

THE ART OF BRAKING

Expensive hi-fi from Switzerland? There's plenty of that around, and it tends to be ranked alongside the well-known heavyweight products from the usual suspects. However, it's the understated, discreet stuff of the highest quality that is the spice in the audiophile soup. Like this wonderful turntable.







The Simplicity II in copper finish is only available in combination with the Elegance drive

Let's get straight to the point: the work of art under review here costs 28,000 euros with tonearm and cartridge. That is far beyond the reach of most hi-fi fans, but nevertheless a welcome exception to the usual high-end gigantism.

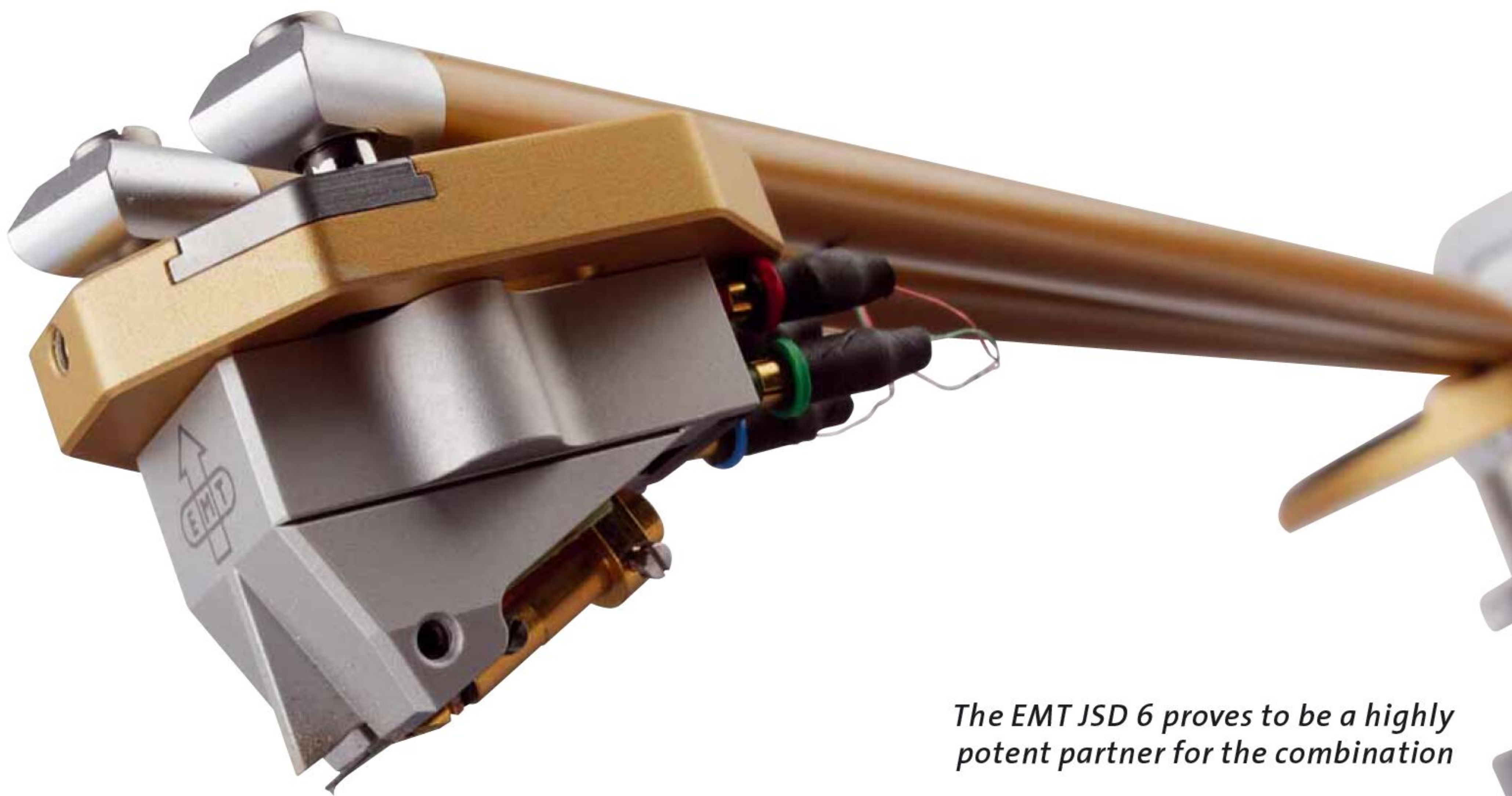
Designer Michael Huber, owner of Thales Audio, would probably reject such things outright. The man has a refined, quiet, and thoughtful demeanor, and when you interact with him, you quickly realize that his

work focuses on the finer things in life and not on loud, flashy big business. Nothing could bear more convincing witness to this than his latest turntable creation, called "Elegance." The name says it all, because elegance dominates every aspect of the device's design and construction. The appearance of the device is not unlike that of its predecessor, the "TTT-C," which we reviewed back in 2013. Both are belt-driven models with battery power, but that's where the similarities end.

The heart of the Elegance is its drive system. To call it a mere "belt drive" is almost an insult. In fact, Huber has created something of a work of art with the Elegance, which ultimately transfers the power of a motor to an inner plate via a blue plastic belt. It is an attempt to replicate the merits of its centrifugal governor, which it uses in its in-house "Reference" model, by electronic means. On the manufacturer's website, thales.swiss, there is a very interesting video under the "Technology" section that explains how the centrifugal regulator works. In principle, it is a sophisticated speed-dependent eddy current brake that keeps the belt speed constant without any electronic aids. This complex solution was out of the question for the Elegance, but a similar solution that requires very little electronics was considered.



Visually unobtrusive, but a big player in terms of sound: the Thales Elegance



The EMT JSD 6 proves to be a highly potent partner for the combination

None of this is visible from the outside. The Elegance presents itself as an unobtrusive, yet surprisingly heavy (17 kilograms) construction made of steel-blue anodized aluminum.

This looks very tasteful in combination with the copper-colored details and the tonearm, which was also manufactured in a copper-colored version especially for this turntable. The extremely solid platter of the Elegance rests on a very precisely fitting inner platter: due to the minimal dimensional tolerances, putting on and taking off the platter is not that easy. One of

the secrets of the Elegance drive is revealed in the form of two sets of three cylindrical neodymium magnets embedded in the frame. One set is located at the front left, the other at the rear right, both below the edge of the platter. These magnets, in conjunction with the turntable rotating just above them, provide a significant braking torque. What seems absurd at first glance makes perfect sense on closer inspection: even though many manufacturers promote particularly smooth-running bearings, a platter that runs as smoothly as possible is not the best choice, especially with a belt drive.

Teammates

Phono preamplifiers:

- Accuphase C-47
- Accuphase C-57

Integrated amplifier:

- Soulnote A-3

Loudspeaker:

- JBL 4301B
- Opera Quinta V2

Competitors

Turntable:

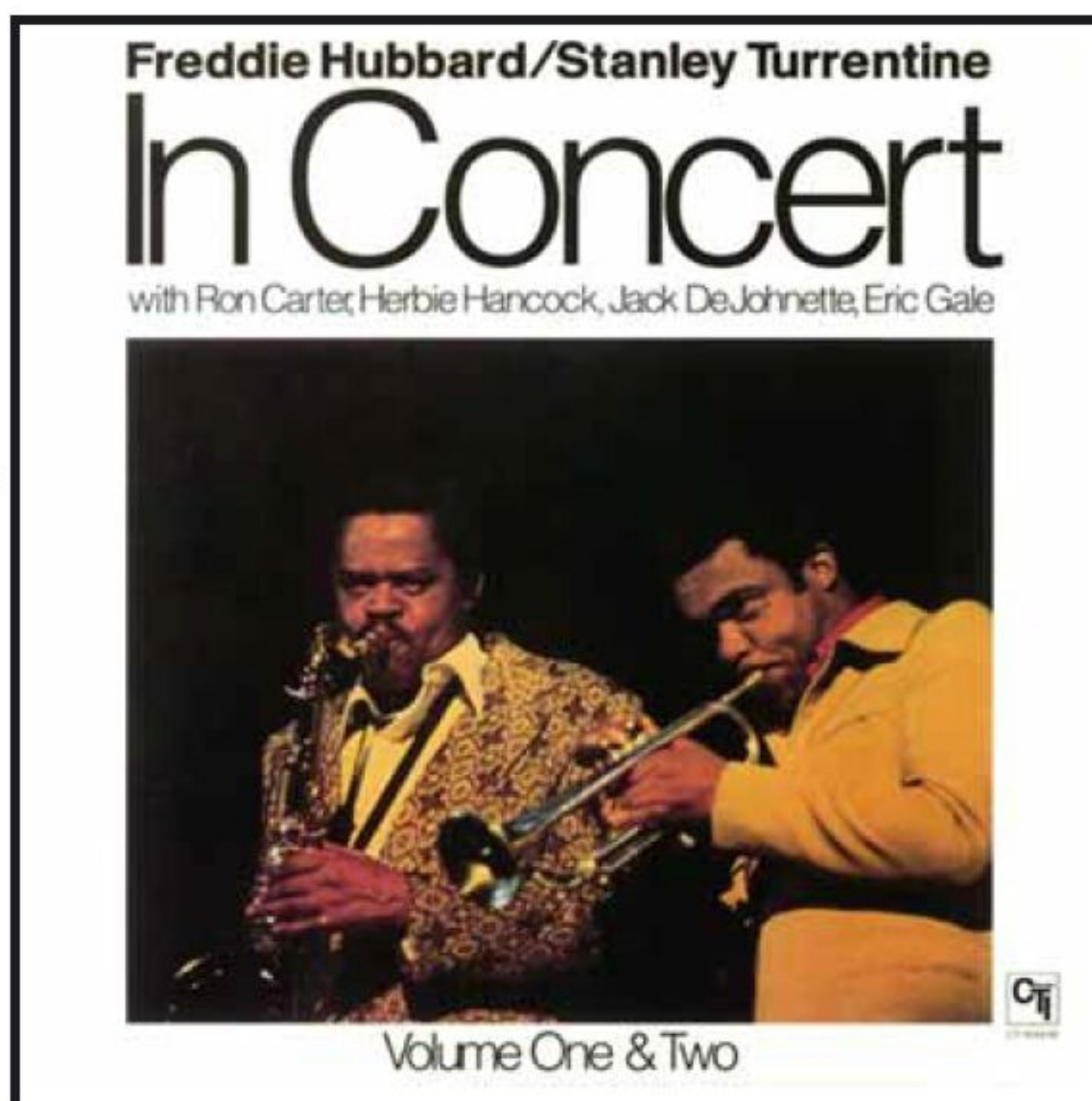
- Transrotor Massimo Nero / Studio 9" / Figaro



The tonearm bearing block guides two tonearm tubes that do not run completely parallel



The arm allows for a practically perfect correction of the tangential tracking angle



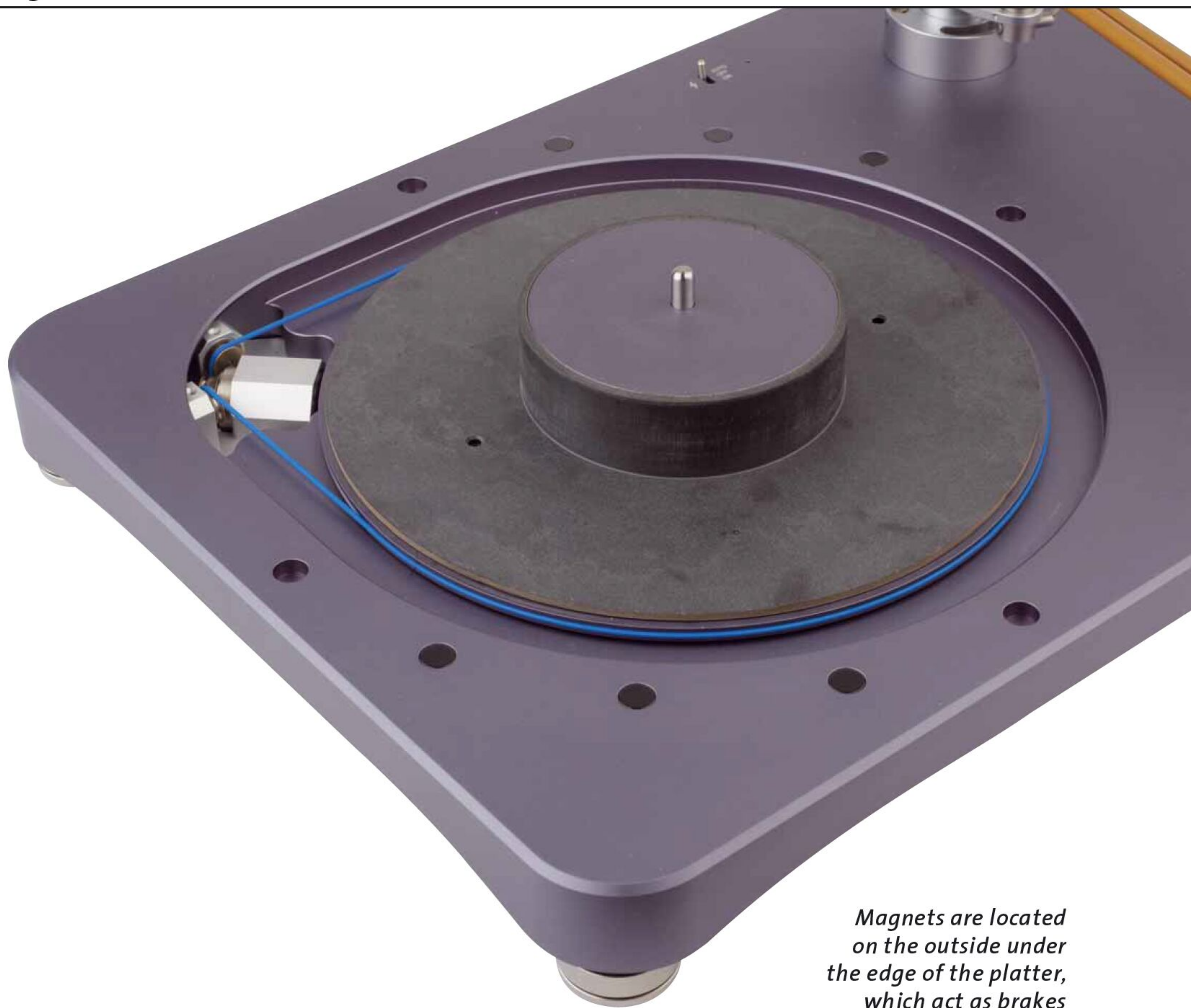
What we played

**Freddie Hubbard /
Stanley Turrentine**
In Concert

Wishbone Ash
Argus 50th Anniversary 45rpm

LA4
Live At Montreux

Monolord
Rust



*Magnets are located
on the outside under
the edge of the platter,
which act as brakes*

The “defined inhibition” also used in the Thales ensures that the motor constantly runs against a defined load, which keeps the belt tension constant and prevents the platter speed from oscillating around the nominal value, which can easily happen with “unbraked” drives. It never ceases to amaze me that this insight has only been adopted by so few turntable manufacturers.

The speed-dependent braking torque allows Michael Huber to incorporate a second beneficial detail into his drive: the use of a largely free-running DC motor. As a rule, this is not a good idea because this type of motor changes its speed depending on the load. However, because it runs against a practically constant load here, only very minor corrections are necessary. In the Elegance, this is achieved by gently intervening electronics, which indicate their influence via the lighting behind the two speed selection buttons. Green or red signals activity of the control system, while white means no intervention in the drive’s operation. You will notice that the colors

only fluctuate briefly when the drive starts up and the arm is placed on the turntable, then a reassuring white prevails across the entire side of the record: the drive and eddy current brake are in perfect balance. The Elegance’s motor does not operate completely silently, which is perhaps the only criticism that can be levelled at this drive. This may also be due to the fact that its axis is horizontally oriented and the belt therefore has to be deflected twice in order to drive the sub-platter. This is not particularly significant, as you can’t hear it when the music is playing, but it does detract somewhat from the otherwise perfect impression made by this turntable.

Incidentally, a toggle switch on the rear right of the frame allows you to determine how the charging electronics for the built-in battery work. The “Auto” position is likely to be the right one in almost all cases. In this mode, the charging electronics are completely switched off during playback, provided that the battery voltage is sufficient. Only when the platter has been stationary for one minute is the battery

recharged. A two-color LED indicates the operating status. All of this is completely unobtrusive and requires virtually no attention during operation.

Tone arm and cartridge

Even though the Elegance is available without a tone arm, it makes sense to combine it with the wonderful in-house "Simplicity II." We already presented it in detail when testing the TTT-C, so here are just the basics: It is a tracking angle-corrected rotating tone arm with a rotating headshell. Its position relative to the groove is determined by the two tonearm tubes, which are not completely parallel and can be rotated independently of each other. The result is a tracking angle that deviates from the perfect tangent by only 0.008 degrees – a design that is still very impressive even after all these years, works perfectly in practice, and can be operated like any other rotating tonearm.

The turntable is an extremely solid aluminum disc



AUDES



Audes Power Conditioner

Audes M Serie the new Standard

Audes DT3600

Conclusion

Very convinced by this result, we decided to permanently entrust the DT-3600 with the supply of the system in our listening room. The sound improvement provided by the DT-3600 is so convincing, that there is hardly any alternative.

Holger Barske, LP 2/25



Audes M 5

Conclusion

After decades of listening to even expensive speakers, I can lean out to say: The die Audes M5 is so good, that their price is almost cheap, but their class should scare the top dogs.

Christian Bayer, LP 03/24



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The motor axis is horizontal, which is why the belt has to be deflected twice



The small toggle switch controls the battery management

The cartridge is inserted into the headshell from the side via an adapter plate with a dovetail guide and secured with a tiny grub screw.

The Elegance package includes an EMT JSD 6 cartridge. This is a classic from the EMT range: Michael Huber has also been the owner of EMT for some time.

The JSD 6 is an MC with an unusually high output voltage (one millivolt at 5 cm/s). It features an “SFL HP” diamond mounted on a boron stylus carrier. The magnetic field of the largely open generator design is provided by a gold-plated AlNiCo magnet, and the housing of the ten-gram cartridge is made of aluminum. Individually, it costs 3,120, but in a package with a drive and tonearm, the surcharge is reduced to 2,500 euros. Sure, that’s still a lot of money, but after hearing the first few notes from the combination, the desire to try another cartridge immediately tends toward zero.

Sound

The Thales combination is one of those rare designs that can do much more than its unspectacular exterior suggests. I would even go so far as to say that its magnificent timing and completely relaxed naturalness need not hide behind any overly pretentious turntable. Playback with the Thales breathes, vibrates, inspires, and lives in a way I have rarely experienced. Here, the interplay of the musicians in a top jazz ensemble can actually be experienced physically, which also increases the understanding of such music.

We devote ourselves to the incredibly great 45th anniversary edition of Wishbone Ash’s “Argus” (which our neighbor Lars discusses in detail in the review section of this issue). This classic sounds full, warm, relaxed, and perfectly transparent, revealing even to the unprepared listener why this band’s two-part guitar sound was so unique at the time. For me, the Thales combination is an almost unbeatable tool for musical understanding. And I can’t pay a turntable a bigger compliment than that.

Holger Barske

Thales Elegance



• Package price	22,800 euros
• Distribution	HiFiction EU GmbH, Mahlberg
• Phone	+49 7825 879470
• Internet	www.thales.swiss
• Warranty	2 years
• Dimensions (W x H x D)	435 x 120 x 320 mm
• Weight	approx. 18 kg



International 1/26

Thales
Elegance /
Simplicity II /
EMT JSD 6

» This work of art of a turntable is an incredibly expressive music machine that crowns its understated physicality with outstanding sound performance. Truly great analog art!