



ALTO EXTREME

The specialty of the Transrotor Alto is its extremely sensitive height adjustment for the tonearm base. To find out what it has to offer and what the turntable's other perks are, we used its most extreme configuration with three motors.

A few thousandths of a second faster, a nose length ahead: for those who fight in the very top leagues, such supposed trifles become hours and kilometers – not only in sports. HighEnders are constantly pushing to improve their systems in areas and dimensions that would usually remain unnoticed and of which “normal” listeners wouldn’t suspect they were of any importance.

For example the cartridge adjustment. In regard to overhang, azimuth or tracking force, comparatively tiny changes can make the difference. Ultra-precise stencils, measuring records, electronic scales and other aids help us with the adjustment. But what about the tonearm height? The analogue listener is usually left with only the specification that the arm tube should run parallel to the plate surface when the needle

is lowered. However, at least insiders know that the diamond is, then, often not at the correct angle of 20 degrees in the groove. Also frequently the focus and tonal balance are only optimal when the tonearm base is one to two millimeters above “nominal zero”.

KEYWORD

Line Contact-Cut: Collective term for diamonds that approach the shape of the cutting stylus and trace more information in the high-frequency range.

This can only be determined in a listening test, because general recommendations for pickups of one or the other brand show, at best, a general direction. Also there are, of course, tolerances within the production which require deviations in the adjustment. “One size fits all” is not the way to go.

The intricate **line contact-cuts** of the diamonds of high-quality pickups, however the various brands may call them, further “sharpen” the problem in the truest sense of the word. For example, I recently discovered, how, when testing

Audio-Technica’s first-class AT-ART9 moving coil pickup, which is equipped with a delicately faceted “SLC” diamond, its slight brittleness only turned into smooth grace when tilted slightly forward.

And what happens when changing from a normal to a thicker 180-gram pressing? Strictly speaking, the tonearm would have to be raised or lowered by a small amount. Of course, nobody does that because it’s fiddly and annoying. Instead one would look for a compromise setting. The emphasis is, however, on “compromise”, because not only the ART9 changes its sound with a slight change in height.

Which brings us to the Transrotor Alto. This turntable makes a virtue out of necessity by allowing its height to be adjusted via a solid metal wheel on the bottom of its tonearm base – even while playing! This is done extremely sensitively, because a notch in the rim equals just a tenth of a millimeter. Also, the chrome-plated disc feels so smooth and creamy that one loves turning it. It conveys the fascination of precise mechanics and is lots of fun. Once the adjustment is done, it can be fixed with a screw located at the front of the tube. A pithy detail on the Alto, which is as solid as it is finely crafted, but actually superfluous, because nothing here is going to shift by itself.



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1 The solid tonearm base, which can be used for nine- to twelve-inch arms, can be sensitively adjusted in height via the lower ring. **2** The inversely supported TMD bearing, which magnetically decouples the plate from the drive pulley and to which three motors are connected via belts, sits enthroned on the massive full metal base. **3** Thanks to its internal ball bearing, the feet of the drive can be adjusted in height easily and effortlessly. **4** A nice detail is the storage for the plate weight, which is available for an extra charge.



3

The newly developed arm base is as stylish as it is refined. Below a cover, the arm cantilever runs in three round guides. If you turn here, you have the basic setting for the usual nine-inch arms and the longer twelve-inch arms from stop to stop. For demonstration purposes, Transrotor mastermind Jochen Råke had the test-device equipped with the M2-12R, also manufactured by the English manufacturer SME, in addition to the proven and highly recommended TR 5009.

The Alto, which is derived from the successful Fat Bob model, could even hold a total of three tone arm bases simultaneously. At the place of the third one there was a flawlessly made rest for the plate weight. As you know: with every change

of a record you don't know where to put the thing. For an additional 130 Euro Transrotor attaches this seat for the noble weight with engraved "JR"-logo to the Alto.

Its solid metal base rests on three newly designed feet. Thanks to the integrated ball bearing, they can be easily adjusted in height via their shiny outer ring to render it perfectly level.

Including a round motor block with metal base, the TMD bearing, which magnetically decouples the belt-driven platter, a tonearm base, the smallest of Transrotor's high-quality mains and control parts "Konstant Studio", and the plate weight, the Alto drive costs 5000 euros. Additionally, the TR5009 tonearm and Transrotor's top MC scanner Figaro, which cost 2900 and 2000 Euros, are included in the test unit. These are preferential prices reduced by 20 percent compared to the individual costs if acquired as a set. If you buy the Alto in the depicted "Extremo" version, you have to invest exactly 16,863 Euro.

In addition to the second arm base plus M2-12R arm and in this case the additional MC pickup Merlo Reference (subsidized by 1100/2340 and 960 Euro), you then have two additional motors for 680 Euro each, as well as the now necessary and equipped with a soft-start automatic large power supply Konstant FMD (1075 Euro surcharge) and the neat weight storage on the bill.



4

Now one inevitably asks oneself at this point, what advantage the three-motor-drive should have. After all, one should be sufficient to keep that full nine kilogram heavy plate in motion with corresponding mass-momentum, while the TMD bearing, in addition to the flexible rubber belt, should keep all small irregularities away from it, right? So far the theory.

In practice, however, the Alto's sound increased significantly when the engine trio was used. First of all this resulted in a much more spacious presentation, which at the same time increased in clarity and differentiation in all respects, as well as a much more mature, high-end character. This was not least due to the more stoic and fluent timing. Diana Krall's fantastic live album from the Paris Olympics, for example, was much more authentic, while, as soon as you took two of the motors out, the stage and its surroundings shrank au-

TEST-COMPONENTS

- Turntable: Transrotor Rondino nero
- Pickups: Audio-Technica AT-ART9, Clearaudio Stradivarius V2, Dynavector Karat 17DX, Ortofon Cadenza Red
- Phono-Preamplifier: Accustic Arts Tube Phono II, Brinkmann Edison
- Pre/power amplifier: Accustic Arts Tube PreampII-MK2/AmpII-MK3
- Loudspeaker: B&W 800D3, Fischer & Fischer SN470M
- Cable: HMS Suprema, JIB Silver Galaxy BP-006SC (Phono), HMS Gran Finale Jubilee/In acoustics 2404 (NF/LS)

dibly, the band moved closer together and there was audibly less air in the sound.

With Tiny Island's congenial version of the Taj Mahal title "When I Feel The See Beneath My Soul" from the Opus 3 vinyl sampler, the Alto only achieved that self-contained, floating, indeed, almost hypnotic aura, which is reserved for only the best record players, if used in its three-engine mode – whereby the correct mains phase at the Konstant FMD (see diagram) must be adhered to. By "Single-Drive" it played clean and orderly, but without this pronounced "instinct" for atmosphere and perfection and therefore stayed clearly below the mentioned sphere. Theory is dull, the analogue cosmos, on the other hand, is colorful and full of surprises.

Of course we also messed around with the height adjustments of the arm bases. The expected results occurred: if the base was too high, the reproduction became more present at first and then stricter. It could happen that voices appeared glassy by losing the energy connection to the supporting fundamental. On the other hand, the performance was covered or even slightly musty if the arm was lowered too far down. It was astonishing that deviations of half a millimeter were already noticeable. Although not every scanner

reacted equally clearly and sensitively to the ups and downs, the tendency was consistent. And the differences also led us to rethink the subject of "vertical scanning angle", because the rapid adjustability of this Transrotor makes it possible to demonstrate its significance all the more emphatically.

Correctly adjusted, the "Alto extremo" did not need to hide away from its brother Rondino nero out of our reference class, who competed in the family duel with identical arm/scanner combinations for optimum comparability. In order to avoid imponderables, we even exchanged the Figaro MCs with each other and used only one phono cable, which we always plugged into the TR5009 we were respectively using.

It didn't take long to recognize that the two turntables were playing at eye level. The Alto, reinforced by the motor double and the large power supply, tried to overtake the, in theory superior, Rondino nero, which is some good 2000€ more expensive, with its exemplary cleanliness and openness of sound. However, the Rondino nero played at least as spaciouly and relaxed, albeit with a somewhat more closed diction, which resulted not least from a touch more sonority and serenity, whereby the Rondino nero kept slightly ahead.

ANALOG MANUFACTORY

In comparison to the big names in turntable production, Transrotor in Bergisch Gladbach is a proper manufactory. And above it hovers the spirit of founder and analogue veteran Jochen Räge (below), who registered the brand in 1973 and experienced all the highs and lows of the analogue industry. The company's manageable dimensions were usually of advantage.

As well as that you could do almost everything yourself. During our visit, metal parts were polished on a machine, while employee Gerd Weichler (r.) measured the control boards delivered by an electronics specialist and installed them into elegant cabinets. The drives were already waiting for them, because a shipment to Asia was currently being prepared. The export business, which has grown rapidly in recent years, is in the hands of Räge's son Dirk. Overseas sales have long since exceeded domestic sales, although Transrotor is strongly represented in the German hifi trade. However, the solidity and finesse of „Made in Germany“ are a source of delight worldwide. Valuable synergies also result from the cooperation with the British manufacturers Goldring and SME, whose pickups and tonearms the Rhinelanders sell in Germany. They perfectly complement the Transrotor drives.

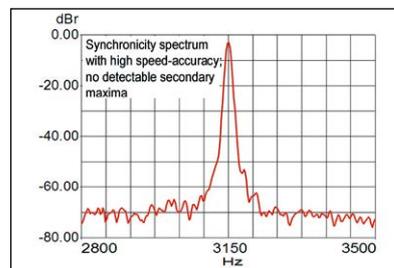
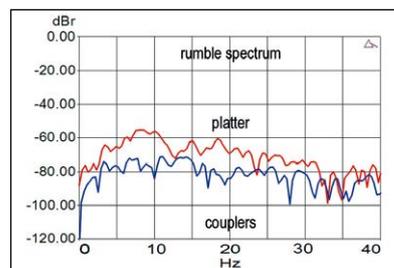


TRANSROTOR ALTO

Price: around 12335 €
 (Complete price with power supply Konstant FMD, two extra motors, tone-arm TR 5009 and MC pickup Figaro)
 Dimensions: 52 x20 x50 cm (WxHxD)
 Warranty: 2 years
 Contact: Räge Hifi
 Phone: +49 2202 31046
 www.transrotor.de

A first-class turntable in terms of effort and technical demands, whereby the standard TMD bearing as well as the perfectly reliable height adjustment for the arm base stand out especially. This way top tone arms and scanners can always unfold their full sound potential because they can be adjusted in the twinkling of an eye to different thicknesses of vinyl, for example. Even in the basic version, the Alto is a top turntable. With the optional three-motor drive and large power supply unit, it's right at the front in terms of sound!

MEASUREMENT RESULTS



LAB COMMENT

Mains phase at the tested device

The rumble and synchronicity values approach our respective measuring limits. Thanks to the fine speed adjustment on the power supply unit, the two speeds can be set very precisely.

FEATURES

External power supply for up to three motors, two individually adjustable speeds (33/45), height adjustable feet and tonearm base

STEREO - TEST

SOUND QUALITY **99%**

PRICE/PERFORMANCE

★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆
SEHR GUT