



TEAC PD-505T Transport | REVIEW

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Like many of you I have, or had, an extensive CD collection. Like many of you I gave away lots of CDs and my CD player a few years ago. But here we are, reviewing the TEAC PD-505T transport – HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?!

For many years I felt a transport did “what it says on the tin,” as the Brits would say, and never understood why someone would pay big money for a transport. Perhaps a cheap transport to spin discs, rip CDs to a hard drive, etc. would be useful, and there are plenty of products on the market for that. Heck, I was ripping music from CDs to my computer using the built in computer transport and setting the error correction as high as it would go. In my layperson belief I thought, “If a computer can read it four times and a CD player/transport only reads it once there

must be more errors in reading it once. Therefore, the computer has less error and hypothetically can sound better.”



The days of ripping a CD and discovering that the ripped version sounded better was a myth I was willing to accept. In return a piece of audio gear, a wall full of CDs, and “perfect sound forever” was outta here, replaced by streaming services and hi-rez files that could pursue the holy grail of 24-bit 192kHz music and the entire catalog of [Qobuz](#) and [Tidal](#) at my fingertips. Nirvana, peace, bliss...or so I thought.

Digital streaming and associated gear has its issues, like vinyl, and it’s

far easier to pull out a CD, plunk it in a transport/player, hit play from your cozy listening chair and BAM – music. No naggy software updates. No wi-fi drop outs like with streaming. No vinyl protective sleeves, cleaning devices or anti-static mats and cleaning routines that approach religion. Just a simple aluminum or gold plastic-encased disc that the vast majority of the time just works.

So how did the TEAC PD-505T end up in my system? Well, I blame [Marc Phillips](#). Marc loves CDs, transports or players, it doesn’t matter and talking with him at shows in our super secret handshake *Part-Time Audiophile* message board he slowly convinced me that I might, just maybe, perhaps need a way to play CDs. Sure I could have gone the messy route of loading CDs into a laptop, but we are audiophiles and I refuse to stoop to that level of practically, frugality, and inconvenience. I’ve got a few DACs so I really didn’t want a CD player. Thus the search for a transport began.



Enter [Capital Audiofest 2024](#). Jaclyn Inglis recently began working with TEAC, and having worked with her on some [TAD](#) reviews I wanted to see what was up at TEAC nowadays. TEAC includes Tascam (pro audio) and [Esoteric](#)

(ultra high-end) and has a reputation of knowing a few things about CD players and transports for the last few decades.

TEAC started in 1953 by a young audio engineer names Katsuma Tani. What started as a small west Tokyo shop with Tani-san's brother, Tomoma, they began building reel-to-reel tape recorders in the late '50s. TEAC continued to focus on source components in audio and video, which included slow motion video capture at the 1964 Olympics and a variety of ground breaking reel-to-reel and 4-track cassette recordings of *Star Wars*, Bruce Springsteen, and others. TEAC has worked outside of audio as well including ventures with IBM on magnetic tape storage and has branched out into the medical and computer industries in addition to their pro and consumer market audio gear.

Gibson bought a majority stake in the company in 2013, but with Gibson's bankruptcy in 2018 TEAC has bought their shares back and now operates autonomously. TASCAM started out as an R&D branch of TEAC in America in 1971, and became a professional audio division catering exclusively to the pro audio market. TEAC started Esoteric as a stand alone company in the 2000s and recently merged Esoteric back into the TEAC fold in April of 2024.



It's so cute!

TEAC has three series of electronics—Reference 300, Reference 500, and Reference 700—with the 300 being entry level and the 700 being the flagship line. (The Esoteric brand is marketed firmly above the

Reference 700 products.) The Reference 500 line up has several newer products that have been recently released, including a Master Clock and the UD-507 Headphone amp/preamp/USB DAC. The 500 series have mid-sized chasses that are meant to fit in a smaller space such as a desk or a small audio rack. TEAC designed the Reference 300 and 500 series for smaller systems in smaller homes. TEAC's market research suggests that younger folks are not as likely to purchase a home and so have a desire to keep their systems tiny and tidy. Taking up less space and being easier to move makes sense. It also cuts down on casework and necessitates a smaller rack (or desktop). But I just think they are cute.

Back to CAF 2024. I entered the TEAC room and was delighted to find the new TEAC PD-505T, which retails for \$1,399.99, and improves upon the in-house manufactured drive in the CD-5020A. The CD-5020A was extensively used in the broadcasting industry and is a testament to ruggedness and reliability. As part of the 500 Reference series, the TEAC PD-505T is a compact (A4 letter sized) unit that is a straightforward-looking piece of hi-fi gear. The appearance, in black or silver, is all business with an industrial design that has a definite pro audio influence with real switches, front handles (more for looks than functional), and a clear OLED screen. TEAC didn't waste money on glitz, but instead made sure the chassis is solid and rugged.

The TASCAM pro unit has a reputation for durability and reliability under heavy use. The TEAC PD-505T uses similar specifications used in TEAC's pro audio transports and has an apparent build quality that should last for a very long time. Internally, TEAC created a new circuit design and a semi-floating mounting for the transport drive. TEAC claims the new circuit creates slight feedback to create a natural rotating state that they feel makes the PD-505T sound more natural. Everything is metal construction with a satisfying metal power switch, a simple OLED display that should last for decades, and firm buttons that will hold up to repeated use.

TEAC has followed a recent Japanese trend to implement loose feet and a loose top. Though the unit feels loose and seems like it should vibrate like crazy, TEAC claims the chassis has been thoughtfully and purposely constructed this way to actually avoid vibrations in the transport mechanism. I think the idea is to optimize isolation of the CD-reading internals by allowing the some parts of the chassis and drive to resonate and other parts to be dampen or be rigidly connected to eliminate external vibrations. I'm not a vibration expert and this seems counterintuitive to me, but sometimes engineering is counterintuitive. In addition to vibration, TEAC spent time isolating the circuits using toroidal transformers to isolate stray EMF that could interrupt properly reading the disc. It sounds like TEAC engineers put a lot of thought and effort into the design and construction.

Digital outputs for the TEAC PD-505T include SPDIF RCA and Toslink. A BNC connection for an outboard 10MHz master clock is also provided. CD, CD-R and CD-RW formats are supported. I happened to have CD-R and CD-RWs on hand to test and can confirm they work.

Enter AudioQuest

After hooking up the TEAC PD-505T with a cheap \$4 22-gauge coaxial cable and listening to CDs for awhile, I elected to replace the cheap wire with something better. [AudioQuest](#) was kind enough to send three cables of varying cost and quality. I had the cheap \$4 coax cable lying about to use as a starter cable and compared that to the Cinnamon (\$79.95/0.75m), Carbon (\$229.99/0.75m), and Coffee (with DBS \$595/0.75m) cables.

Replacing the 22-gauge coaxial cable with the Cinnamon yielded the most dramatic improvement in everything: better bass, more clarity, better treble, better sound stage and imaging. If you don't buy any other cable, at least get the Cinnamon if you are using SPDIF. For under \$80, the difference was dramatic.



Switching from Cinnamon to Carbon resulted in improvements in clarity and better bass with more slam, impact, dynamics and presence. Grover Neville was visiting and felt this was the first cable that sounded like serious hi-fi. Carbon was an improvement in clarity and the bass but the midrange was a little different than Cinnamon. It was difficult for me to put my finger on the differences of the midrange, but the character of the Carbon was different. Perhaps smoother with more clarity, but less rich? There was something in the midrange I preferred with the Cinnamon over the Carbon, but if clarity and bass are more important than definitely get the Carbon.

Upgrading from Carbon to Coffee was a significant step up. Not a \$4 to Cinnamon improvement, but Coffee with the DBS system did everything better. Better bass, way more air, space, and holographic imaging, better treble – gotta have it levels. Grover and I both felt this was the first cable of the bunch that could achieve the illusion of sounding like real instruments in space. To my ears the Coffee seems to be well worth the price, despite the Coffee costing nearly half of the TEAC PD-505T retail price. Coffee is definitely where you want to be. Reviewing a singular transport, with nothing to compare it to, just didn't seem relevant. I needed a yardstick, something I could measure up the TEAC PD-505T to hear how it compared. (Comparing it to the

Aurender N150 I had in the system didn't seem adequate.) I'll talk more about that comparison below, but I needed another CD player or transport for comparison. I rummaged about and found a cheap BluRay player I had been using on a simple tv setup from my basement for comparison. Compared to the TEAC PD-505T the cheap BluRay player was closer sonically than I expected. I expected a difference between these products but I didn't have a reference of how much better a quality CD transport would be over something more germane. The BluRay player just didn't have the ability to make instruments sound real and slightly veiled everything else. Bass, midrange, and treble clarity was just a little less. The differences were more subtle than the cable changes I discussed above and was about equal to the upgrade from Cinnamon to Carbon. What you get over the cheap BluRay players besides some relatively minor sonic improvements is a tank of a piece of gear. Casework, feature set, ergonomics and usability is an absolute cut above. Several cuts above in fact.



The other thing that impressed me was the ability of the TEAC PD-505T to read even the roughest CDs. I have a Peter Gabriel *Last Temptation of Christ* that had a horrible scratch on track 16 that a regular CD player would either just crap out or create horrible skipping noises. With the PD-505T I couldn't detect ANY errors or skipping. I played several other heavily scratched CDs and the PD-505T didn't skip a beat. Color me impressed – very impressed.



CD v. Streaming

Back to my earlier musings on the Aurender N150 comparison, what surprised me was how the PD-505T playing CDs compared to CD red book files either streaming or ripped onto the N150. The PD-505T and N150 were both connected to my reference [LampizatOr](#) Golden Tube Atlantic TRP DAC. The PD-505T through the RCA SPDIF connection sounded considerably better on redbook CDs than the N150 through the USB. I checked to make sure that both were playing 16-bit, 44.1kHz files either streaming or locally ripped on the N150. When I played higher rez 24-bit files through the N150 those sounded better than the PD-505T CDs, so I suspect the USB implementation isn't as good as I thought on the Lampi. I pulled out my [Schiit](#) Yggdrasil for comparison and the USB and SPDIF red book files were virtually identical in that scenario, which confirmed it was not an N150 issue but a USB implementation issue with the Lampi. It took a dedicated transport to show me a limitation that I didn't know existed in my DAC. And I think this reality check was enlightening and something I will definitely add to my review checklist when reviewing future digital products.

Final Thoughts

I've been living without a CD player or transport for several years now – and perhaps that was a mistake. Living with the TEAC PD-505T showed me that CDs weren't as dead as I thought. Yeah 24-bit is still better

and the PD-505T won't play SACD or DVD-A discs. But my CD collection is still probably quadruple my vinyl collection and a good chunk of my hi-res files on my digital player are ripped from my CD collection. Perhaps I shouldn't have donated some of my CDs to the local library!

So, the TEAC PD-505T convinced me that I need a transport in my system. But does it need to be a PD-505T or can I get by with a cheap alternative?



I recall several years ago that audiophiles were buying original PlayStations to use as transports—not because they were cheap, but because they sounded better than many of the audiophile alternatives that cost thousands of dollars. Digital is a fickle beast. With network streamers, word clocks, USB cables, Ethernet switches *ad nauseum*, how much of this matters? In my experience the cables are legit and often create more of a difference than the gear, which is something I wasn't expecting. My experience with the AudioQuest coax SPDIF cables paralleled some of my USB cable testing I did a few years ago. I could hear a larger difference between cables than I did between the PD-505T and a cheap BluRay player, which did not align with different USB implementations in DACs (which I think make more of a difference).

Does that mean the TEAC PD-505T was bad? Not at all, since it was definitely better than the BluRay player. The sonics were better, but not as much as I expected. The build quality, functionality, and attention to form factor was so much higher than the cheap consumer product that it's insulting to even

compare the gear. You want to be a cheap audiophile then go buy a sub \$100 BluRay player for your transport. You could buy thirteen of them before you spend what the TEAC PD-505T costs. Heck the Coffee AudioQuest cable costs almost six times the cheap player and arguably was more important to the sonics.

The TEAC PD-505T just had a respect to its design and construction that the cheap consumer product will never have, and kudos to the designers is warranted. I really liked the functional simplicity of its operation and the industrial design that pays homage to TEAC's pro audio line. Perhaps most importantly, the PD-505T made me want to listen to CDs. With the cheap BluRay player I felt I could get the convenience of streaming just as easily and left the CDs on the shelf. I think that several elements are necessary to make a great product. Technical specifications are important of course, and it has to sound good, but if all this doesn't create an environment that facilitates *using* and *enjoying* the gear then can you really call it a successful product? I definitely felt the PD-505T was a successful product and got me scrolling through my CD collection (which is woefully disorganized!) and listening to music that I had paid for, but perhaps have been forgetting and neglecting.

Is the TEAC PD-505T a product you should own? I think that depends on your system and what's important to you. If you have a \$1,500 integrated amp in your system, then yeah then PD-505T levels of money should be spent elsewhere, and perhaps a Reference 300 level product is a better choice. But in my system, which is pushing into the \$40k+ range, it's good value and seems appropriately priced – a bargain even. It has a level of fit and finish that is appropriate to the other gear in my system.

I enjoyed my time with the PD-505T and I haven't really considered TEAC as an audiophile product in recent years, but with the departure of Gibson they seem to be making a push back into the higher end market and warrant attention. TEAC's recent resurgence into the hi-fi industry makes perfect sense and though the Esoteric brand is aimed firmly at the ultra hi-end, the PD-505T is a great intermediate level product that I'd be happy to own. I may take a look at other transports before I decide on a purchase but any other transports will have to beat the PD-505T's form factor and functionality. Definitely worth checking out if you already have a great DAC and want to play CDs for a very long time.