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»No Compromises«:

Revox Studiomaster T700



Review: Turntable Revox Studiomaster T700

With the Studiomaster T700 Revox dares a return to the turntable market. How do we rate its chances for success?



In August 1982 Dusseldorf was the venue for the »HiFi-Video« tradeshow. For me who was 14 years old back then, visiting this event was better than Christmas. I can still remember very clearly the moment when I saw the Revox B791 turntable the first time. It was equipped with a tangential tonearm, a pickup system from Elac and a quartz-precise direct drive. The speed was displayed in red digits. When soon afterwards a friend of the family bought a complete Revox system, I spent a lot of time in his living-room to copy LPs to cassette tape. For my career this was a formative phase. In the following years I lost sight of the brand until it aroused my interest again in some other place after the turn of the millenium, inter alia with multiroom solutions. The new products embodied the classic Revox virtues like quality and reliability, but otherwise they had nothing in common with the classics from the 1980s any more. Until today Revox has been permanently expanding the multiroom segment. For this reason a meeting with Marketing Director Jürgen Imandt was held last December where he presented the new Studioart S100 audiobar.

Near the end of the conversation he mentioned that, in spite of all the euphoria over active and network compatible loudspeakers, they would also like to give a treat to the classic clientele – and to my surprise he announced the Revox Studiomaster T700. After checking its feature list I instantly knew that this turntable would definitely have to get a rendezvous at our listening room as soon as possible.

In 1956 Revox introduced their first turntable, the Revox 60 – thereby heralding a new chapter eight years after the company foundation. The 1970s saw the advent of the tangential turntables, starting with the B790, B791, B795, and finally the B291. Now the success story is to be continued with the beltdriven Studiomaster T700. The drive, which rests on three feet, tips the scales at ten kilogrammes including the dust cover. The surface is made of black acrylic, the

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frame is black as well. There are no switches fitted so one might be fooled into thinking that this could be a fully manual turntable. But first impressions are deceiving: touch sensitive buttons select the 33 and 45 rpm speeds, a third one stops the platter rotation. The illuminated function buttons will only come on when the external power adaptor delivers 15 volts DC.

With numerous turntables controlling the speed is only possible by means of a strobe disk. In the T700 an optical sensor registers the speed and transmits it to a quartz-precise phase locked loop, which in turn provides a constant rotational speed. Only then the speed indicator will show a steady light. The speed is adjusted via two set screws on the back. For a calibration the stop and speed buttons are both pressed and held for five seconds, then the screw is gently turned until the display stops flashing. Actual and nominal rotation speed settings are now congruent.

Chief developer Jürgen Lindemann has fitted the turntable with a sophisticated MC phono preamp which gives evidence of the high ambitions at Revox's. However, the player is delivered with a pre-mounted, correctly aligned pickup cartridge, the Ortofon Quintet Bronze – why would I then need six DIP switches per channel to select a terminating impedance between 47 and 2,000 ohms and four more for a sensitivity adaptation between 0.15 and 1.2 millivolts? But Revox doesn't want to tell anybody what to do – those who would like to use their preferred pickup can therefore adjust it precisely in small workable steps. How this is exactly done is explained in one of the best user manuals for a turntable that I've ever held in my hands.



Who wants to use a cork mat on the resonance-optimised platter made of POM plastic – it adds just under three kilos to the overall weight – or install a different pickup, can set the tonearm height by unlocking two hex screws. Experienced hands will accomplish the complete assembly of the T700 in a good half hour: put on the platter, lay the belt around it, adjust the stylus pressure and antiskating force and insert the dust cover – done. With the included accessories

Revox sets standards, because apart from hex wrenches and a record brush, the set contains an electric stylus pressure gauge and a circular level as well.

The latter is used to check the horizontal alignment, followed by controlling the stylus pressure force of 2.3

The DIP switches on the bottom side allow a separate adjustment for each channel (below). Above we see the RCA outputs and the two trim pots for the precise adjustment of the rated speed.



grammes which may be varied by ± 0.2 grammes for sonic reasons. How well-conceived the design of the T700 is, becomes apparent also in the pickup choice. Due to its 0.3 millivolts of output voltage, Ortofon's Quintet Bronze – which is currently available for 630 euros – falls into the category of low-output MCs. With a weight of nine grammes, it harmonises well with the T700's carbon tonearm tube which also allows to set the azimuth if need be.

After connecting the Revox via RCA cables to a line-level input of the Pass INT-60 integrated amplifier, the tension was growing; after all, the connected Dynaudio speakers would relentlessly reveal any weakness. But I waited in vain for a faux pas. It was in fact amazing how

the T700 played back music. You remember my first encounter with a Revox turntable of which I told you at the start. Back then »The Turn Of A Friendly Card« by the Alan Parsons Project was

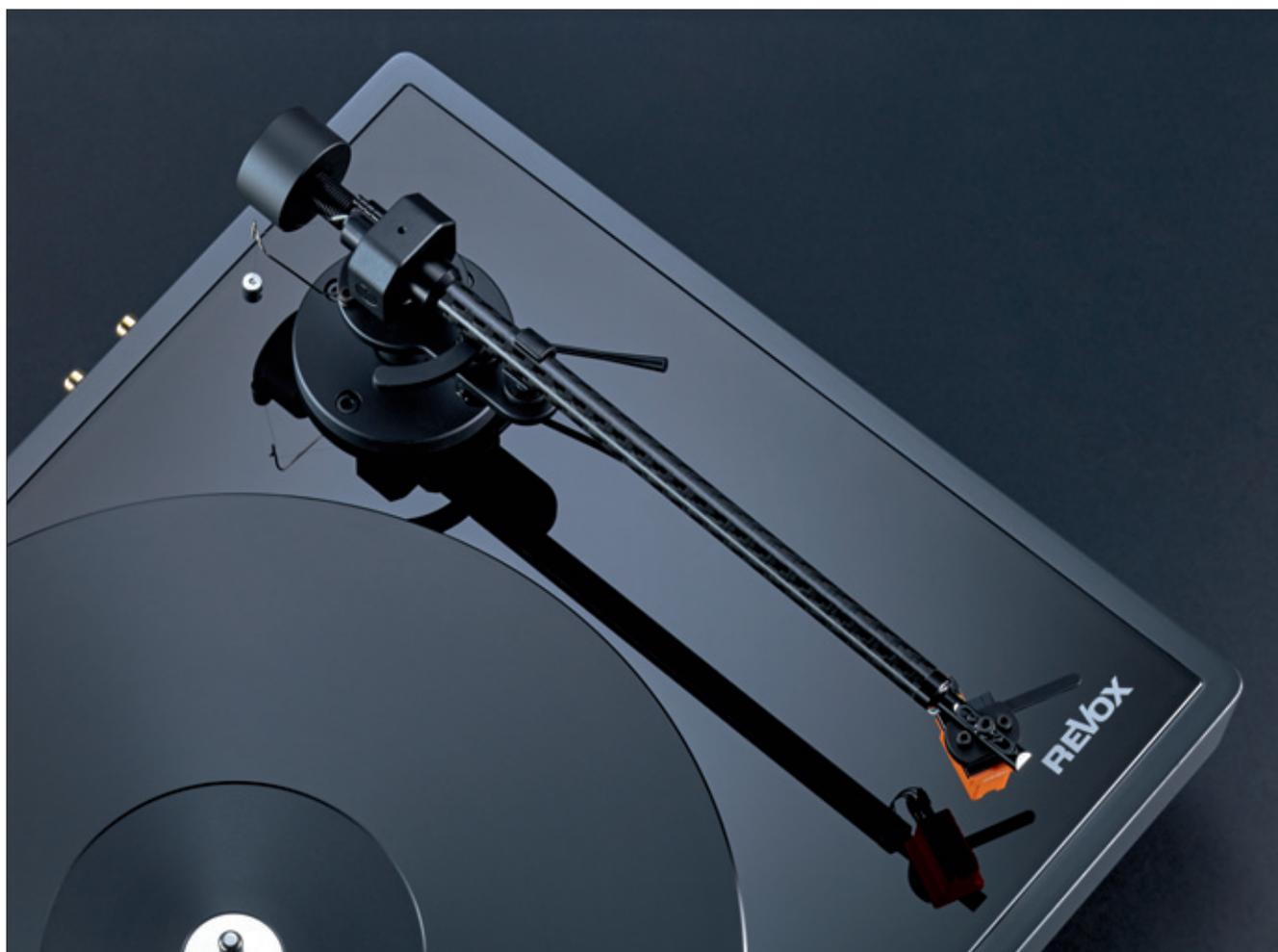
Woolfson's voice display the subtleties of individual recording tracks; the entry of the drumset adds dynamic skills which turn the piece into a harmonic entity. In doing so the T700 doesn't emphasise

»Whith the Ortofon Quintet Bronze pickup system the Revox designers made a brilliant choice for the T700.«

spinning on the B791, and now I put on that record again. With »Games People Play« already the initial sequence is just marvellous. Sparkling keyboard tones and the multiple choir copied from Eric

anything explicitly, nor does it hold back anything. And how good is the onboard phono preamp? A cross-check later it joins hands down the league of contenders which carry already four-digit





price tags. Should I install a different pickup? I've never asked myself this question seriously because this turntable makes a wonderfully harmonious match with the Ortofon.

Among my proven test records are the »Uncompressed World« LPs, one with female (Vol. II) and one with male voices (Vol. III). When singer Jessica Gall, who was born in Berlin in 1980, begins her sensitive, but by no means anaemic performance of »Beautiful Girls«, we can hear one of the best answers to the question: why record? It starts with bright and clear piano chords, and when Gall begins to sing, she does it with a gentleness that's so incredibly smooth – the music is flowing freely. Sure, the same recording from CD sounds perfect, but this won't do to make me fall in love. Only the record has this seductive easiness and closeness to the artists as it is now also voiced by

the Revox in such a clear and distinctive manner.

When jazz musician Theo Bleckmann from Dortmund interpretes »Running Up That Hill«, a deep spatial impression is created by the reverberation. Here, too,

»What the T 700 elicits from the groove is amazing. The musical performance sounds so organic and natural.«

the delicate piano chords are shining, but what's really noteworthy is the clean rendition of the voice that stands right in the middle in front of the instruments. When listening to the record over the reference set of Clearaudio Anniversary, Stradivari MC pickup and Lehmann-audio SilverCube which has been drawn

on for comparison, the room is depicted larger in size, yet with almost identical proportions. Only when it comes to the timbres, the T700 has to bow to the significantly more expensive combination. The differences, however, are far

less dramatic than could be expected based on the price gap in euros.

After tapping lightly on the 33 rpm sensor you'll notice that the T700 observes a short second of silence and then smoothly accelerates the platter; this is supposed to extend the service life of the drive belt. Energy and power are then



demanded by Kraftwerk's »Computerwelt«. Here I particularly like the depth and punch in the lower octaves, as they come along neither bloated and vague nor faint-hearted. Once again the impression of a tight cohesion of the sound image is confirmed here; nothing kicks over the traces, nothing sticks out in a positive as well as in a negative sense.

Those who said good-bye to their turntables and their LPs years ago, or those who own an entry-level record player and have tasted blood or simply don't want to turn the mission of »buying a new turntable« into a drama, will find an excellent solution in the Studiomaster T700. Furthermore, it offers

Revox Studiomaster T700

WxHxD	47 x 16 x 34 cm
Warranty	2 years
Price	3.450 euros
Distribution	Revox Am Krebsgraben 15 78048 Villingen-Schwenningen
Web	www.revox.com

the option to connect a headphone amplifier such as the Lehmannaudio Linear directly and then conquer analogue soundscapes.

Exactly for this scenario I'm taking my time now. Armed with the Beyerdynamic DT 880, I'm immersing myself in Andreas Vollenweider's soundscapes, and right at the beginning I'm flabbergasted. Normally I use headphones when travelling by train or by plane, with the smartphone as the source then – and with uncompressed music. At least that's what I thought until this moment, for what the T700 elicits from the groove is amazing. The musical performance sounds so organic and natural like I haven't known it from the digital medium. Sonorously the strings of the harp vibrate, producing low notes, the various noises don't sound artificial at all – you may catch yourself turning your head to a tweeting bird. So there's no apparent reason why we shouldn't set up a minimalist listening place of such quality.

But now let's get back to the Dynaudio-Pass combination. For the final of my listening checks I have saved »e.s.t. Live In Hamburg«. Recorded at the Laeisz Hall on November 22nd, 2006, this

album exhibits a maximum of credibility when played on top-grade chains. Then, and only then, you'll get lost in time and space, fall into a rush of thoughts that becomes slower as time goes by and will finally leave you behind with an ultimate feeling of peacefulness. Here it shows for a last time how well the Ortofon Quintet Bronze matches the ensemble of drive and arm, because how close you can get to the musicians and the audience is simply fabulous.

Result

The new Revox Studiomaster T700 is a fully equipped turntable with a clear focus on music. Likewise the accessory box is well packed with, among other things, a record brush, a circular level and a stylus pressure gauge. Owing to the integrated and electrically adjustable MC phono preamp, the T700 can be linked directly to a line-level input. With the Ortofon Quintet Bronze pickup system the Revox designers also made a brilliant choice. Everything in this conclusive total package fits perfectly, from the packaging to the user manual to the drive and its performance. It can't get any better. *Olaf Sturm* ■