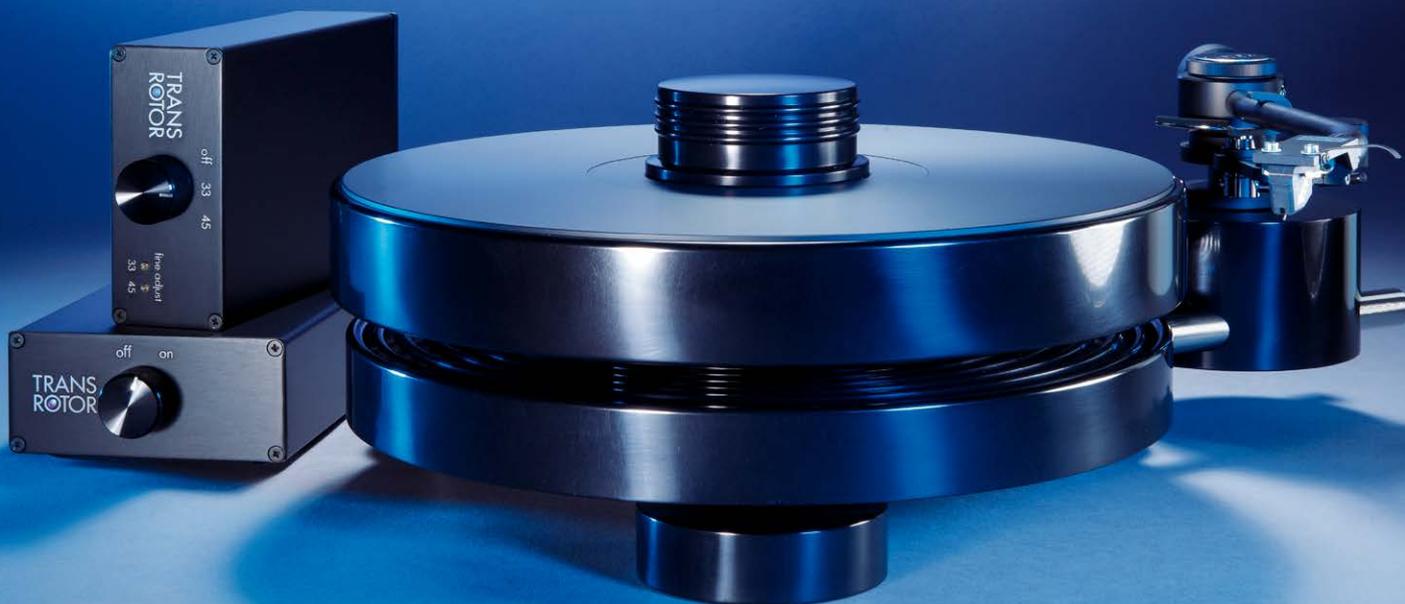


BLACK MAGIC



Man, Transrotor's „Max nero“ looks good! And it's supposed to sound just like that, the review sample being an all-inclusive package seemingly as well-calculated as it is uncompromising. Can it deliver?

The saying that a whole can only be as good as the sum of its parts is a truism, and one particularly applicable to turntables: combining three main functional parts – motor unit, tonearm and cartridge – there's plenty of opportunity for the weakness of one to undermine the performance of the whole. With packaged turntables, that chink in the armor is often the cartridge, because a cost-saving design has been chosen to keep the total price within reasonable limits. Even Transrotor equips some of its models costing thousands of euros with a moving magnet cartridge in the 150-euro league – that's fine, but an upgrade should be budgeted for, at least in the medium term, to unleash the turntables true potential.

Special package price

However, in order to make it easier for his customers to advance to higher sound classes, the Bergisch Gladbach-based analogue specialist here has put together a

complete package at a special price for the beautiful Max nero. In fact, it even includes the motor control/power supply and a phono preamplifier – parts are usually only purchased some time later in the course of an “upgrade”.

The turntable is polished up before anodizing and therefore shiny black, and comes as standard with a simple power supply hidden under the platter as part of the motor block. But although simple, this solution is somewhat cumbersome, offering no fine adjustment and also requiring the removal of the six-kilo platter the switching the short belt between pulley to achieve speed-change; the “Konstant Studio” electronic control unit is not only more convenient but also it sounds more mature, because it is more spatial, rhythmically sensitive and more gravitational.

The supply unit is included in the package at 495 Euro, saving 55 euros on the price when bought alone, while the Transrotor “Merlo” moving coil cartridge, supplied by

the British manufacturer Goldring, is also 20% less expensive in the package at 640 euros. The same reduction applies to the Japanese-made S-shaped Jelco-S 800-S tonearm, which costs 800 euros here.

Add in the “Phono Studio” equalizer/preamplifier, at 495 euros instead of 550, and you have a package at just under 5000 euros, saving around 450 euros – you get a lot of nice records for that.

The solid base of the brace is connected to the base plate by two strong steel rods. ▼





▲ British specialist Goldring manufactures Transrotor's "Merlo" MC cartridge.

On the trail of the Rondino

So this "Max pack" is all you could need – but is it the best set-up for the money? We stood it up next to its big brother, the "Rondino nero": one of our top references, and full of sheer mass and innovative technology. After all, Transrotor boss Jochen Rake had reported that the junior model had succeeded particularly well and gave him unexpected levels of listening pleasure, making it sensible to compare it to the top model. Both models had the same tonearm installed, making it easy to swap the Merlo-M between them.

And Rake hadn't over-promised: his black Max played openly and vividly from the off, offering a gnarled, firm bass and extending a confident spatial panorama in front of the listeners. Even with the furious, extremely complex opening of

The shaft runs in a bronze bearing; the motor stands free in a recess in the chassis. ▼



Chadwick's orchestral work "Jubilee" it was undaunted, delivering the grandiose recording of US label Reference Recordings with a neutral tonal balance firmly in the footsteps of the Rondino nero.

Hats off, then – and in order to achieve such a result, you don't have to have tweaking skills or secret knowledge: give the Max a stable support, align it exactly horizontally by means of the three luxurious, height-adjustable feet and use gloves when putting on the short belt. That way the drive remains grease-free to avoid slippage and thus imprecision. Do those few simple things, and you are already on the right course.

In addition, it's absolutely necessary to maintain the correct mains phase for the power supply unit and at the phono pre-amplifier (see notes), if the sound isn't to lose its tact and naturalness (power supply) or spaciousness and smooth homogeneity (Phono-Pre). But then these things cost nothing save a little attention, even though they should be considered as an important "part" of the whole, like the motor unit, arm or cartridge.

And since we're already in the process, you should pay attention to the channel-separated DIP-switch benches on the underside of the Phono Studio. With these the phono-pre can be adjusted to suit the

TEST-COMPONENTS

TURNTABLE: Transrotor-Rondino nero/SME 5009/Transrotor Figaro, Clearaudio Ovation/Unify/Talismann V2

PHONO-PRE: Brinkmann Edison, Musical Fidelity LX-LPS

PRE/POWER AMPLIFIER: Accustic Arts Tube Preamp II-MK2, Ampli-MK3

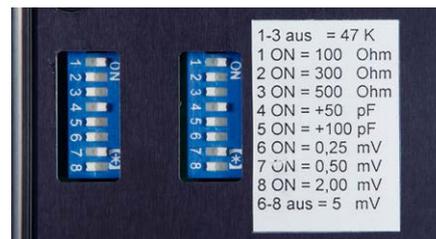
INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER: Symphonic Line RG9 MkIV Reference

SPEAKER: B&W 802 D3

PHONO CABLE: HMS Gran Finale, Sun Wire Phono Reference



▲ The correct phase of the power supply of the phono pre is as marked here. On the underside of the latter are DIP-switch banks for adjusting it to suit the cartridge in use.



cartridge in use, and for the Merlo we chose 100 ohms terminating impedance plus the second highest sensitivity, even though that means a value below the maximum gain for this MC, which is "loud" at best. Loading of the input with additional capacitance (pF), which is also possible, is only relevant for if one were to use a moving magnet cartridge.

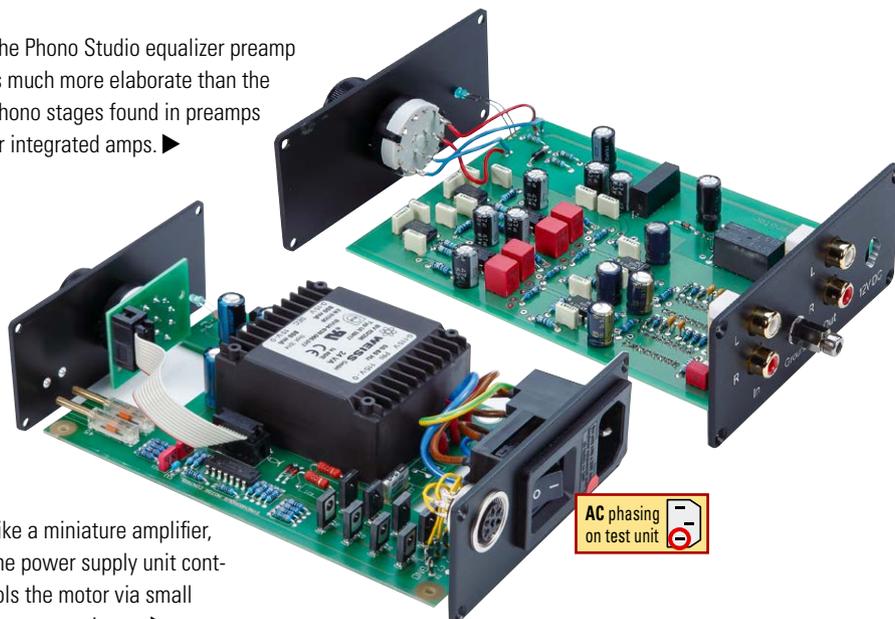
Thus accommodated, Transrotor's MC cartridge can unfold properly, sounding lively and dynamic, spatial and nuanced – ready for vinyl delights such as Lyn Stanley's current "Interludes" 45rpm double album (a cheerful 70 Euro), whose precious recordings are best only entrusted to exquisite, perfectly adjusted turntables.

Preserves the magic

"More Than You Know" is the title of the second track, and Max nero succeeded in spreading the music between and behind the loudspeakers. The perfect recording, produced and mastered by the luminaries Al Schmitt and Bernie Grundman, can sound sensational, but immediately loses its appeal if the turntable undermines details. With the Max nero and the Phono Studio, the audiophile magic was preserved in the form of a floating.

A new recording of Carl Nielsen's violin concerto by Acousence was a real challenge, as Kolja Blacher plays his instrument with a glowing intensity, and the Duisburg Philharmonic is pushing hard. Here, the turntable must be able to build up energy and tension musically and sound-wise, and hold it over other melody

The Phono Studio equalizer preamp is much more elaborate than the phono stages found in preamps or integrated amps. ▶



Like a miniature amplifier, the power supply unit controls the motor via small power transistors. ▶

arcs. To the consolation of all Rondino owners, it should be noted that this time Max turned out to be the lesser Transrotor, not quite reaching the stringency and forcefulness of the three times more expensive model, which doesn't create "drama" but rather pleases by straightforwardness and loudness, leaving the emotion of the music to the listener.

However, the Max is a true Transrotor, whose clarity of concept and precision in the mechanical execution are reflected in a pronounced stability, which even in fortissimo shows the exact distances of the musicians to each other and prevents the lower layers from clouding the waters. We

are familiar with the Max nero's sister models, such as the "Fat Bob" and the ZET1 turntables, which are closely related to the materials used here, as well as the "Dark Star" made of POM plastic.

When we switched in Brinkmann's "Edison" ultimate phono-pre in place of the Phono Studio, there was no shock. Although the performances with the Transrotor phono stage seemed less refined, natural and bright, for not much more than 5% of the price of the Edison the Phono Studio fits perfectly with the demands and quality of Max and Merlo. For cross-checks within the price league, it proved to be absolutely on par with the

TRANSROTOR MAX NERO

around €4980 (incl. tonearm 800-S, Merlo moving coil cartridge, Konstant Studio power supply and Phono Studio equalizer/preamplifier)

Dimensions: 41x15x36 cm (WxHxD, without electronics)

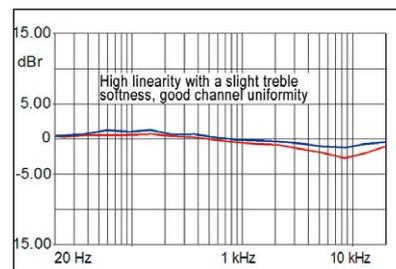
Warranty: 2 years

Contact: Råke HiFi/Distribution

Tel.: +49 2202/31046 www.transrotor.de

With this set built around the small, black and strong Max nero everything is done everything right. Even if you already have a good phono preamplifier, add the Konstant Studio power supply to the motor unit!

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



CONFIGURATION

cartridges, switchable. RCA outputs, ground terminal, impedances pre-set at 47 kOhms for MM and 100 Ohms for MC. External power supply. Owner's manual.

STEREO-TEST

SOUND QUALITY **84%**

PRICE/PERFORMANCE



EXCELLENT



YOU WANT A SECOND ARM? A TWELVE-INCH ONE WILL FIT

On the opposite side to the tonearm mount on the right hand side, the drive has two tapped holes in the metal, to which you can attach an additional tonearm base. These are available for all kinds of arm: tone shown on the left has a long SME arm, which requires different assembly preparation than Jelco's. The round base is fixed from below with the two steel support rods, on which it can be pushed forward and backward comfortably with loosened screws. This is handy because

most headshells only have a short fore and aft cartridge-mounting adjustment. In the case of a twelve-inch tonearm like the one shown here, a shiny plaque adorned middle section suppresses the last remnant of vibration tendency in the supporting rods. The shorter bolts for normal nine-inch arms, such as the J-800S in the test package, don't need such a „resonance brake“, and there or such a case, there would not be enough space between the underside of the chassis and the arm pedestal. Anyone who wants to expand with a second tonearm can retrofit it at any time - in any length. The prices are 620 euros for the nine-inch and 680 euros for the twelve-inch version.

competition, although it should be noted that the phono stage shouldn't be used too close to the Konstant Studio power supply as there is a danger of light humming in spite of the metal housings.

Transrotor's complete range of products combined with a sense of reason for the requirements of first-class record reproduction, shone brilliantly on all of our discs and showed no weaknesses whatsoever. In the medium term, the tonearm cable could be replaced by a higher quality one. But even with the one fitted the sound is more than respectable.

Transrotor's refined little black model definitely qualifies for a hearty recommendation – yes, all those parts have come together very nicely indeed.

Matthias Böde