

Having looked at Thorens' top deck (its £650 3001) in January, I stated a number of reservations, notably with respect to bass response and suitable tonearm partnerships. It was evident that an SME Series V was too heavy to partner the 3001, even after careful suspension adjustment. So, in conclusion I felt that the 3001 had failed in its objective of outperforming its less costly sibling, the 2001 – which, with TP90 arm, was the subject of review back in February 1990. While at Hi-Fi Cologne, on Thorens' own turf, I discovered that the 3001 was available in Germany ready partnered with a revised TP90 arm. Taking my criticisms on board, Thorens' UK distributor kindly obtained a European TD3001 with TP90PS.

The three-point suspended sub-chassis turntable is still as I outlined in January (p67), and it is the arm which is worthy of a closer look. In PS form the TP90 is of good-quality construction with significant mechanical improvements over the earlier version; notably a fixed headshell. The mounting and adjustment of cartridge were straightforward, and easier than with many turntable/arm combinations. The arm's bearings were excellent with very low friction, and no play was evident in either plane. While the arm lift/lower provision is not as convenient as with the TD2001 and old TP90, this new arrangement does at least offer a removable armboard as a bonus, permitting other makes to be tried with relative ease.

About the only criticism to be levelled at the TP90PS is the scaling of downforce on the counterweight, which needs simplification. This could either be achieved with 1/10th gram markings or through the use of a dial-weight adjuster fitted to the side of the bearing housing – *à la* Rega.

The 3001 itself was very easy to set up – in fact it was just 30 minutes between taking it out of the box and an up-and-running state. Despite suggestion in the owner's manual that 'suspension is factory fitted', the sub-chassis was not level with the top of plinth, although the belt was

running correctly on the centre of the pulley. A slight adjustment to the left-hand suspension easily rectified this. The whole turntable has obviously benefited from attention to detail in design and manufacture, although there are still some niggling doubts concerning the motor mounting. It is fixed using an additional top plate which has just two screws. Incorrect tightening of these causes the whole motor to tilt, thus leading to incorrect running of the belt with reference to the centre of the pulley, even with the sub-chassis level and correctly aligned. Thorens' engineering brains should surely be able to find a superior mounting to match the otherwise consistently high level of design.

Sound quality

Immediate impressions when partnered with a Shure Ultra 500 cartridge were of excellent imaging and resolution, whereas the earlier TD3001/SME V did not reveal the innermost qualities of this fine moving-magnet. Stereo width, height and depth were of exceptional quality, too. The image remained rock solid on every type of material tried, sharp in focus on solo instruments yet vivid with full orchestral symphonies. Some initial worries over imaging stability and mild smearing were alleviated by removing the detachable finger lift from the headshell and re-balancing the arm.

Both classical and rock orientated material were reproduced with consummate ease, with never a hint of the sound becoming fatiguing. The softening of the bass experienced with TD3001/SME V combination was completely alleviated. Now extended, bass lines were strong and tight, with even the lowest registers handled with precision. There was very little

overhang, and no unpleasant resonances noted. Mid-range was delicate, clean and well integrated. Human voice reproduction, often an acid test, was particularly good, with no chestiness or 'boxy' colorations observed. Orchestral soloists were well defined with pinpoint positioning and good sound level balanced in relation to the rest of the orchestra. The previously obtrusive forwardness of vocals had disappeared as they took on an almost 'velvety' feel.

Heavy rock music was also handled well, with excellent imaging. Percussion was judged crisp and well defined, the treble very good, if on the odd occasion a shade thin. This was later found to be due to cartridge selection and a change to one offering more power in the top end rectified the anomaly, as the HF became smooth and natural. One listener commented on the absence of sibilance and ringing on soprano vocals, which were reproduced to a high standard. Indeed all instruments were portrayed with a true sense of realism, from a good breathy quality of flute to the crisp attack and even decay of cymbals.

Conclusion

This £850 version of the Thorens TD3001 is overall a very pleasing combination of turntable and arm which works extremely well. It is simple to set up and use, well made and pleasant to look at. Silent in operation, it makes listening to vinyl a pleasurable experience. Its well balanced sound quality makes it undoubtedly one of the best integrated turntables available. For those who feel the need to upgrade, my advice is to avoid the SME route and maintain partnership with a lightweight arm. The Naim Aro, reviewed by MC last month, is a likely candidate. ↵

Supplier: Portfolio Marketing, 67 New Road, Little Kingshill, Bucks. Tel (0494) 890277.

THORENS 3001 PLAYER

This European version of
Thorens' top turntable is supplied
with the revised TP90PS tonearm

by Trevor Butler

