

Audio

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THE HIGH END MAGAZINE 1/2013



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NEW MAGIC

- Vinyl via Headphones
- The active avant-garde
- High End 5.1 on the road
- Power with copper cooling



Mass Movement

Author: Stefan Schickedanz

Flying a helicopter definitely figures among the things every man should have done at least once. Flying with such a huge rotor requires a skilled hand. Its reward is an unimaginable pleasure, but - like the handling of a delicate record player - it is not for people with only rough motoric skills. The transmission of driving and steering forces is much smoother and more delayed than in motor vehicles. In addition, there is a permanent awareness of majestic inertia.

When the latest creation of phono doyen Jochen Räge was assembled from a set of first rate components (like e.g. a magnetic coupling drive) before my eyes, it reminded me of flying a helicopter, which I had recently tried. It also generates a yaw movement, which in this case only serves to make hi-fi enthusiasts lose their heads and stir up their covetousness. On top, this sound-sculpture with its triangular - and in the Nero version also three-layered - frame offers all the elements that for four decades have been making Transrotor products iconic.

But the Rondino does not arrive on its own. Its imposing metal rack also houses two other thrilling electronic components from Bergisch Gladbach: the pre-amp Phono 8-MC and a strange looking little box about which it can be claimed that never before has an unorthodox idea been given such a run-of-the-mill name. It is called Transrotor Headphone Amplifier With Tone Control and at first glance appears to be just that. Who would have thought it? But it is only half of the truth, because this item was developed because of the intention of its creator to introduce a sound and balance regulation

into his otherwise purist combination of pre- and power amplifier. But that is another story ...

To begin with I want to deal with the eye catcher of the set, which is without doubt the Rondino with its 37 kilograms sitting above the tower like the Acropolis above Athens. According to Transrotor's custom, it is available in many versions that do not just differ in the materials used, but also in price.

The Rondino was launched last year and is distinguished from normal turntables by an entire range of interesting solutions, above all by its sophisticated magnetic coupling drive FMD (Free Magnetic Drive). But this solution, which is best explained in a picture, also provides an especially smooth run for other devices of this brand. What makes the Rondino special within the Transrotor program is the encapsulated drive unit. Normally, the creations of motor enthusiast Jochen Räge parade their drives and gear trains like the high powered cars in 'The Fast & the Furious', where compressors protrude from the bonnet and cardan shafts and rear axles are featured with under floor lighting. But don't get me wrong: This maybe a somewhat drastic comparison, but there is no criticism implied! Räge's motor show is conducted in an extremely civilized and aesthetic fashion - designed for over 30-year-olds. On the whole a Transrotor usually displays its drive. Some decks even have more than one, which enhances the stability of sound as well as the self-confidence of the owner.

The Rondino, however, hides its power source like the mid-engine sports car >



Just looking at the Transrotor Rondino arouses boundless desire. But it doesn't stop with a heavy turntable and a magnetic coupling drive. With a special rack, pre-amp-duo and earphones, this altar becomes a recent high end revelation. And it's somehow magnetic.



Polished achievement: Not only does the combination of dark acryl and aluminium look extremely distinguished. The sandwich protects frame and tone arm beam with the SME 5009 and the Merlo from vibrations.

Porsche Boxster, where only the oil dipstick and the oil filler neck protrude for the carpeted engine cover. Motor, belt and the drive disc which can only be seen through a round opening are concealed in closed module shaped like an eight. Taking off the solid aluminium lid reveals the reliable belt drive. The drive unit has no connection with the disc drive. An air gap separates the motor unit from the frame made of layered acrylic and aluminium and the magnetic coupling provides additional insulation of the disc drive from motor vibrations. The success of this technology is demonstrated by the excellent rumbling values. Obviously, annoying vibrations cannot even make it through the back door, from the motor via the base into the system.

On the Rondino tone arm and pick-up encounter optimal working conditions, as in comparison with earlier models another improvement has been added in this series. The impulse originated with

Dirk Rake, who is getting more involved with the technological aspects of his proud father's company. The sickle-shaped tone arm base, which is attached to one of the three feet is now made of a three-layered combination of acrylic with aluminium enclosures in order to improve the protection of against all kinds of vibrations.

People who find it difficult to choose one of the many tone arms offered by Rake do not need to restrict themselves to the SME 5009, which is used for the test device. The Rondino can accommodate up to three bases. In that case a different arm is fixed to each of the feet and reaches out over the massive turntable, which prevented from vibrating with the same frequency throughout by circular cutouts of different depth on its underside.

However, the meticulous precision of the 9-inch tone arm – a custom-made product of the British specialist SME – with

its conical magnesium tube and the super-accurate ball bearing of the SME V will leave hardly anything to wish for. In combination with the drive this variant costs 2700€ extra and the 12-inch type another 600 € on top.

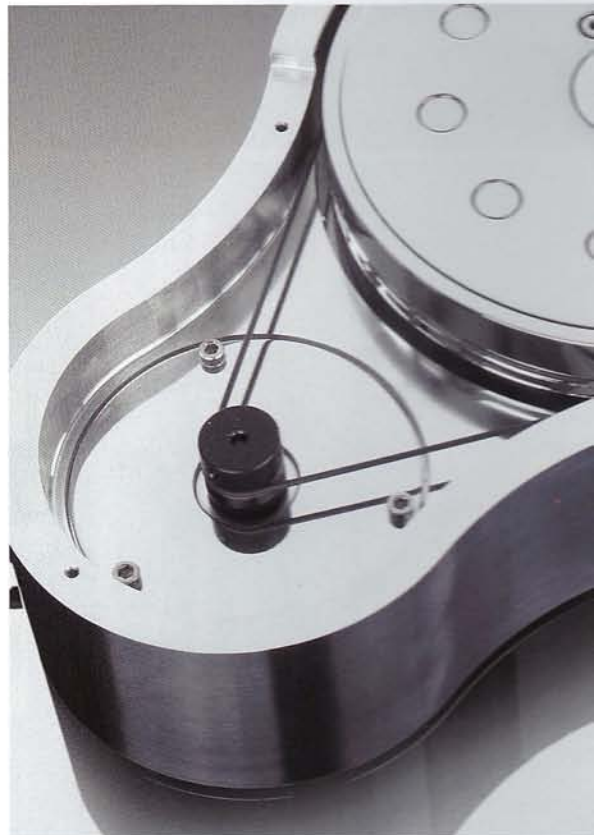
Our test device was additionally fitted with a perfectly adjusted Transrotor Merlo Reference MC pick-up, which can be ordered for another additional 1100 Euros. That means more than 12000 Euros struck up in our studio, the Rake rack not included. But honestly, if you travel to Tuscany to feast on the local delicacies, you don't look at the menu and tot up the prices for your meal. You blindly trust the recommendations of your host. We don't want to be stingy and therefore direct our attention towards pleasure.

Even the smooth manner in which the turntable starts moving to reach its final speed after a dozen revolutions has a majestic air. Forget all those slogans like 'class – not mass'. Here you get both >

Division of powers: The 10 neodym magnets in the FMD gyrating mass interact with those in the upper bearing unit (centre right) and repel each other through the lower bearing unit



Covered support: The Rondino hides its belt drive and gyrating mass in a module separated from the frame by an air gap.



Alternative Energy

Author: Stefan Schickedanz

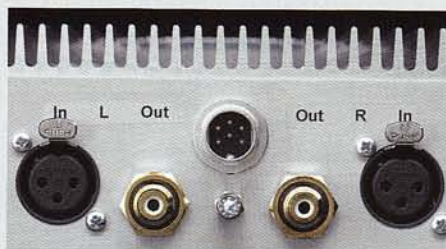
The Transrotor quality equipment set does not end at the pick-up. Those who wish for amplification that is a perfect technical and optical match, another two-part auxiliary device is available to fill the space on the precious gleaming delicatessen shelf. By means of this they guarantee a feed for the sensitive analog signal that is the equivalent of first class hospital treatment including the services of the chief physician. To prevent the mains adapter from infecting the sound with stray radiation in this difficult operation at low signal levels, the designer, who – as Jochen Räge respectfully emphasizes – is a professional, relocated it to a separate casing.

Actually, the most interesting part of the history of the new design revolves around the power supply for the pre-amplifier that uses moving coil systems only. In fact, master mind Jochen Räge had in mind a power supply unit that was intended to immunize the sensitive electronics against disturbances from the mains. But Räge freely admitted that the electronics expert who is responsible for the design persuaded him not to adopt this notion on the grounds that it was out of date: Today's technology had better things to offer.

Only the old-fashioned lead battery could provide enough power at the speed required, but it also suffers intensively from unwanted memory effects. The designer's solution: a state-of-the-art capacitor reservoir. It responds faster than lead batteries and, in addition, provides better long term stability. In all other points the common project developed exactly along the lines of Räge's vision. Räge: 'In Phono we have the perfectly symmetrical source. Consequently, the pre-amp with its consistently symmetrical structure has XLR connectors.'

Just in case, there is also a pair of cinch connectors on the back side.

However, with respect to sound they came second by a short head. But this is not the difference between varying shades of grey, but between sunny and even sunnier prospects. Even people with great expectation are in for a supersized sound experience: Agile, wide ranging dynamic and an enormous space with a stable stage combined with extremely faithful rendering of timbres make for a gripping experience. Mission accomplished.



Consistent: Symmetrical connections and circuits for the perfectly symmetrical source.

Should an ambitious phono pre-amp be designed to run on battery power? Jochen Räge allowed himself to be argued out of it after pre-implementation diagnostics



Flexible: On the front of the phono pre-amp, amplification, impedance, subsonic filtering can be adjusted.



Räke's Progress

Author: Stefan Schickedanz

Once upon a time behind the hills of Bergisch Gladbach. In his old age the record player king who lived there had no dearer wish than to have a way of adjusting the balance and sound of his purist stereo to his sense of hearing. It so happened that the king started searching for a talented craftsman who should render homage to him with a smart little box that could be fitted between his pre- and power amplifiers.

And the ambitious designer talent said: 'Why don't we make it into a headphone amplifier as well? All the necessary components are there.' And that is how it was done. And after many days of work the master was beside himself with joy and announced this new arrival during the previous fair. Recently, in the listening court in Stuttgart the little box faced a tribunal of heretic testers who in the last century had sworn to resist any

base temptation posed by balance or tone controls. But Jochen Räke's passionate plea assuaged them. He avoided making absolute claims. In addition, the invention makes sense – at least in certain predicaments.

We put the strange creation to the test. The approach of leaving the most important frequency range for audiophile experience from 100 Hz to 8 kHz untouched and only permitting controls according to individual rules with ± 10 dB outside this tabu zone works out.

The subtle effect of the tone controls is definitely compatible with the ideological precepts of hi-fi purism. And the best: Side effects like fatigue or vagueness of the sound were fortunately absent. Neither the fitting in of the magic box nor the use of its controls, which can be disabled, notably impairs the enjoyment of sound. Only by conscious listening the

hi-fi emperor visits Stuttgart: Jochen Räke asked for forgiveness because he had sinned against the doctrine of purism: a little box with tone controls.

effects on bass or treble could be noticed. Strikingly notable was the quality of the structural components.

Connecting a mobile player via the headphone amplifier resulted – depending on the pre-amp used – in a more stable sound and more punch in the bass. For Spartans the question arises whether a pre-amp is needed at all. The shiny little hedgehog has the ability and the volume regulation to input directly into a power amplifier. These genes predestine it for equally minimalist and high-end desktop systems with active speakers.

Oh yes – for headphones there is hardly a more neutral and dynamic complement. Particularly not one that includes tone and channel volume correction. It's like a happy ending of a picture book. And the moral of the story: After having his ears flushed the creator does not actually need his creation any more.



Guess what. By name this is a headphone amplifier with tone controls. With its fixed and pre-amp jacks it also opens a number of other avenues, for instance as a tone control between pre- and power amplifier.



in rare harmony. Which record is better able to express the emotions of a 'squat-ter behind the turntable' (please not: tribute is paid to Stuttgart turntable rocker Michi Beck!) than Holst's Planets? The gravity and circumference of gigantic Jupiter – here they were experienced with all the senses.

The LSO conducted by Andre Previn seemed to fill the room and was much more impressive than normally. Lovers of stable sound images and the much quoted quiet between notes will com to appreciate the Rondino.

Apropos of quotations: In our sister publication AUDIO fellow writer Bernhard Rietschel, a vinyl fan from tip to toe, some time ago described an effect that lifts the team from Bergisch Gladbach into a class of its own. In muted passages this steady pick-up miracle advanced to the very limits of vinyl technology. Although it was not able to suppress the noise

pressed into the thread or the inevitable occasional crackle, it managed to elevate the desired signal (if it is permitted to call these beguiling sounds by such a prosaic name) onto a marble pedestal. From there it rises above the dirt similar to an oak tree that is supremely indifferent to the pigs rubbing against its trunk. Authenticity, dynamic, and body were present in such abundance that we were completely submerged in the music.

For those who believe this pleasure could hardly be enhanced at reasonable expense we recommend the Transrotor drive table. It contributes even more steadiness and stability to the sound. And by the way it transform the Rondino into a sound sculpture whose momentum of desire can hardly be compensated for – in particular, if the electronic components described in the following occupy its lower levels.



Test-Vinyl

Holst: „The Planets“

On the heavy, 180-gram pressing that was recorded with a wide dynamic range by the LSO under Andre Previn the drive, tone arm and pick-up can show their true ability.



The Author

Stefan Schickedanz

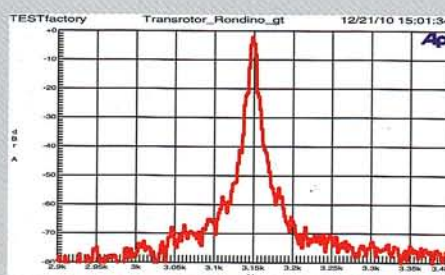
Because his pocket money was insufficient for a real Transrotor he took a job at a local newsroom in Frankfurt after leaving high school. Still, he only made enough to buy an Audio Linear TD 4001 made of black acrylic glass, which is still working today.

Transrotor

Rondino Nero, SME 5009, Transrotor Merlo

List price: 12,300 Euros
Warranty period: 2/5 years
Weight: 37 kilogram
Dimensions (W x H x D):
47 x 42 x 22 cm
Phono 8-MC
List price: 2,800 Euro
Weight: 2,5 kilogram
Dimensions (W x H x D):
18 x 75 x 30 cm
Transrotor
Headphone Amplifier
List price: 1,350 Euros
Weight: 2,5 Kilogramm
Dimensions (W x H x D):
22 x 75 x 17 cm
Distribution:
Räke Hi-Fi / Vertrieb GmbH
Irlenfelder Weg 43
D-51467 Bergisch Gladbach
Internet: www.transrotor.de

Laboratory

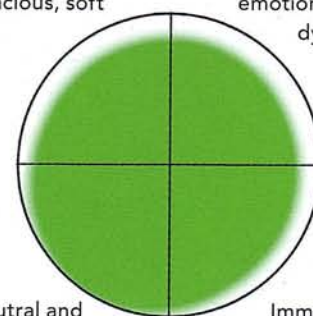


The set performed convincingly throughout. The tone range of a 3.15-kHz signal has optimally narrow peak and does not contain any low or high frequency disturbances. The rumbling values are extremely low and – measured via a coupler – in the upper frequency range near the measuring limit. The low noise pre-amp has a frequency response from 0 Hz to 100 kHz as straight as a ruler.

AUDIophile Character

Effortlessly
spacious, soft

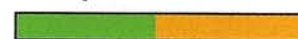
Grippingly
emotional and
dynamic



Neutral and
authentic

Immediacy
high resolution

AUDIophile Potential



Recommendation

With up to three arms and pick-ups the the Rondino offers a lot of opportunity for experimentation. However, for most of us the complete set fits perfectly.