

# IZZO VIVI MK II – A CLOSER LOOK (REVISITED)



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

## Overview

It is great to have another chance to review the Vivi in its MK II incarnation, the review machine is a pour-over or “tanked” machine and does not need to be plumbed into the mains. The Vivi arrives well packed (Izzo have improved the packaging and Bella Barista also double box the machines). The build quality is really excellent with high quality (industry standard) components and a lot of care has been taken with assembly. Constructed using heavy gauge mirror finish stainless steel, outside and **inside**, unlike some machines which use cheaper materials for the inner frame. The quality is noticeable when lifting the machine as the Vivi is much heavier than similar machines of the same size.

This type of heat Exchanger (HX) machine internally, is slightly more complex than cheaper non HX machines, but much simpler to operate. There are fewer controls and no need to do anything special (apart from filling the water tank occasionally) to draw steam, hot water or espresso at any time. The Vivi automatically maintains the water level in the boiler as required and if run low on water in the tank the Vivi has a low water alarm in addition to switching itself off as a safety precaution.

The machine is attractive, compact and fits comfortably under standard height kitchen cabinets. I previously said the Vivi compared favourably with other similar prosumer machines, after having reviewed many other machines for Bella Barista, I now feel confident in believing the MK II Vivi to outshine them all.

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Some coffee enthusiasts buy second hand commercial machines that are very large and heavy plumbed into the mains with 3–6kw heating elements in 5 litre or larger boilers to make quality beverages at home. The Vivi can make the same high quality drinks), without the hassle.

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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Izzo Vivi MKII closer look v2.doc

## Overview – cont.

In summary; The Vivi is, unique and an excellent machine both for the customer to use and the reseller to support. It will provide years of reliable service with the minimum of maintenance. Once in position on the counter the machine looks nice and does not dominate on standard sized work surface. The height of the machine is very convenient and gives plenty of room under standard height kitchen cupboards. Even though it's compact, it has a nice large cup warming tray. Placing the Vivi in a corner is ideal, especially when located near the sink.

The Vivi comes well packed and with comprehensive documentation covering all aspects of operation, routine maintenance and production of espresso based drinks. A valuable addition to the Italian manufacturer's written User guide that comes free with the Vivi.



*Very well packed inner box, protected by double packing in an air-cell filled outer by Bella Barista*

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 Vivi is easy to keep clean, a quick wipe with a damp cloth and a buff with a micro fibre cloth is all that's required to keep it looking great. The more complex tasks such as backflushing and descaling are actually very easy to do and the supplied Bella Barista user guide explains how to do them in detail.



*The Vivi, positioned in the corner of my kitchen*

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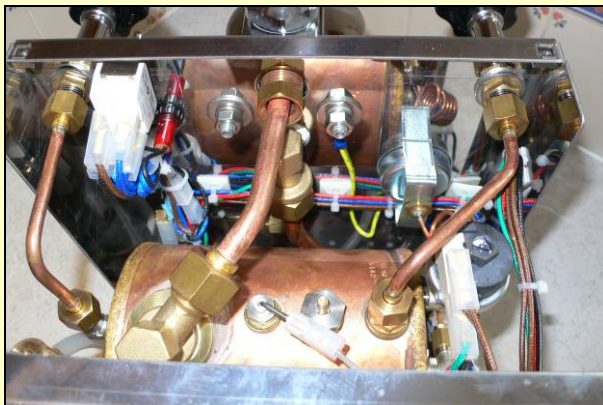
## Inside the Vivi – more of the same?

It's easy to dismiss the Vivi MKII as having just a few cosmetic differences and the manufacturer could be forgiven for only making the changes you as a consumer see. A close inspection of the Vivi actually revealed that all the feedback given on the MK1 after reviewing has been incorporated as improvements in the MKII, plus many other nice changes. Internal build quality is extremely high, with great attention to detail. Components are well positioned, neatly assembled; all cables are well away from hot spots and comprehensively tied to avoid movement.

Some internal shots below; with all the quality names, Sirai, MA-TER, Gicar.



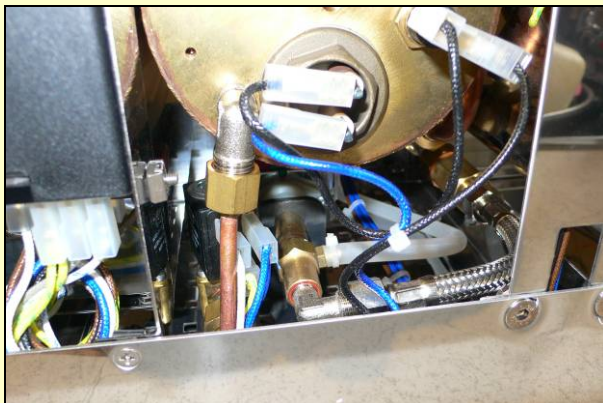
*The powerhouse of the machine accessible from the top, with the removal of only 4 screws*



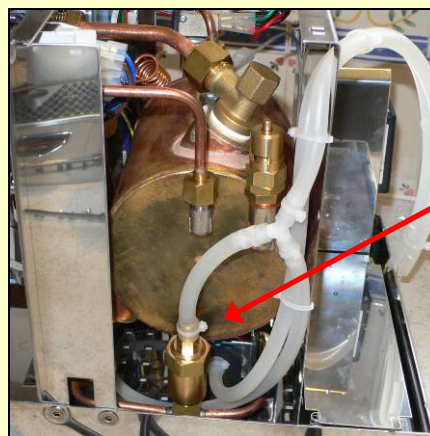
*Improved vacuum breaker, power switches & great wiring*



*Removal of the outer case, gives easy access to all components, e.g. heating element.*



*The vibe pump tucked under the boiler*



*Good quality "beefy" OPV valve*

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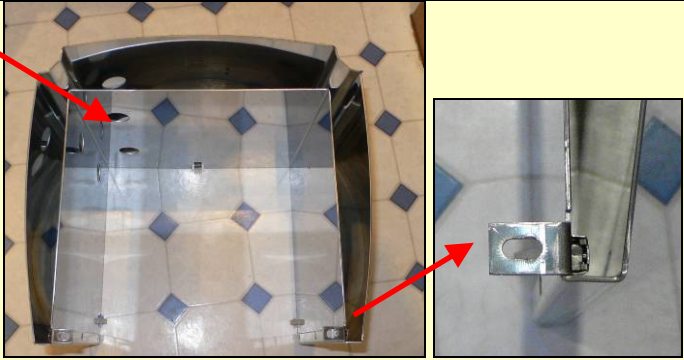
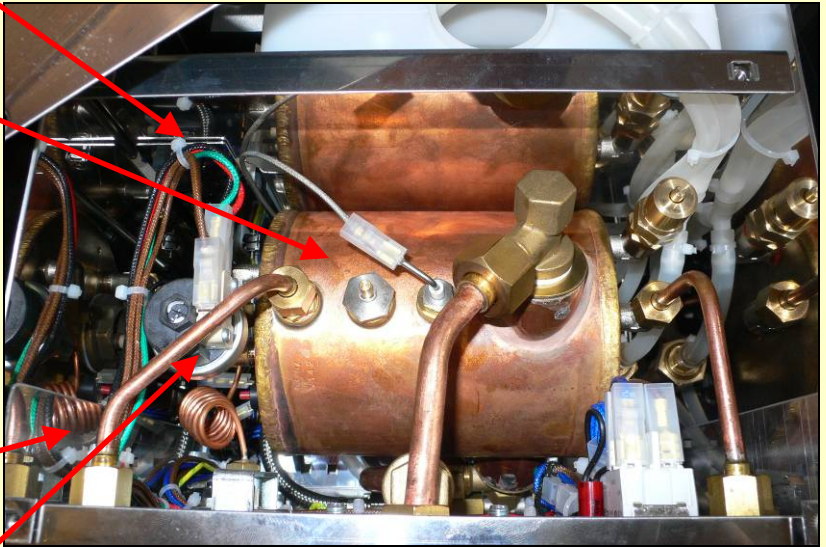
## Key features – also what’s different from the MK I?

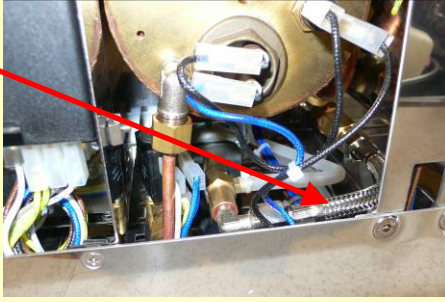





There are many subtle changes over the MK I

- Much neater brazing on boiler (really neat)
- Improved Vacuum Breaker Valve
- slotted outer case top holes to allow sides to be drawn in and eliminate vibration (it didn't vibrate before though)
- Ball Joint steam and water arms
- Redesigned drip tray and cup rack
- Improved finish and design under drip tray area
- Better quality internal water tank
- Much Improved ventilation for internal components
- Larger Knobs on steam & water valves
- Pressure stat adjustable from hole under cup warmer tray.
- Improved steam wand tip

Many of these subtle changes are invisible to the customer, so why make them? The answer is simple, Izzo unlike many companies, do care about what people say and take the feedback on their products seriously. Many things fed back to them during the review of the MK I (more as observations, rather than a need to change) have been considered, together with, end user modifications and Izzos own continuous improvement process.

All this and they still come with 2 portafilter holders and 2 filter baskets as standard!

Item/Description	Picture	Comments
The double skinned external case, giving cool walls. Better ventilation for the Gicar box has also been provided...this should extend the service life of internal components. Slots rather than round holes ensure the case sides can be drawn to the frame as required to give a snug fit. Only 4 screws need to be undone to remove the case.		
Excellent routing of internal cables and pipes, avoiding hot spots and areas of vibration scuffing. . I've come to expect this on Izzo machines		
Weld/braising quality on tank, nice and neat (huge improvement over MK I)		
Nice large copper tank with substantial brass endplates. All screwed fittings on brass holders either brazed to tank or on brass endplates		
High quality internal components		
All components very accessible. This makes servicing quick and easy		
Wiring all braided and high quality		
Very accessible pressurestat that is not too sensitive to adjust. This makes pressure adjustment extremely easy and can be adjusted without removing the case		

<p>Steel braided high pressure pipe</p>		
<p>Improved quality cold water tank, holds about 2.35 litres</p>		
<p>The tank is quite close to the backplate (touching in places) and the water container is directly behind the backplate. This means the water in the reservoir will get quite warm as will the plastic of the container.</p>		<p>A few felt pads or one large rectangular one stuck on the back plate would fix this and only cost a few pounds and insulate it from the boiler</p>
<p>Pressurestat adjustable without removing the case or top plate. It's done through this hole. The MK I Vivi also had a hole to do this, but it was in the wrong place, this has been corrected on the MK II</p>		
<p>Nice large cup warming tray. You can get plenty of cups on there, definitely no lack of space.</p>		
<p>The Vivi is heavier than it looks, because every part of the case and frame is constructed with a high quality and thick steel</p> <p><b>The feet are height adjustable!</b></p>		<p>For a few pounds. Stick 4 of these little felt pads on the feet and it slides about with one hand!</p> <p>Alternatively use Teflon "glide pads" and you can slide it around with 1 finder!</p>

The drip tray has been increased in size and holds a respectable 1 litre or more). Better still the tray can now be removed simply by sliding out from under the cup rack.

In addition the finish under the drip tray has been improved and the Vivi just looks much better like this. Of course they did this to add slides to support the drip tray when removing, but like typical Italians, used the opportunity to make the machine “look good”



An improved steam tip design. It took some practice to microfoam smaller quantities of milk with MK I steam wand tip as it had larger holes. This tip on the MK II is very similar to the “Gold pro” tips and works very well to make smooth microfoam for even small quantities of milk.

New (left) and old steam tips



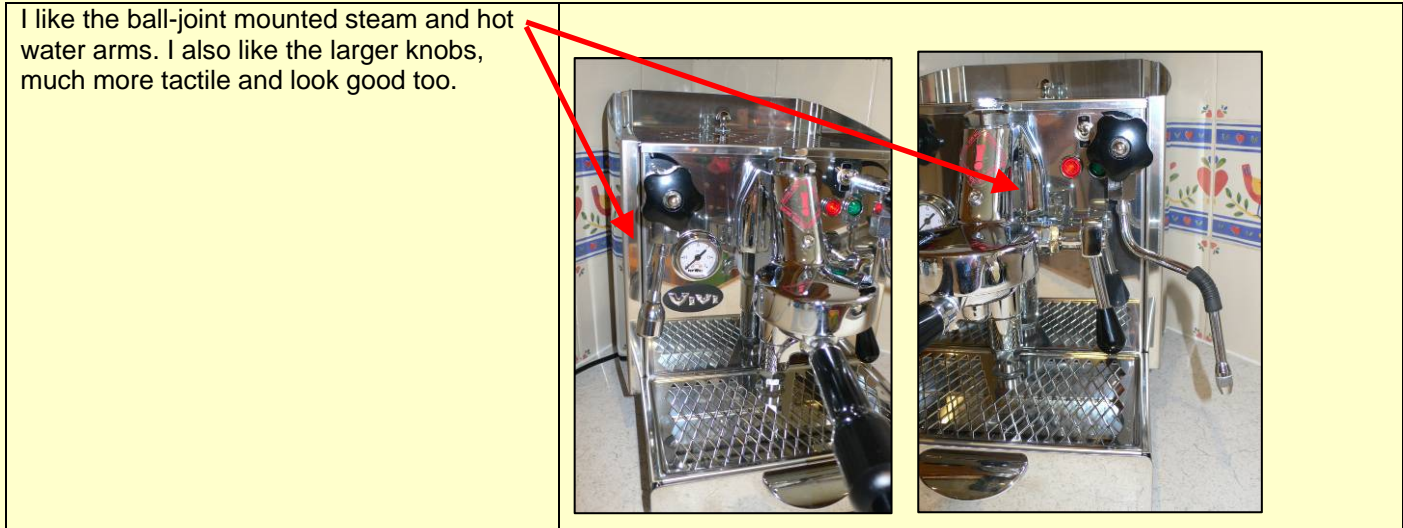
I still think the single hole steam tip also works well, but now can be purchased and considered an accessory, rather than a necessity.

The new improved vacuum breaker valve on the current Vivi MK II. On inspection it appears that this is a direct replacement for the old valve and can be fitted on all models of Vivi.

I took one apart to have a closer look and as you can see, it's a very simple device. Pressure in the boiler pushes the brass pin with the silicon O ring onto the nylon seating and seals the boiler as it comes up to steam.



The old one was actually OK and was easy to split for cleaning without removing from the boiler. Admittedly this one looks as if it will be less prone to small leaks



Using the Vivi – simple and easy to use!

### Pressure Settings

The Vivi runs quite hot, which is usual with Heat Exchanger (HX) machines, because of the tight compromise between continuously available steam, and production of brew water for espresso. The pressure in the boiler is directly related to the temperature, a higher pressure gives higher temperatures. Because of the way HX machines work most require a cooling flush prior to drawing the first in a series of espressos, the Vivi in common with other machines of this type also requires this “cooling flush”.

*“It has an enormous steam capacity, you won’t run out of steam with the Vivi”*

The machine came set to around 1.1 bar boiler pressure, perfect for the lower volumes in the domestic environment.

### Espresso

As long as a cooling flush is performed, the Vivi makes consistently good espressos and easily maintains the temperature during the pour.

Domestic volumes of espresso one after another will be absolutely no problem with this machine.

### Steam Production

The Vivi has great steam performance and seemed even more powerful than before, probably an illusion created by the improved steam tip. It has an enormous steam capacity and you won’t run out of steam with the Vivi as the heating element is powerful enough able to keep pace with all your steaming.

### Hot Water

It’s 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 a kettle is a better option in areas where lime scale is a problem and saves having to descale your machine so often.

### The E61 group

The E61 group is an industry standard (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. This also means that the pricing of these spares is highly competitive.

## Final Thoughts – so what’s the bottom line!

This was a rare opportunity, the chance to do a second review on a machine that has seen a significant “upgrade” into its MK II guise. I put upgrade in quotes, because we always assume an upgrade is something we will actually see, especially in new bells or whistles. So was it a surprise to see that the Vivi didn’t really have many new Bells and whistles and that much of the improvement was “under the skin”. In many ways no, it wasn’t a surprise, because the Vivi was a very good machine to start with and has simply “matured”. It definitely holds its own against other similar machines and is often significantly better than more expensive offerings from the competition. I truly believe it is one of the finest machines you can buy for the money.

It’s heavy, but compact and for the modern kitchen I think size is an important consideration. It’s also not too tall and I do prefer machines that are a little more balanced in this way. A commercial 1 group (which would make similar beverages), would be significantly bigger, heavier and overkill for the home user.

### Anything you would change?

As a reviewer, with my 20/20 hindsight, there were a few things.

- The water tank is 2.35 litres (the old one is about 2.5 litres on the MK I). I calculated that if they used a tank about 32mm taller, it would have fitted and could have held over 2.7 litres
- I would like to see a brew pressure gauge as well, or if space is limited a dual pressure gauge (one dial for boiler pressure one for brew pressure)

But these are small items on a very well sorted machine and do little to detract from its day to day operation. If no more upgrades of the Vivi are planned, perhaps this could be included on a special edition model along with a few other touches.

### So why do you own an Alex?

This is a question I always get asked when I say the Vivi is a great machine and really all you need to make great coffee drinks. Usually I follow it up with “you don’t need an Alex, nobody does, and it’s simply an indulgence....really!” In most cases this is absolutely true, however in exceptional circumstances you may want an Alex...these are (some a little tongue in cheek)

1. You’re making very high volumes of coffee in a small commercial setting
2. You (like me), think rotary pumps sound cool
3. You received a big bonus from work
4. You believe bigger is better

There is a grain of truth to the last 3 and I wouldn’t swap my Alex for anything (unless Izzo make a digitally temperature controlled dual boiler Alex). The important thing though, they both make the same fantastic coffee.

### Should I upgrade my MK I Vivi for a MK II?

No, the MK I makes coffee as well as the MK II, yes, you would get a few refinements, but not worth an upgrade. Perhaps upgrade your steam tip (Expobar single hole tip or one of the Izzo MK II steam tips), if you still have the original Izzo one on your MK I...they are a simple screw in replacement. This simple change will improve your milk foaming and micro-foam production enormously.

## Gallery – A few pictures of the Izzo Vivi



*At the sharp end of the machine*



*2 high quality group handles, with single, double and blind baskets, many manufacturers only give one!*



*The top comes off faster than a Ferrari for easy access, just 4 screws*



*The beautiful lever operated E61 group!*



*Just waiting to make that espresso or latte*

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