

O F F P R I N T

HÖRERLEBNIS

DIE ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR MUSIK UND HIGH FIDELITY

**ACOUSTIC SOLID
SOLID ONE**

Mass is class

By Marco Kolks

If I ever believed that a product could live up to its name, then never could it be more likely than with the Solid One from Acoustic Solid. What I have in front of me is a fortress of highly polished aluminium, which literally takes my breath away. Yes, this is how I always imagined an analogue mass drive turntable should be. There is sure to be some owner somewhere who will even develop an erotic bond with it.

Its developer, Karl Wirth, is a friendly man from the south of Germany, who is convinced that it must be possible to produce analogue equipment which sounds good, is affordable, and is also easy to use. Coming from him, this statement would have you believe that you could bang up a turntable like the Solid One blindfolded.

The base consists of three (two at the front and one at the rear) impressive columns, connected by a rod assembly to form a three-legged construction which is relatively insensitive to resonance, and which itself is effectively shielded from the surface on which it stands by way of teflon discs. Further holder mechanisms serve as fixings for the base unit, also known as the base plate. Above this, a solid aluminium platter sits on its throne. The round arms each contain a hexagonal screw with which the precise height, or horizontal orientation can be set, using the supplied, precise tool, in a procedure which can only be described as child's play.

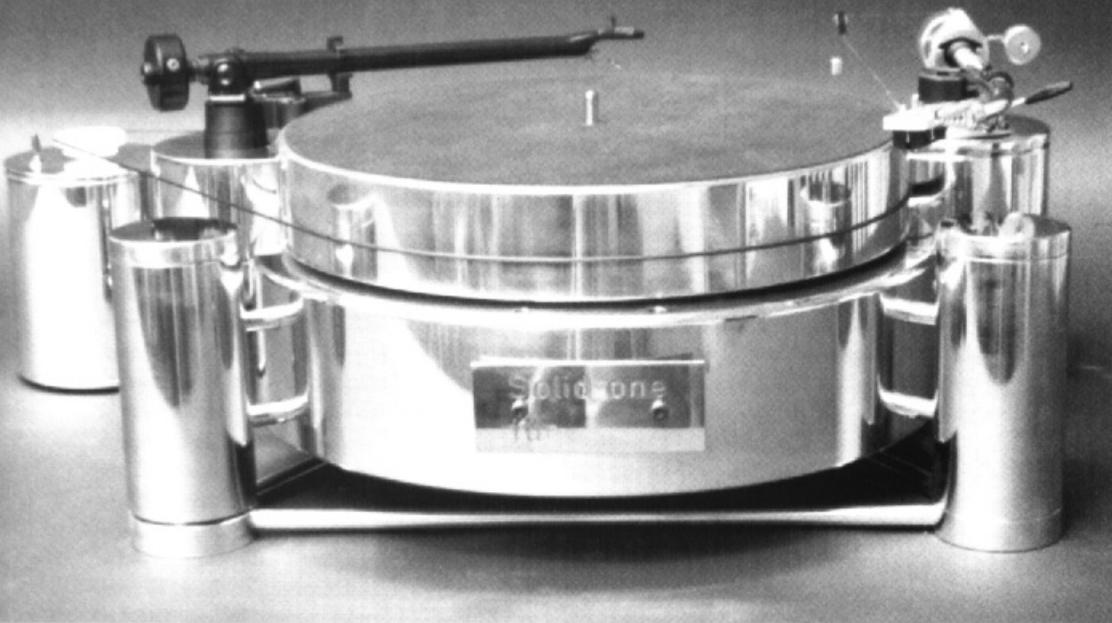
Up to three tone arms can be fitted to the Solid One. Karl Wirth has their model-specific mountings and bases always in

stock. But any customer with special wishes will find in Acoustic Solid a flexible partner.

The drive power is provided by an external Berger synchronous motor with a plug-in mains transformer coupled to the drive by way of a very thin nylon string. The transparent plastic pulley is designed for 33 and 45 rpm. Alongside this is a colour-coded mains switch, which unfortunately causes an heavy plop to emanate from the speakers when switched off.

Depending on the number of tone arms fitted, the Solid One can weigh up to 37 kg. What it needs more than anything is a sufficiently large area on which to stand - about 500 x 500 mm. It is indeed rather particular about the type of surface upon which it stands. I again found the Acapella 'Fondato Silencio' music base to be the best here. But a really solid stone flag, such as is used in standard windowsills, would be fine. The special status of the Solid One can be emphasised by an inconspicuous do it yourself construction consisting of a wooden frame filled with quartz sand sealed on top with an aluminium plate. Every surface has its own acoustic properties. Stone tends to produce a higher and more precise reproduction, whereas care must be taken when using sound - as in the do it yourself structure described above. If the amount of sand used is wrong, the result can be deadened sound. The danger of this is often underestimated. Otherwise the machine has plenty of quiet and well-structured bass.

It sounds at its most balanced with the



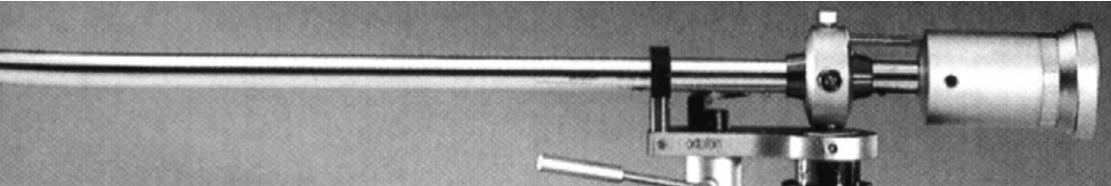
Up to three tone arms can be fitted to the Solid One. The name of the owner is also engraved in the shield at the front.

Fondato Silencio, which unfortunately is an expensive proposition in the special size which is necessary for this setup.

Karl Wirth is particularly proud of the platter bearing. He makes use of the so-called SKC non-frictional coatings, which are characterised above all by their precision, resistance to wear and running properties. The result is that there are no unpleasant jerks in the operating elements when the turntable starts up. It also avoids the onset of after-running, caused by tension release. The use of the right kind of lubrication - high quality oils are a must - reduces the wear of the non-frictional coating to a minimum. SKC non-frictional coatings are not damaged by unfavourable operating conditions such as faulty lubrication and can therefore not seize up. Moreover, tolerance levels, which Karl

Wirth puts at three thousandths of a millimetre should ensure that no play is apparent anywhere in the whole bearing.

The aluminium platter follows the order to run given by the thin string with great precision. It only takes a very short term for the turntable to achieve the required speed. The red leather mat on the platter is not only optically beneficial but it also lends the sound a warmer, more natural and balanced character across the entire frequency range as would be possible with an underlay of felt. It should be noted that this turntable does have a tendency to somewhat tight reproduction characteristics. For this reason, a round piece of leather placed beneath the puck is advantageous. A circular spirit level is fitted inside the puck which at first glance is nothing more than a nice gimmick. But you shouldn't rely on the small display when setting up the system. It would be better to invest in precision tools. The



differences are considerable. Furthermore, the small bubble could - theoretically at least - cause an imbalance. This is not inconceivable because even the use of different types of cotton in the strings can lead to widely differing results.

As far as the tone arm is concerned, I am restricting myself to one only. I asked for the Ortofon 309i which was supplied with the classic SPU Royal. In the 12 inch league, this arm enjoys a legendary reputation, along with the SME 3012, the only difference being that the former is both the better and the more expensive of the two. This finish is flawless and is enough to make you break out in tears of joy. Its respectable length requires plenty of room, but the stable distance bolts appear to provide the optimum solution. While it is possible to live without the antiskating device, the optional lift really should be taken into consideration when planning the purchase.

Optically, the SPU is anything but graceful. This black, somewhat antique looking square box contraption is without a doubt a good contender in the ugly duckling contest, but insiders know that the Royal is an absolute wolf in sheep's clothing, whose qualities stand in absolutely no relation at all to its appearance. It can be fitted to the arm extremely simply using the bayonet fitting. Installation and adjustment, which would normally run into days, can be completed in a few strokes of the hand. The tracking

The 309i by Ortofon enjoys a special status among 12 inch arms. Contact to the pickup is created with a bayonet system. The classic SPUs prove themselves to be the best partner, and not only here. Interested customers should definitely consider the optionally available tone arm lift device (bottom left).

weight is apparently relatively high, at 3 pond, but it has nothing in common with the record scratchers of vinyl ages past. The recommended end resistance of 100 Ohm proves to be the ideal value in practice. After only 20 hours of playing time, the Ortofon is running at capacity performance.

The rubber components in the pickup are fitted by the Danish manufacturer in artificially aged condition, with the result that are guaranteed a virtually unlimited service life. In addition, the stylus does not display any exotic shape or finish, something that a record collection which has not been subject to excessive wear will be extremely thankful. The result is a sound which is full, homogeneous and colourful, which plays into the foreground somewhat, and which comes very close to satisfying my personal preferences.

The gold/silver mixture applied in the coils confirms the statement of the Ortofon developers that the use of extremely pure and noble materials produces an extreme purity of sound. And one more tip - even when first setting up the tone arm and pickup, you should clean the small contact pins with pure alcohol or squalene oil. Because as soon as the contact surfaces become dirty or even oxidised, the quality of reproduction suffers. For this reason it is worthwhile performing regular checks.

As far as the workmanship is concerned, there is nothing to criticise, not even down to the last detail, although



manufactured almost exclusively by hand. The highly polished aluminium gives the impression of great elegance. If you like things a bit more rustic, you can also order a glass-bead sprayed finish, which is very similar to the grey Nextel varnish finish. In accordance with the company philosophy, special fittings such as a brass base, hole fittings for additional tone arms or the precision stabiliser are available at very reasonable prices.

The only thing left to note before putting the machine into service is that the rotational speed is controlled by the frequency of the mains current. If any deviations become apparent, it can be reset by means of a stroboscope disc and altering the string length or tension. The quiet, yet still audible noise produced by the pulleys is perhaps another point to which Karl Wirth can apply his constructional skill.

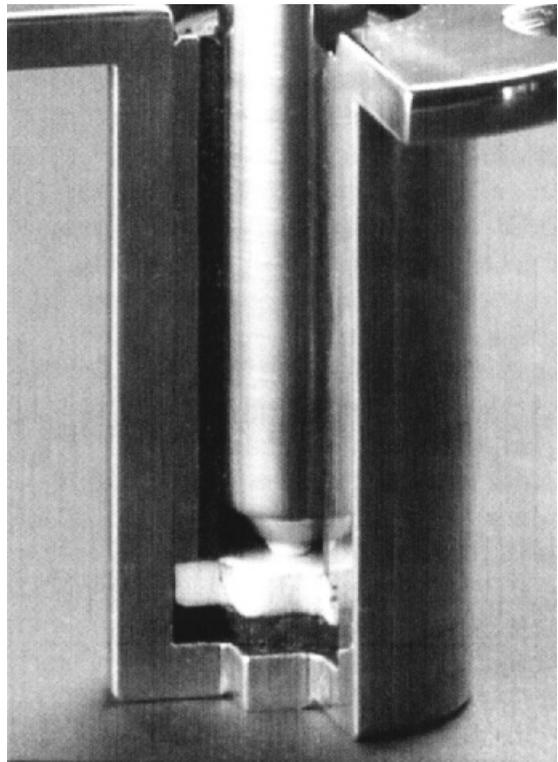
Commentary

Just how calm and elegant the reproduction obtained using the Solid One can be is demonstrated impressively by Ben Webster's Quintet on 'Soulsville' (MGV-8274). The tenor saxophone of Ben Webster comes across wonderfully clearly and stands in front of me in the room so close I feel I can touch it. The sound is full and rich. He plays with so much feeling that it almost takes on heart-melting character. Webster is accompanied by Oscar Peterson on piano, Ray Brown on bass, Herb Ellis on guitar and Stan Levey on drums. The group is a veritable who's who of jazz. The atmosphere is electric and it swings. The Solid One makes sure that

The bearings of the Solid One are characterised by their extremely low wear and high durability. The production tolerances are a maximum of three thousandths of a millimetre.

the instruments retain their fixed positions on the stage. The tone arm and pickup - a restlessly convincing Ortofon combination - support the homogeneous sound. It doesn't manage to coax every last speck of information out of the groove, but this does not deter from the thoroughly good general impression. It is often the case that overwrought audiophile hair splitting ends up in somewhat shredded and uncalm reproduction. But here, the listener can lean back in his chair and the music flows gently and all the more comforting to the ear.

And this is what I conclude - The Solid One fulfils all the demands that you could possibly have of a turntable of this class. It keeps the record rotating constantly at the desired speed without exercising an influence on the sound. Regarded absolutely, it does go a touch into the foreground but it is always resolved by the speaker and possessive an extensive width and depth structure. To accuse this turntable of having a deficit of accuracy



would be very wide off the mark.

The extremely powerful bass reproduction is extremely deep in fact astoundingly so. And this range does not conceal any influences that could mar the sharpness of contour of the lower octaves. This can be appreciated very nicely in the Intro to Tarkus on the album 'Welcome back my friends to the show that never ends - ladies and gentlemen' by Emerson, Lake and Palmer. The untamable weight thrown into the room by the synthesiser and drums rock the room. The individual instruments do not run together, despite the complexity of the reproduction and they all have the right size. The piece loses nothing of its effect. These properties have been incorporated highly successfully in the Acoustic Solid. It retains the necessary calm and conveys an audible image to my ears that gives me the feeling of being in charge of events. A further advantage of this turntable is that it is absolutely unshakable. Even at extremely high sound levels and on floors with a tendency to vibrate, the Acoustic Solid shows no reaction at all. The music simply sounds powerful and anyone who attends the occasional

concert knows just how much pressure can be involved in live music. This level of reproduction guides you directly into the music. The following piece, Luck Man, a sensitive ballad, again succeeds in achieving the level claimed by Karl Wirth - tonally spot on, clearly distinguished instruments and the voice of Greg Lake spatially defined. The wandering effect which can sometimes be observed within an ensemble is not noticeable here.

In combination with the Ortofon arm and pickup, the Solid One is a good example of the skilful implementation and transmission of an analogue signal which stands out clearly and positively from the cool sound of the CD.

To my knowledge, absolute perfection is something that you can not expect from any device. The question is, how close does the sound come to my ideals and within my financial means. Where must I be prepared to compromise? The art is to compromise in those areas where to do so can most easily be accepted. These thoughts must have been running through Karl Wirth's mind at some point, and he certainly has done his homework very well.

I tried out various materials for the string. The supplied nylon thread fits well in the

The Solid One can also be set up and operated on a specially designed tripod, which has the effect of further increasing calm and stability in the reproduction.



aurally coherent concept. An interesting alternative is to use pure cotton, which must however have a fine surface. The reproduction is then a little more biased to the treble range and the contour sharpness increases. Don't forget that we are talking here about nuances. Anyone who really wants to can even try out rubber belts. Precision then drops and in comparison to the nylon string, dynamism gains. So it could well be that the use of a particular kind of string will make all the difference.

Character: The Solid One fulfils all the requirements of a high quality analogue mass drive turntable. It sounds calm and well-rooted and tends to move a nuance towards the high and not the cool tones. This gives the reproduction more precision and clarity. The Ortofon 309i and the SPU prove themselves as congenial partners in this constellation. What is thoroughly recommended is the blue 8 N TSW 1000 phono cable from Ortofon, made of copper, which transmits the warm character of the rest of the Ortofon chain. For a 12 inch arm and a pick up which appear antiquated only from an optical point of view, this combination is extraordinarily dynamic on the Solid One, and in terms of speed it leaves absolutely nothing out. Hard edges in the reproduction are foreign to this triumvirate. On the contrary, the music makes best use of its emotional trump card. As far as the spatial representation is concerned there is really nothing left to be desired in terms of depth and width.

Conclusion: Mass is quite clearly class. And this mass is even affordable. It is rather more reasonably priced than its appearance would lead you to expect. And if you are going, you may as well do things properly, and combine it with the Ortofon 309i and the SPU Royal.

