

Thales Turntable TTT-C Battery Drive English ver.



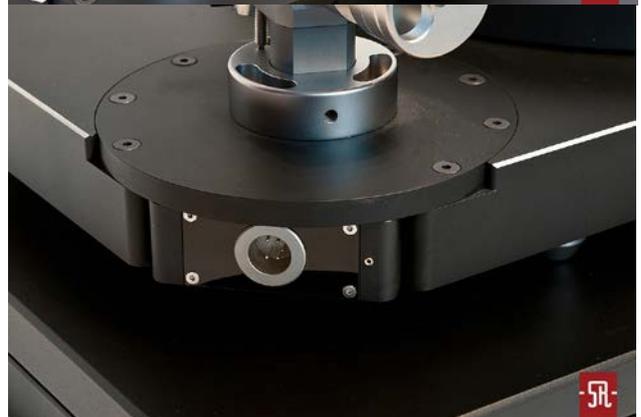
It is known for a long time, that everybody has its own point of view, but reading internet forums it would seem, that not all people are aware of that. They tend to utter opinions on many things not even trying to assess things from all sides. I am rather careful in reading tea leaves and always try to look at things very carefully and learn everything what is to learn about them. I own a quite refined analog system, but I would never create an orthodox line of truths about higher price levels than mine, just based on assumptions and hear-say information. This is the reason, that when trying to hear the analog absolute sound, I tried to get an adequately refined system for testing and finally I succeeded. So things got serious. I got what I wanted. When I got the telephone call with the information about the turntable readied for testing, a model that only recently was introduced to the Polish market, I did not know what to think. My heart was happy, but my brains stated to cool off emotions. Devices from that price level require a lot of listening experience (fortunately I heard some things in my life) and controlling of the euphoria associated with this fact. Fortunately the waiting period was not so long and I could confront my expectations with reality. The first contact with the tested device happened during the Audio Show in Warsaw, but as usual in such situations, it was rather getting acquainted with the product and could not be regarded as a conclusive experience. Press information were optimistic, and the main idea behind the existence of the brand – minimizing the cartridge tracking error and fighting vibration – just heated the atmosphere. The idea of construction of the tonearm comes close to tangential arms, but is done in a different way. The nullified tracking angle (in fact it is not zero, but minimal here) allows to listen without distortion (which are present at the beginning and end of the disc, when using a standard tonearm)

for the whole length of the disc. The second aspect – fighting vibration – is a development of the well known sandwich concept. And those are the directions where the constructor of the turntable went: the drive and the tonearm. So now I will no longer keep you waiting and introduce to you the turntable from the company Thales – the Turntable TTT-C Battery Drive with the Simplicity tonearm, manufactured in Switzerland. In addition to this set, the distributor – RCM from Katowice – proposed a cartridge from Kuzma, the model CAR-30 and the phono cable from the Danish company Argento Audio, the Flow Master Reference.

Strolling through the Internet I found a substantial amount of information about the company Thales, with descriptions about how it works and ideas behind its creation, there were also lots of pictures. On those, the product looked quite “cheap”, and compared to its price tag, it could suggest some sham. The mentioned meeting during the audio show changed my initial thoughts a bit, but only during the weeks the turntable spent at my home showed the Swiss product in a much better light, and that what it showed when playing LPs will stay in my mind for a long time. It was so convincing, that I, focused for years on the British turntable SME 30, if I would be searching for a turntable now, I could change my search direction, as the apparent simplicity of the Thales was its greatest strength.



In fact the turntable is absolutely not simple, this is a piece of engineering designed to eliminate unwanted vibration. The plinth in an irregular, oval shape is a sandwich made from many different



materials (the platter and subplatter are also sandwich constructions), the DC engine, powered from batteries and is placed under the platter and a proprietary tonearm which minimizes the cartridge error angle down to 0.008 degree. The whole is placed on an anti-vibration platform – two MDF plates separated with something that looks like an air chamber (an air pump is supplied as standard). As a final touch we get a disc stabilizing clamp, not very heavy, but still effective. Due to the battery power, on the back of the plinth there is a three position switch (0, I and II), which allows for playing while charging batteries (as a rescue option, it is recommended to disconnect the PSU during playing), standby or operation without connection to mains. On the top of the plinth, to

the left, two silver buttons with amber rings were placed, used to initiate 33 or 45 rpm rotation. Like many similar devices, the Thales has an option to adjust and fine tune the speeds. This can be done using special (supplied) tool via holes in the front of the plinth. This all does not reveal the fact, that this turntable will move us to another level of reproduction and perception of the sound, which could not be matched by my Feickert. Maybe this was no “running over” the competition, but you could easily hear a better class of the sound. I knew, that when I would need to give the Swiss product back, it would hurt, but the urge to hear another world in my own system, something from my beloved analog world, compensated for this suffering by far, so I had no concerns placing the first disc on the platter.



A man, skipping over a few levels of initiation, becomes exposed to the danger of become overly excited about a device, what can falsify the true level of performance of that unit. Encounters with other products at the same level allow to have an idea about the overall performance, but only a test in your own system can really be conclusive. Somebody trying to test such a device without proper preparation will not be a fully reliable source of information, but there is always a first time, also for me. Looking from my perspective, I think, that I have some experience that allows me to make this test, like owning a very good digital system, which surpassed my analog setup with the way it presents music (palpability and three-dimensionality of the stage). Only recently my Feickert made a small step in that direction (with the phonostages Theriaa and Phasemation), but it is still half a step behind the digital competition. So I am even more happy to verify the claims of analog gear manufacturers, comparing them with my digital set made in Japan.

Being set for nirvana I took quite randomly a disc from the shelf, which turned out to be “Oregon in Concert” Glen Moore, Ralph Towner, Collin Walcott and Paul McCandless in an American pressing from 1975. Placing the disc on the platter I was prepared for the effects, that would confirm the pricing of the turntable in question is right. But I was not prepared for what happened. It was a short action and a knockout. I expected some quality jump, but not in all aspects of the sound. Resolution, palpability, homogeneity, selectiveness, contours, etc. I could continue naming them

one after another. All this with a slightly upped timbre, which is probably determined by the cartridge. In CD players bringing timbre up usually results in a tiring vividness of the sound, but there were no such issues with the Swiss turntable paired with the Kuzma cartridge. This was still a very smooth, very natural and pleasant to hear musical spectacle. The resolution was unobtrusive, but very high, often unreachable for many CD players. A true masterpiece. The accessories of the percussion players shone like dew on the grass in the morning, and there was not even a trace of detachment between the higher frequencies and the rest of the frequency spectrum. The midrange, although pushed slightly higher, still presented timbres of exquisite analog, and the lower frequencies enchanted with even the smallest vibrations of the contrabass strings. A true feast of audiophile relishes. And the used cartridge is by far not the summit of what can be purchased, with its price around 10000 zlotys. I fear to think what could happen, if we equip the Thales drive with a cartridge from the 20-30 thousand zloty range. But this was done on purpose by the distributor, who just wanted to show how important the deck is in the process of completing an analog setup. This is the reason, he did not show all the assets he could. Still the set supplied to me by RCM costs around 130000 zlotys. You may say, that this game is not worth that amount of money, I even think, that 50% of the population of listener will say that, but I really ensure you, this will be until such people live through this way of presentation of music – not even in terms of timbre or smoothness, but in terms of creating the musical stage, combined with financial capabilities. Of course this will not be readily available for everybody, but please do not call people “idiots” just because they can afford to buy such a setup, when someday you will be in the position of owning this setup yourself, most probably you would also not want to be called and regarded this way.

But let's return to music. I already mentioned, that this set was a bit lighter in the midrange than mine. And after confrontation with the CD, it turned out, that this is also the case compared to Reimyo. The distributor knows exactly how my system sounds and what is my master (slight emphasis on the midrange) and I am quite sure, that he wanted to show me, how a well setup analog source can enchant me, even if the sound specifics is a bit away from mine. Maybe this feeling of the sound being a bit thinner came from the extraordinary, yet still analog, resolution and contour of the Kuzma cartridge. Maybe. But after having heard a few dozen discs with it I can say that it sounded good, and this idea for sound can be absolutely accepted. I would never expect such a tonally balanced presentation would be appealing to me (I like more color), but it was enough to go at a certain level of quality, when reading from the LP groove, and I did verify my opinion. Some time ago, if I would listen to this American pressing, I would not be happy, but after having heard it with the Thales, everything sounds natural and enough colorful to me. It could seem, that this is magic. No, it is just that open and free way of playing, with a readable sound stage and really enslaving presentation of the three-dimensionality of the musicians creates the impression of palpability, which I achieved in my system by putting more weight on the midrange. The concert from Oregon was a true show-off not only by the musicians (each of them is very capable), but also by the sound engineer and the stereo system playing it back. The slightest lack of synergy between the musicians – recording engineer and stereo system would result in some kind of averaging of the reception of this fantastic session and in effect putting the record back on the shelf, without thinking about the heard material. Due to the incredible resolution, each instrument had full spread of microdynamics, from the slightest vibrations of the contrabass strings up to the dense and smooth sax, without any distortion from the beginning to the end of the disc. To verify the achievements of the Swiss constructors in terms of appropriate guidance of the diamond in the groove by the tonearm, I took a disc with a well recorded trumpet, which screeches a bit in the final parts on my Feickert. To have good insight into this aspect I played the mid and final part of the disc many times. It showed the supremacy of the Thales Simplicity over my tonearm, and I will need lots of time to forget the masterful reproduction of the disc by the Swiss product. Fortunately time heals wounds, and if not, I will just need to live with what I have (at least for some time).



The Swiss Thales Turntable TTT Battery Drive was the most expensive and at the same time best sounding turntable I hosted in my listening room. It placed the threshold for others very high, although in the beginning it did not fit into my temperature of sound, but it turned out not to matter. Of course this is not the eighth wonder of the world, just a very good sounding turntable, so other, well combined sets from competitive manufactures can compete with it. But there will be one big condition they need to meet – synergy. There must be synergy of the deck, with the tonerarm and cartridge. I know that such sets exist, and what is more important, that we will get them for testing. I am very happy that I will be able to hear them all, to go out on an adventure with them in my musical Mecca. The Thales is a very sophisticated construction (of both, the deck and the tonearm), despite the superficial simplicity, and if somebody does not need to brag with designer gear, then he may become enchanted. In my description I tried to convey, with what the tested turntable competes with my CD player. Smoothness, timbre, homogeneity (even with smaller than expected saturation of timbres) was obvious, and I did not write about examples confirming those aspects, as on this price level this would be an offence to the clients, if there would be any shortcomings there. That what is most important in this turntable is the construction of the tonearm, which minimizes the tracking error of the cartridge. Second thing is the multilayer, anti-resonance plinth and platter, what combined with appropriate cartridge allows to a real 3D reproduction of the musical material. To really be able to see that, you need to have a very good digital setup, that will provide an adequate reference point, as the lack of it will not allow to fully assess the capabilities of the Swiss turntable. And if someone thinks, that I am wrong, then I have to say, he is erring. To be able to assess anything, you really need a high quality reference point, otherwise any evaluation will only be guessing. I went along that path, so I ensure you, this is the truth.



PS. When I was writing the last sentence of the conclusion of this test, the Thales was playing a free jazz disc, albeit in a quiet version. This was another example of a disc showing the artistry of the musicians and the recording artists. It was the concert disc from the trio: Albert Mangelsdorff – trombone, J.F.Jenny-Clark – bass and Ronald Shannon Jackson – drums. This time the concert was with lighter compositions, allowing to show this genre from its easier to accept side. The musicians did not try to deafen the public, but played quite leisurely, relaying on reverberation of the cymbals, blows of the trombone or vibration of the contrabass strings in the slow melodic lines from the chosen notations. Due to the high resolution of the Swiss set, the dynamics of the reproduced material allowed to see every vibrating string, hear every breath of air in the mouthpiece or touch of the drumstick on the cymbals. Such nuances may seem not to be a significant part of the musical spectacle, but once we hear such presentation, when we notice how much information we were losing, it will not be easy to forget, and somewhere inside us, a need will grow, to have such quality every day we listen to music. I advise caution, because even casual listening to the tested turntable can be a risk of bringing us much closer to leaving it in our system.

Text: Jacek Pazio

Photographs: Jacek Pazio, Marcin Olszewski

Distributor: RCM

Price:

Thales Turntable TTT-Battery Drive – 43 400 PLN

Simplicity tonearm – 30 990 PLN

LeviBase – 8 250 PLN

Kuzma CAR-30 – 1 900 €

Argento Audio Flow Master Reference – 30 500 PLN

Specifications:

Thales Turntable TTT-Battery Drive

Turntable speed: 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ rpm, 45rpm

Wow and flutter at 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ rpm, DIN45 507: $\pm 0,06\%$

Rumble: 60 dB (unweighted)

Output terminals: RCA / XLR / DIN / direct wiring

Size: 432 x 312 x 91 mm

Weight: 16 kg

Input voltage for charger: 100-240V, 50-60Hz

Battery service life: 16h

Simplicity tangential pivoted tonearm

– finest ruby bearing, six jewels

- optimized Burne-Jones geometry, theoretical tracking error: $\pm 0.008^\circ$
- hard chrome plated cardanic bearings
- aluminium arms, bronze anodized finish
- removable headshell for easy installation of cartridge
- effective length: 9 inches
- effective tonearm mass: 19g

Kuzma CAR-30

Type: Moving Coil

Coil Wire: 5N Copper

Cantilever material: Boron

Stylus: Microridge

Frequency Response: 10Hz – 35 kHz

Output Voltage: 0.3mv

Channel Balance: <1dB

Channel Separation: >25dB

Tracking Force: 2.0g

Compliance: 10×10^{-6} cm/dyne

Trackability: $>70 \mu\text{m}/2.0\text{g}$

Internal Impedance: 4Ω

Load Impedance: $>100\Omega$

Net Weight: 17 g

The system used in the test, a complete set of Combak Corporation.

Electronics Reimyo:

– Separate DAC + CD player: CDT – 777 + DAP – 999 EX

– Tube preamp: CAT – 777 MK II

– Solid state power amp: KAP – 777

Speakers: Bravo Consequence +

Power cables: Harmonix X-DC-350M2R Improved Version

Speaker Cables: Harmonix HS 101-EXQ (mid-high section); Harmonix HS-101 SLC (bass section)

IC RCA Harmonix HS 101-GP

Digital IC: Harmonix HS 102

Table: Rogoz Audio

Accessories: Antivibration stand for the power amp by Harmonix TU-505EX MK2; Harmonix Enacom improved for AC 100-240V; Harmonix Tuning Room Mini Disk RFA-80i; Acoustic Revive RST-38H

Analog stage:

– Turntable:

drive: Dr. Feickert Analogue „Twin”

arm: SME V; Siplicity

cartridge: Dynavector XX-2 MK II

– Phonostage: RCM „THERIAA”