



◀▼ In a functional building in Buckenhofen near Erlangen, some of the finest jewels of the analog world are created, and Clearaudio founder Peter Suchy is proud of his company, now run by his three children. And his „gem“? The „Goldfinger Statement“ moving coil cartridge, with no fewer than 12 magnets, 24 karat gold wire in its coils, and the company's world famous Micro HD diamond stylus on a 14 karat solid gold body adorned with a diamond on the front – yours for €12,000.



CLEAR ADVANTAGES

Peter Suchy founded Clearaudio in 1978, and still all of the company's production is in-house, from cartridges, tonearms and turntables to phono stages.

A picture is often worth more than a thousand words, and at Clearaudio the images are abundant. Walk through the corridors and rooms, and you become aware of the concentrated working atmosphere, from the huge CNC machines used for the metalwork of turntables and tonearms to the equipment that

winds the tiny coils for the MC pickups. All of this requires the highest precision, which is why checks are carried out in many places in the factory in Erlangen, north-west of Nuremberg. Does the tonearm move freely or do the bearings bind? Is the stylus placed just so on the cantilever? Are the surfaces flawless? The aim is

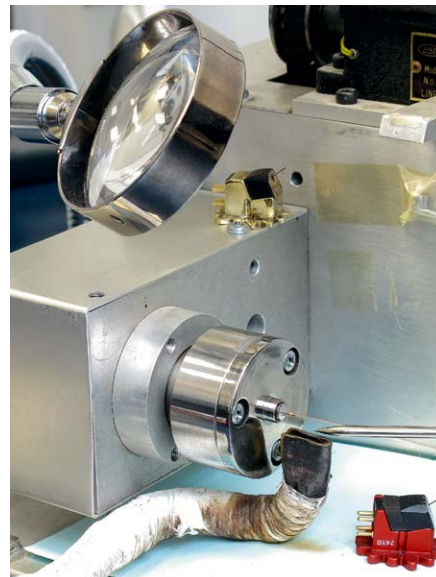
simple: to deliver a product that lives up to the claim “Made in Germany”, especially as 95 percent of the production is exported, meaning every complaint is annoying.

Getting it right is the task of 50 adept employees with experience, knowhow – and “gold fingers”. *Matthias Böde*



◀ Simone Cimander takes care of the fine grinding of spindles and bearings as well as custom-made products on the lathe, because building a turntable requires not only detailed work, but sometimes also some more 'heavy metal' engineering.

Peter Suchy introduced us to this machine, which he says is „the smallest coil-winding machine in the world“. The coil, designed for MC cartridges, is barely visible on the minute former, being made from gold wire and just 0.3 microns thick. The MCs Goldfinger Statement (above) and Da Vinci V2 give an impression of the proportions. ▶



◀ No cartridge goes out of the door without Natascha Woskoboinikova taking a close look: from inexpensive moving magnets – here in abundance on her bench – to Clearaudio's true treasures, she's always looking for any possible error. In addition, every completed model is tested, immediately revealing any distortions.



◀ Cantilevers are delivered with styli already installed – one of the few processes Clearaudio doesn't do in-house – but checked and adjusted in Erlangen. Under the microscope it can be seen whether the cut has been made correctly and the diamond applied cleanly. Here we see the elliptical stylus of the lower-end Concept MM.

TRACING PROGRESS

The latest Clearaudio innovation is the „Tracer“ tonearm, but what sets it above the „Satisfy Kardan“? We checked it out.

Seen in the foreground below, the „Tracer“ looks dazzling: with its matt aluminum parts and the silver-colored tube made of carbon fiber, as well as the extremely fine workmanship throughout. Also available in gloss black, it sells for just under €1900 – or €500 more than the „Satisfy Kardan“ arm seen behind it. However, you can already have the latter model from just €1200, but then it comes with an aluminum arm-tube instead of the carbon fiber.

Unlike the Satisfy, whose freely swivelling headshell proves quite fiddly during adjustment, the Tracer has a headshell firmly fixed to the end of the arm. Both models have extremely low-friction sapphire bearings, but on the Tracer this is 90 degrees to the angle of offset instead of to the arm itself, which is said to be beneficial for accurate tracking.

And while the magnetic anti-skating setting on the Satisfy looks rather rustic, the Tracer has a small knurled wheel to compensate for the force that pulls the angled arm inwards on the rotating record. Also its bell-shaped coverage is supposed to protect the sensitive bearing from dust more effectively than the open design of the Satisfy. In addition, the suspended counterweight ensures a low centre of gravity for the Tracer, while another knurled wheel to the rear allows very

sensitive adjustment of the tracking force. On the Satisfy all this seems simpler and coarser, but admittedly in the end it works just as well.

Both arms have the same, permanently installed and acoustically first-class cabling, which runs out into two RCA plugs as well as a ground line. We set them up on Clearaudio’s „Innovation Compact“ turntable, and fitted both with a €750 „Concept MC“ cartridge, the alignment of each being identical in terms of overhang, downforce, tonearm height and anti-skating. Any differences, therefore, would be down to the construction of the tonearms.

The performances turned out to be very similar, and that Satisfy and Tracer have the same origin was unmistakable. Using the Tracer makes it clear it’s in a higher league, as both the feel and the mechanical impression are simply better, but in terms of sound it doesn’t really distance itself from the less expensive Satisfy – whose name, after all, is self-explanatory.

Yet there are subtle differences in the depths of the sonic images they deliver that can be heard, for instance, on Scottish 80s band Deacon Blue’s live disc: in the middle of the evergreen „Chocolate Girl“, singer Ricky Ross talks to the audience, which reacts, calls along and answers. Using the Tracer arm, the hall

acoustics of Glasgow’s Barrowlands, where the concert took place, come across more clearly, the image is deeper and the sense of the audience and the dialogue are easier to feel.

In Chadwick’s „Jubilee“, the large orchestra has more air and scale via the Tracer; using the Satisfy it does not spread quite so comfortably. Yes, the Satisfy is still a very good arm, but with the new Tracer Clearaudio offers even more.

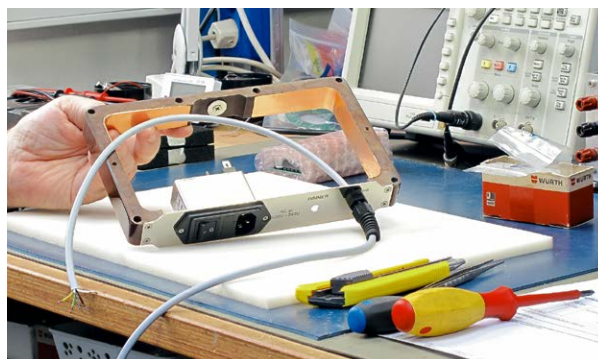
Matthias Böde



Giuseppina Schmeisser needs a sensitive touch to adjust the bearings of a tonearm. The arm must swing out at least 16 times to show the friction is low enough – and the bearing must be free of play.



▲ In 1987 Peter Suchy bought US tangential tonearm specialist Souther and continues to optimize and refine its techniques: today Clearaudio offers a whole range of tangential arms as an alternative to their conventional designs.



▲ Electronics are also manufactured and measured in-house, all the way through to the housings: here is the power supply unit of the top-end „Absolute Phono“ two-box equalizer/preamplifier, which uniquely locates the moving coil phono stage in the headshell of the tonearm, to be seen.



▲ Trust is good, but control is better. Here Robert Kenner lets his trained eye – he’s been with Clearaudio for six years – wander over a series of inexpensive „Concept“ turntables. That’s why over the recent years quality of workmanship, including the flawless finish, could be advanced even further.

We turn a corner – and suddenly face Clearaudio’s monumental „Statement V2“ turntable. Ralf Rucker is working on it, mounting the company’s high-end tangential tonearm. The turntable uses a massive pendulum to stabilize it using gravity – aligning it to the centre of the Earth – and weighs around 300kg. Costing upwards of €150,000, this one is on its way to Asia, where a rich analogue fan is already eagerly awaiting it. ▼



▲ Claudia Lux is working on the inside of a record cleaner, tightening the suction fan. When finished, the „Double Matrix Professional Sonic“, which cleans both sides of the record simultaneously, looks as classy and dignified as Clearaudio’s high-end turntables. Record cleaners are an important side of the business.

Inside the aluminum pivot of the tonearm is a low-friction sapphire bearing mounted at a 90-degree angle to the headshell. Further features are its hanging counterweight and magnetic anti-skating. ▼



▲ Clearaudio mills virtually all metal parts in-house, using a total of five CNC machines with state-of-the-art computer control for maximum consistency. Still, a critical glance has never done any harm.

