

image hifi

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Acoustic Solid Solid Edition

By Dirk Sommer, photographs by Rolf Winter

There is a firm in Swabia in the south of Germany that has a thing about solidness. You can tell it from the company name and also from the name of their products. The people in that part of the world are also known for their thriftiness and so it comes as no surprise that these products are available at an incredible price. But be careful - the list of accessories is as long as your arm, although when it comes to top class manufacturers from the Stuttgart region, we are getting used to this by now.

Record player test

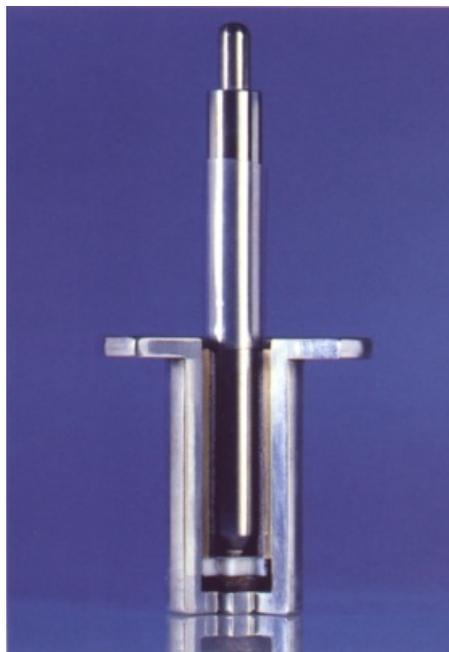
The first time I came upon one of these rather impressive mass drive turntables was at the Scala exhibition in 1997. It was called - you'll never guess - the Solid One, and it was distributed by Peak Audio. At least I know it now. At the time, I assumed that the former was the name of the product and the latter that of the manufacturer. But more about this later. The aluminium drive was already impressive on account of its incredible presence, but even more so upon glancing at the price label - in comparison to the heavyweights already well known in the scene, it is possible to save a good few thousand marks with this machine. Is this a case of a newcomer trying to get its foot through the door of the highly competitive analogue market by offering its products at dumping prices?

The fact that this was not the case has been proven over the last few years. Acoustic Solid has since developed into an important figure among the community of turntable manufacturers, without this process being accompanied by any appreciable price changes. And this is sure to be the main reason why more and more requests have been received to perform tests on this interesting unit. However, since - happily - there has been anything but a lack of analogue themes in these pages, despite - or perhaps better - because of the advent of Audio DVD and SACD, and image hifi should not attempt to devote itself exclusively to valves, high efficiency loudspeakers and record players, it was simply a matter of time before we were then finally able to address your requests. Still, better late than never. The enormous product range coupled with the long accessory lists mentioned above were also partly responsible for us taking so long in selecting a test product.

But shortly after this year's High End exhibition, where the Solid Edition was first presented, everything was finally organised, and Karl Wirth, founder, owner and developer of Acoustic Solid arrived in Gröbenzell, accompanied by his turntable and son-in-law. The latter happens to be an electrical engineer, has worked for several years for a well-known loudspeaker manufacturer from Boston, and it is he who developed the control electronics for the record player motors. But before we move on to involve ourselves with technical

details, we should first take a look at the history of the company, which is as brief as it is successful. As so often happens in our sector, for Karl Wirth it was a case of his hobby turning into his profession. For more than fifteen years, he worked as head of manufacturing for a supply company to the automobile industry, and his intention was originally to give up working at fifty at the latest, and to devote himself from then on to the good things in life, preferably in the sunny climes of Spain.

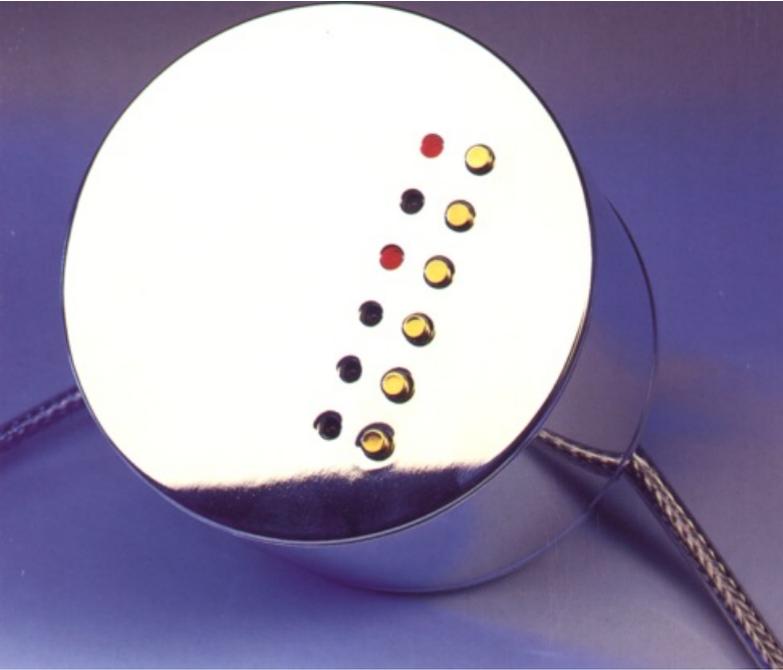
However, while still actively involved in his profession, he often used to spend his evenings after work in the metal shop, developing his mass drive, simply for his own enjoyment. And this was the point at which fate stepped in. The prototype, which - as we may conclude - was extremely successful, both fascinated and aroused the desires of his friends and colleagues. It wasn't long before he had produced the first models which were not intended for his own private use. A short time later, the unexpected small series manufacturer wanted to know if his creation could hold its own among the products offered by the well-known names.



The high gloss polished ceramic bearing runs upon a teflon surface. A non-friction coating absorbs lateral forces.

He approached his hifi dealer of choice, who gathered, perhaps not every representative of the analogue elite together in his shop, but still enough to provide a good opportunity of conducting a number of detailed comparisons. The results of these solid construction tests were so positive that the dealer suddenly transformed into a customer, and it wasn't long before a distributor could be found who made it possible to make the product known throughout Germany, not least as a result of its presentation at the Scala exhibition in 1997. A photograph taken there was subsequently published in a hifi magazine happily devoted to all things analogue allegedly created further positive interest which of course led to a considerable demand.

For Karl Wirth, there was now no way back. Forget Spain. Forget the hoped for lazy life. From now on the new company, Acoustic Solid was to absorb all his energy. It has at times also been responsible for more than a little anger, when the then distributor brought out his own turntable that was barely distinguishable from the Solid One. Consultations with lawyers and conflicts concerning the protection of registered patents were not exactly what our mechanical engineer had in mind when he dreamed up his idea of being his own boss. Fortunately, everything has calmed down in the meantime, the Acoustic Solid company is well-established with a new distributor and Karl Wirth can again devote himself fully to his self-set task that he enjoys so much. And for this reason, he has performed an additional considerable investment in his favourite project, in the form of a number of machines with which he can produce all the metal components required, independently of parts suppliers. Granite and stone plinths for the Solid Elipse and Solid Stone models are no longer required since they have now been taken out of the programme. The great depth of production, the lack of necessity for an expensive administrative apparatus, i.e. overheads, the streamlining of the product range and the moderate sales margin all contribute to maintaining the prices of these aluminium heavyweights attractive in the long term. The Acoustic Solid boss does not even need to pay much attention to the idea of expansion - with between 100 and at the very most 150 orders per year, he can get by just fine.

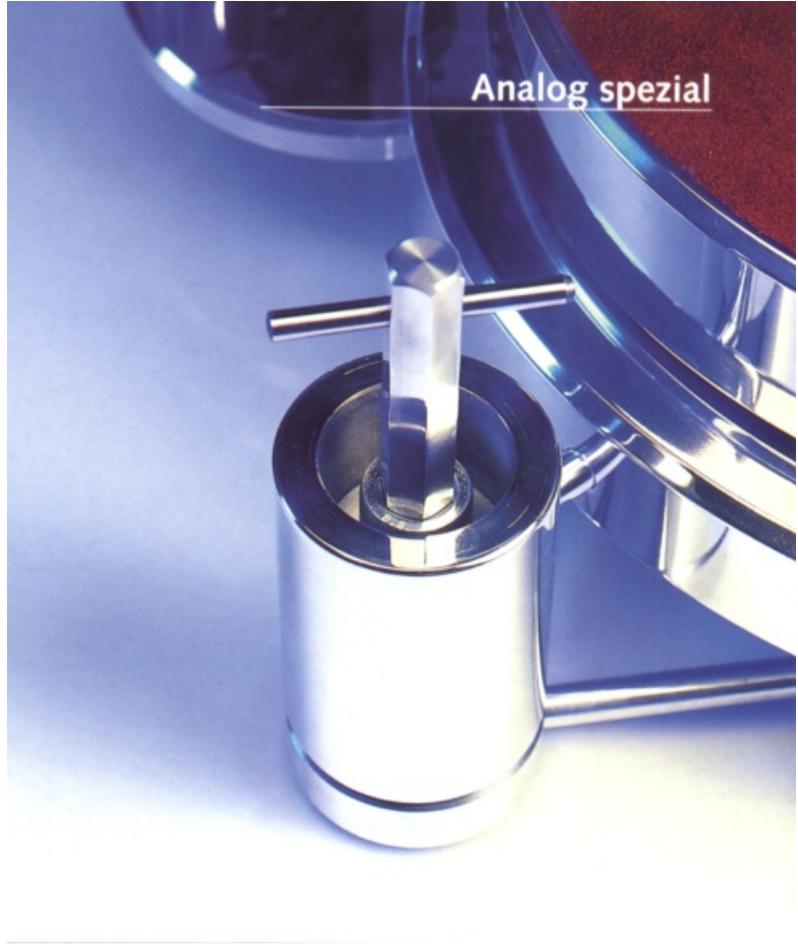


The microprocessor-controlled electronic unit permits not only the selection but also the fine adjustments of the speed

The height adjusting screws and the teflon discs are hidden in the three columns

If no electronic control device is ordered, speed changing must be performed by altering the position of the string on the pulley

The 'puck' with the integrated spirit level looks great. But the display is unfortunately not particularly precise



Analog spezial



Record player test

The drives from the South German town of Neckartailfingen display no trace of voodoo, as can only be expected from the history of their developer. To the question of the material from which the platter is made, Karl Wirth responds as follows: Aluminium in compliance with DIN 1798 with proportions of copper, manganese and lead. The spindle is made of hard metal, hardened, ground and polished, precisely in accordance with the requirements of the German industrial norm 6325. Do you need any more proof that a real professional is at work here, who knows precisely what he is talking about? OK then - instead of praising in detail all the advantages of the moulded bearing, simply hands me a table for selecting SKC coatings.

But let's slow down for a moment here, because the bearing in the Acoustic Solid really is something special. A highly polished ceramic ball-bearing has been worked into the lower end of the above-mentioned spindle - the surface quality of which is anything but standard - which runs above a teflon surface. The aluminium bearing insert contains a brass holder, whose internal dimensions are far too great to provide the spindle with required lateral guidance. This task is therefore performed by a plastic layer. The non-friction coating is poured into the space between the holder and the spindle, which is first coated with a separating agent. When the plastic has hardened, the spindle is removed and cleaned before being returned to its special bearing. The non-friction coating is said to display a high damping effect, good rigidity properties and is highly non-wearing.

The platter is turned in what the technician terms a chuck. First two threads are cut into the workpiece, with the aid of which it is mounted onto the plane disc of a lathe. Without changing the position of the platter to be, it is now possible to work all the surfaces, to drill the central hole and press the spindle. In this way, Acoustic Solid seeks to avoid any irregular weight distribution therefore guaranteeing a particularly quiet circular movement, the like of which could not be achieved in the standard

procedure, in which the platter is inserted into a clamp twice. As far as the drive is concerned, Karl Wirth relies on tried and tested solutions. A Berger synchronous motor is housed within an attractive aluminium casing. This is supplied in its basic version with a rather voluminous plug-in transformer unit, and for a relatively moderate extra price an electronic control unit is also available, with which it is possible to change the turntable speed at the touch of a button.

The Solid Edition is available in three different surface finishes, the cheapest of which is the 'rotating gloss' finish. A glass bead surface costs an extra 220 marks and a high gloss polish finish 260 marks. Karl Wirth rejects the idea of eloxing the surfaces, since this would cause tensions to appear within the material. We chose the polished model with the normal power supply and the microprocessor control unit. As far as the stabiliser is concerned the choice is a difficult one. It is available in two sizes. I would recommend the smaller of the two, not necessarily because it results in 200 g less load on the bearing, but because it is possible that the larger one can occasionally come into contact with it before it reaches the final run-off groove, at least if the groove

is cut close to the label and the pickup used is as wide at the front as the Clearaudio. The photos show the more impressive, heavier alternative.

In the listening room, the unit finds its home on the upper, strongly damped board of the Pagode rack. Since a solid height adjustment screw is hidden in each of the three columns of the Solid Edition, which also contain special teflon discs for acoustic shielding, setting the precise orientation of the turntable is child's play. Nevertheless, the surface used should be relatively flat. The setting range is relative narrow. To start with, the mains transformer supplies the motor with energy. Occasionally, switching the unit on is accompanied by an unfortunate noise from the loudspeakers - but of course only if a high-performance anti-distortion preamplifier is included in the setup. But the designers are sure to find a quick way of eliminating this minor blemish.

The assembly of the tone arms is a simple matter. By turning the two discs, it is not only possible to set the required distance between the platter spindle and the hold, but also to select the orientation when using the elongated holes, for instance with the SME.

When listening to Drone by Jonas Hellborg followed by Little Wing, from the Elegant Punk album (Day Eight Music, DEMLP 004), the edition shows that it in way stands between the bass tone capability of the Five and the Victory. The combination sounds



enormously pressured but despite all the energy, still highly transparent. The three legged construction is surprisingly light in its feet when it comes to reproducing music, and as steady as a rock when ear drum bursting sound levels try to upset its inherent calm. In the absence of a direct comparison, there is absolutely no cause for criticism, not even with less bass-strong discs. But before we get to these, the motor control unit should show whether it is able to display quieter running properties, from the point of view of vibration - it can be clearly felt that considerably vibrations are created by the motor when it is fed by the control unit than when it receives its power directly from the mains. I should hasten to add that the difference is hardly earth-shattering, but still clearly discernable. It is particularly apparent during the week when the fine mechanics shop next door turns on its machines and puts its strain on the electricity supply.

Released from its cabinet for the first time in a long time, Bang, Baaroom And Harp is as fascinating as ever. You could almost touch the plastic spatial illusion and the effusive liveliness is something that never fails to get me going. This is particularly so when, as a result of using the motor control device, the trombones come across with a trace more volume, the spectacle is taking place against a

somewhat background, and there is suddenly room for some subtle rhythmic finesse in the wild forward march of the ensemble. In this well-known percussion furioso, it is also conspicuous that the soundscape created by the Edition has a tendency to high, fine notes rather than the earthy bass, which should not be taken as criticism, but as an indication to be taken into consideration when selecting the tone arm.

Of course, presenting the Edition opposite the Konstant is not exactly fair, for financial reasons alone - the Acapella Basis with the Clearaudio Magix², or the valve mains unit alone cost more than the basic version of the turntable.

However, only a direct comparison can show which areas there are in which small improvements can be made. If the SME base is premounted, there are only 17 minutes - for refitting the Five and correcting height and overhang - between the last tone of Asturias from the Suite Espanola subsiding on the Edition and the onset of the first bars in the Konstant. And this does give the trombones a touch more emphasis and blackness. It is simpler somewhat more relaxed and stable during the weighty brass attacks, which I would consider as an expression of particular elegance, however not without noting that my colleague Höglmeier interpreted the sound difference with our joint experience of the valve mains unit of the Konstant as a loss of liveliness. But whatever, whether you like it sparkling and frothy or if you prefer things a touch more stoic and earthy, the enormous joy of detail and very good spatial dimensionality of the solid drive are beyond dispute.

The test system comprised the following components:

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| Turntable: | Audiolabor Konstant with valve power supply and heating |
| Pickup: | Clearaudio Victory, SPU Royal |
| Tone Arm: | SME V, Ortofon 309i |
| Phono amplifier: | Progressive Audio Phono 1, Omtec Antares (i), Ensemble Fonovivo |
| Preamplifier: | Brinkmann Prototype |
| Power amplifier: | Higher Fidelity 138 |
| Loudspeakers: | Trenner and Friedl Gordon |
| Cables: | Ortofon TSW 5000 Silver, Clearaudio Sixstream, Flatine SPM, Sun Wire, Audioplan Powercord S |
| Accessories: | Sun strip, Audioplan Powerstar, Acapella bases and blocks, Clearaudio Magix ² , Pagode Racks |

Image x-tract

It has never been more tempting to dare to enter the world of mass drive turntables than it is at the moment. The materials and workmanship at Acoustic Solid hardly seem possible at the price, and it displays absolutely no weaknesses as far as sound is concerned. But it is still no cause to revoke the music licenses of the successful machines costing many times more, but it does beg the question, as do so many thoroughly solid components, how much value should be attached to nuances in music reproduction. The Solid Edition represents an extremely welcome enrichment to the analogue scene!

Image infos



Acoustic Solid Solid Edition turntable

Speeds:.....33 1/3, 45 rpm
 Dimensions (W/H/D)....43/21/43 cm
 Weight:.....From 30 kg