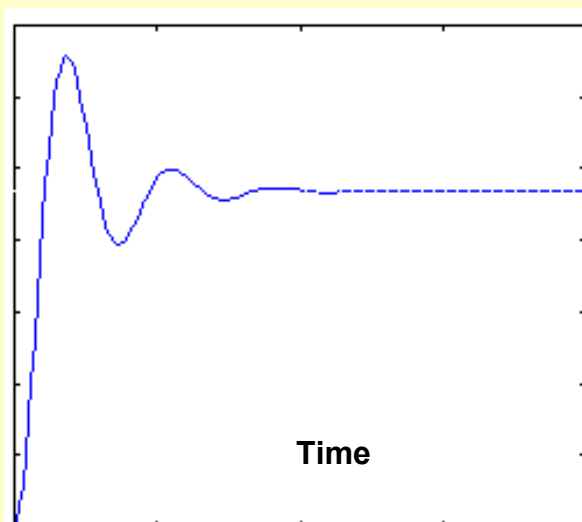
Integral - an algorithm that moves the system towards a smaller and smaller deviation from the setpoint over time, values too large cause "hunting" around the setpoint

Derivative - best thought of as damping, not allowing the controller to respond to change so quickly, has little effect on the setpoint value, only when temp changes are detected. Values too large here can cause the system to become **very** unstable.

Display in F or C

Offset – The difference between the displayed temperature, and the actual brew boiler temperature. This reflecting the true temperature of the water hitting the coffee

e.g. You might need a boiler temperature of 105C to get water at 95C from the group, setting your offset to 10, will **allow the PID to display 95C, even though the brew boiler is really at 105C.**



The PID simply tries to adjust the temperature over time as shown below, each time the system is disturbed a similar, but less dramatic process takes place

A PID helps get your temperature where you want it, in a short time, with minimal overshoot, and with little error, but of course, with compromises, hence the ability to adjust P,I, & D values

Note: The PID and it's sensitive "in boiler" thermostat, allows you to see all the changes going on in the brew boiler, unlike some other machines I reviewed, which either do not display overshoots beyond the temperature you have set, or don't display anything at all.

The Expobar machine does not have the ability to turn off the steam boiler as in the Izzo Alex Duetto, which is a shame because

- It saves energy
- You do not leave the machine at high internal temperatures for extended periods in the home environment, this makes your machines internal components last longer.

There are a couple of issues for Expobar to consider if they want to make this function available, or if you want to modify your machine.

- The Expobar gives the steam boiler priority over the brew boiler. I have seen the view expressed that this was by design and is the right way to do things. This is definitely not the right way to do things, but in a sense is dictated by the “design”. The use of a single SSR and pressurestat means the steam boiler has to have priority to allow for a low power 1250W operation. This is dictated by the need to have simple mechanical wiring with the pressurestat to control this function; presumably to keep costs down....To give the brew boiler priority would require quite different wiring and extra components.

Luckily the large brew boiler size means this isn't a problem and with the low temperatures of the steam boiler (plus the large brew boiler), its probably better the machine has this priority.

- **The impact on brew temperature stability, especially considering the positioning of the pipes in the brew boiler covered below.**

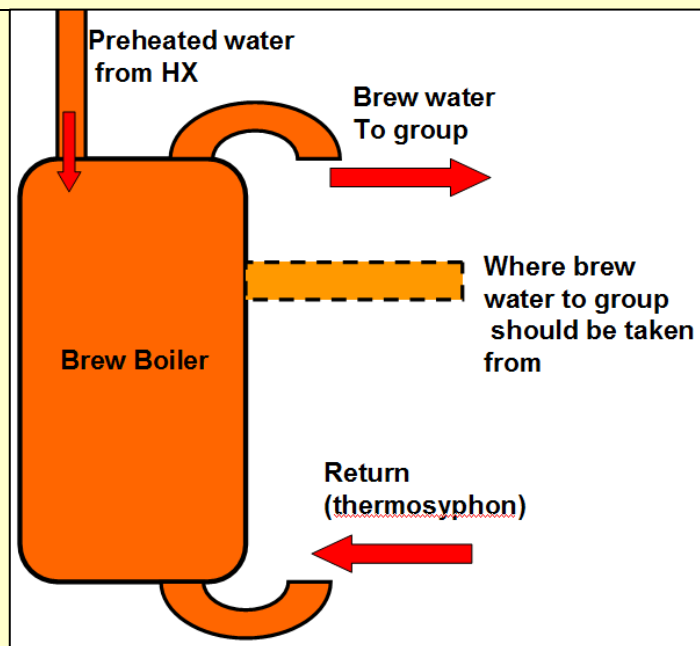
More than a cursory change to the wiring will be required, to have an on/off switch for the steam boiler.

The old Brewtus II design is shown in this simplified representation on the right, and appears to be the same as the design of the new machine.

Should the water level in the brew boiler drop slightly for any reason the thermosyphon also stops.

I believe the right place to take the brew boiler feed (although under pressure both pipes feed to the group) is shown by the dashed line pipe. This gives better temperature stability (improved mixing) and may help running with the steam boiler switched off (on modified machines), or higher steam pressures.

The temperature probe would also be positioned at a similar height within the boiler as the dashed takeoff pipe.



Supplied accessories include

A single portafilters holder with single basket, double basket and rubber backflush disk.



Using the Expobar Office Leva (Dual Boiler)

It is a twin boiler machine, so the usual surfing and cooling flushes required with an HX machine are unnecessary. It maintains the brew boiler at the optimum temperature (whatever you decide to set) for espresso extraction. I recommend flushing 1oz before the first shot in a series, just to stabilize things

Espresso

It's simple, fill the portafilter, tamp and lift the lever and then lower it again when you have the required amount of coffee, the machine does the rest. It makes consistently great espressos and easily maintains the temperature during the pour as the brew boiler of 1.5l has a very large thermal mass. Domestic or light commercial volumes of espresso one after another will be absolutely no problem with this machine.

Pressure Settings & Steam Production

The use of a simple pressurestat means the **Steam Pressure can be altered if desired** (raised or lowered). The Expobar Office Leva (Dual Boiler) is a moderate steamer and is fine for domestic use and the smaller quantities of milk used. It will steam enough milk for two cappuccinos in around a minute

..fill the portafilter, tamp and lift the lever.....the machine does the rest

Hot Water

It is nice to have really hot water on tap, recovery time after drawing hot water for an Americano is very fast. Although I always say for regular hot water production at home, a kettle is a sensible option.

The E61 Group

The E61 group is not only beautiful, but proven in service for over 40 years. It makes superb coffee with good thermal stability and built in progressive infusion. An industry standard and very easily serviced (as are many of the components in the machine), so parts such as, pumps, gaskets, shower screens, filter holders, filter holder handles etc. are all a standard size and readily available from multiple suppliers. Pricing of these spares is highly competitive.



Brew Temperature

On the internet, there are discussions about ideal brew temperatures for espresso and varying them for different coffees. Some machines costing many thousands of pounds can (apparently) control absolute brew temperatures down to fractions of a degree. I am sure they must be very good, but of course, there is usually the law of diminishing returns to consider and the cost of parts for very specialist machines made in very small quantities.

I do not know what difference fractions of a degree make in the cup...when there are so other many variables, roast, grind, extraction speed, water quality, etc. The Expobar Office Leva (Dual Boiler) has the capability to control brew temperature in 1 degree increments, and up to now I have not really made very much of this. I have also not talked about specific brew temperatures. This is because for me the actual, specific brew temperature vs. the display value is not that important, as long as that difference is consistent. It is just a number, although the PID has an easily adjusted Offset, allowing you to tune the display temperature to closely match the actual brew temperature (it's pretty close at the factory presets), but might vary fractionally from machine to machine.

I do care about some specific things with regard to brew temperature though:

- Can I adjust the machine to work in the entire range of; slightly too hot, or too cold for any coffee
- Will the machine maintain a stable brew temperature during the shot
- Is the recovery time OK
- Is it repeatable (assuming grind tamp and dose are the same)

The Expobar Office Leva (Dual Boiler) had absolutely no problem fulfilling these requirements and it seemed very stable during the shot, with perhaps a very slight rise towards

the end of a shot (with my measuring equipment). The true test though is in the cup, if the taste is good then it is OK, too bitter or too sour, reduce or raise the temperature by 1 degree and try it again. The next time you roast a batch of the same coffee, or buy it ready roasted, the same temperature may not give the same results. I think that focussing too much on Expobar Office Leva (Dual Boiler) capabilities in the area of absolute temperatures and worrying about 10ths of a degree to fine tune brew temperature (especially with so many other variables) is doing the machine a disservice and missing the point. To make great coffee you need a good machine, but you also need, good quality (correctly roasted) fresh beans, a clean machine, decent water and a good grinder.

You may not adjust the temperature very much, but you can when you need to. The adjustment covers a large, range much larger than that considered acceptable for making espresso. Temperature stability is good during the shot and there is sufficient thermal mass and brew boiler thermal mass to ensure this happens.

Temperature is adjusted with few simple button presses. A PID with only 2 buttons makes things quite simple. However all important PID parameters are adjustable (P, I and D values, plus offset and C or F display.)

With the Expobar Office Leva (Dual Boiler), your concerns should not be getting the right brew temperature or stability during the shot or worrying about repeatability. If you grind and tamp the same way each time, it produces consistent results. The designers have taken care of all this for you, better to worry about important things, the coffee and grinder. It is important that a machine is easy to use, works quietly and competently, day after day.

I'm interested in drinking great coffee, not playing around with a machine. The Expobar Office Leva (Dual Boiler) is great...because I don't have to think about it!

Final Thoughts – so what’s the bottom line!

The previous Brewtus II was a good machine in terms of the coffee it made. There were a few problems around quality control and a failing temperature controller. These problems were compounded by the manufacturer’s apparent unwillingness to listen. I am told this has changed, along with a change of personnel at Expobar. This does seem to have been borne out by the improvements in all these areas and the adoption of the Gicar PID controller, which has proven reliable in other machines such as the Duetto.

“If you’re looking in the £1000 category for espresso machines, it’s a fine machine for the money, with no significant compromise on taste”

The main changes in the Expobar Office Leva (Dual Boiler) are small incremental improvements, which is a sound strategy considering that the previous machine worked well.

Anything you would change?

There are a few areas where I would have liked to have seen a more innovative approach:

- The brew boiler water flows
- Ability to turn the steam boiler off
- Perhaps the loss of the pressurestat altogether...to have electronic steam boiler temp control
- Feet with a metal finish

But, I suppose this keeps costs down

How does the Expobar Office Leva (Dual Boiler) compare to a Duetto?

It’s a bit of an unfair comparison, but one I suppose many of you will make in choosing a Dual Boiler machine.

Firstly they are different, with different features and functions e.g. rotary, steam boiler control, plumbed or tanked etc...

The Duetto can produce awesome espresso shots and so can the Expobar Office Leva (Dual Boiler). Is one any better at producing coffee than the other? personally think it would be a very close call. The combination of, temperature control, temperature stability and the fabulous E61 group working together is a good combination, in any machine

Quality control issues are hopefully now a thing of the past, certainly the review machine was excellent. The footprint of the machine is good and it’s ideal for the smaller kitchen.

What you have got is a machine built to a price (a very good price), at the time of writing this machine is £1000 and a Duetto is £1500, so a considerable saving. Sure there are differences in overall build and component quality, vibe instead of rotary and more features on the Duetto, but.....

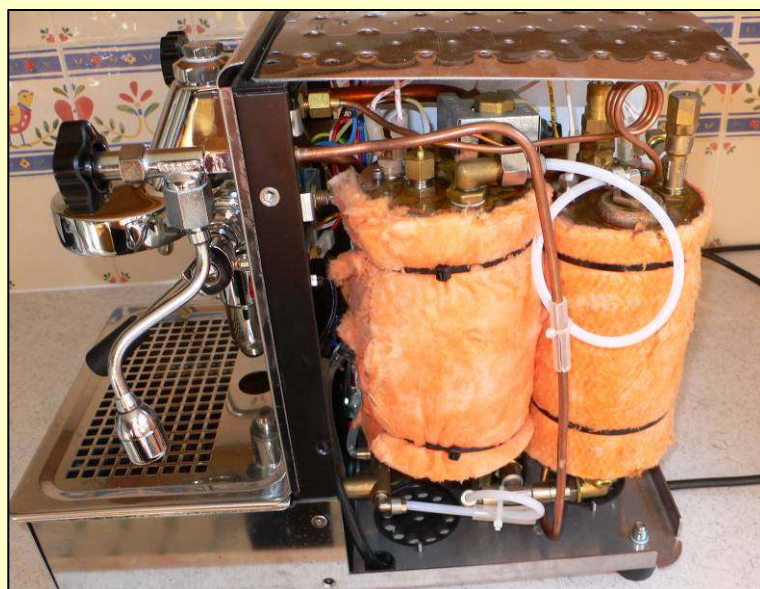
for those on a tighter budget, the Expobar Office Leva (Dual Boiler) is great value for money, with no significant compromise on coffee taste.

<u>Specifications</u>	
Height-Width - Depth:	H400 x W260 x D440 mm
Weight:	20 kg approx
Voltage & Power (approx):	230 V-50Hz, 1250W max, steam 1200W Brew 1200W Pump 48W
Temperature control	PID for Brew boiler (to solid state relay) Adjustable Pressurestat for Steam Boiler
Water Tank :	2.8 litres, removable with low water sensor
Twin Boilers	1.5 litre Steam/HW, 1.5 litre dedicated brew boiler
Pump Type:	Vibration (Ulka 48W)
Group Head:	1 (E61 type), (manual lever action)
1 Filter Handle	Baskets for 1 or 2 cups, Internal Diameter 58 mm, removable drip tray, cup warmer
Construction/Finish:	Heavy Gauge Polished Stainless Steel case and internal steel frame
Water/Steam	Hot water on demand. Steam on demand (ball joint mounted)
Boilers	Copper with brass end brew boiler. Copper with brass end steam/HW boiler
2 Manometer Gauges:	Measures Boiler & Brew pressure

Gallery - A few more pictures of the Expobar Office Leva (Dual Boiler)



The fabulous & beautiful E61 group



A compact coffee powerhouse



At the sharp end of the machine!



All the gauges you could want