

# AUDIO

HIFI · SURROUND · HIGH END · MUSIC



Harbeth 40.2: The most musical monitor ever

# As good as it gets!

Developed by geniuses, exclusively tested by AUDIO:

- ➔ Transcription Reference: the new dimension in vinyl-sound
- ➔ Kii Three: active, digital, wireless – and unbeatable accuracy



Moon Neo 280D: perfect streamer and D/A-Converter



Melco N1-A: can a NAS improve the sound?



ModWright KWI 200: power and culture perfectly combined



More valuable than gold: pick-ups from 1.600 – 6.000 €

Österreich € 7,60 - Schweiz sfr 13,70  
Spanien € 8,95 - BeNeLux € 8,05  
Griechenland € 10,35 - Italien € 8,95  
Finnland € 10,15 - Slowenien € 8,95



# Perfect sound ... forever

What's the price limit for a turntable? With her Garrard masterpiece Martina Schoener from L'Art du Son didn't bother musing about this issue, but pursued only one goal: an overall package that would shelve forever the discussion on analogue sound.

■ Test: Bernhard Rietschel

Why do we see so few women in the hi-fi industry? Maybe because in our society it's primarily men who tend to devote themselves neck and crop and free from any reason to some globally most insignificant hobby. Between modern professional distance and a cynical „what does it good to me?“ one can turn some not at all small wheels in the hi-fi branch, ride with a trend and also move this or that pallet-t with goods. But the big historical breakthroughs remain reserved to those who have become addicted head over ears to the matter. Thus people like Martina Schoener. The Freiburg lady spends a perceived 300 days on the move each year, meandering in a mysterious pattern over all negotiable roads of Europe. Along her easily six-digit yearly distance travelled lie big and smaller trade fairs, customer and dealer meetings, rendezvous with friends, allies and business partners, also an occasional editorial office. For instance, a player which was on loan at place X, is temporarily taken to place Y, and on the way she stops by at this specialist firm where they know better than all the previous ones how to finely balance motor shafts. Or where they feel capable of machining some hundred-

weights of stainless steel on demand in an exotic alloy, which is particularly un-friendly to milling tools, simply to manufacture yet again a single drive chassis.

For what Schoener is up to with her company L'Art du Son and in her capacity as the German governor of English Garrard specialist Loricraft, is nothing short of perfecting an age-old, temporarily fully extinct turntable principle – the belated completion of the friction wheel player. The latter is far better than its reputation: since there's no elastic, slack-prone belt moving between motor and platter and the force is transmitted by a non-slip vulcanite wheel instead, the drive force of a friction wheeler is coupled much more directly which, with a correct motor control, results in an outstanding dynamic wow and flutter stability. In other words: even without ultra heavy platters (which do carry their own typical problems), such a player is exemplarily insensitive to modulation-induced braking effects caused by the groove friction which in turn varies as a function of the music. True, these are quite small (and there's also no measuring method for them), but unlike other wow and flutter hitches, they corre-late



## TEST

Turntable with system

**L'ART DU SON BY GARRARD  
TRANSCRIPTION REFERENCE 80.600 €**







**POWERFUL:** The friction wheel on ruby bearings transmits the force from the 5 mm thick motor shaft onto the inside of the platter (removed here). The resulting torque is huge.



**SMOOTH OPERATOR:** The motor of the Transcription Reference brings several specialised companies to their limits. The platter bearing is a flat type with a virtually unlimited life.



**PRECISELY TAILORED:** Structure and mass of the arm tube are fine-tuned by Origin Live to the stylus compliance of the intended pickup – here a Lyra Atlas.

directly with the music signal. Our hearing reacts to such correlations in an extremely sensitive manner, and to reduce them die-hard friction wheel fans often accept a heavy dose of those other problems which normally belong to the down sides of the friction wheel: whichever secondary noises occur at the motor or friction wheel – whatever is rattling, rumbling, buzzing and humming there –, it is equally mercilessly passed on to the platter like the desired drive force. Not even Martina Schoener can change this. But there's an exit: friction wheel players are not improved by decoupling the motor. Nor by making the motor smaller and weaker so that it produces lesser disturbances. One can improve them by building a perfect motor for them. A powertrain with a huge torque, but which runs absolutely vibration-free – for decades, if need be.

The Transcription Reference project started out from the legendary Garrard 301 and 401 studio drives which still let their platters rotate unflinching even after 60 years, yet need a qualified service then. The English Loricraft company which, in addition to classic inspections, also got more and more incoming orders for "better-than-new" high-class restorations, has specialised in this job. Somewhere along the line the perfectionism – and obviously also the budget the fans were willing to spend – had reached a point which required a complete reconstruction. And so, after a break of several decades, Loricraft added a new stage to the Garrard evolution: the 501 – after its review in 2005 the first and so far the only friction wheel drive in the AUDIO highscore list, and also the only one which could catch up with good non-suspended drives in terms of wow & flutter and rumble specs. But with that Martina Schoener would not be satisfied. She'd rather keep on tuning, refining and cultivating the 501, detecting through tenacious empirical work the very last critical areas which could still thwart the player soundwise.

To remedy them, sometimes no money had to be spent at all – for instance, when talking about positioning a screw or the cost-neutral changeover from



one material to another. In most cases the desired improvements could only be achieved by starting from scratch or by switching from one specialised firm to an even more specialised one.

Strictly speaking the portrayed Transcription Reference is hence a close relative of the 501 reviewed ten years ago, on which, however, no part has been left unchanged. Even the inlaid casing, masterfully carpentered from German walnut (or any other woods, according to customer's requests), when compared to its ancestor, looks like a Davidoff humidor next to an ordinary cigar box. And there is now also a completely redesigned power supply, split as it was before into signal generation and amplification, with an almost infinitely variable rotational speed. The motor, which can also be run directly on mains voltage when needed, is first supplied the required high voltage sine in its very purest form by a special, fully analogue generator, which is then amplified by a high voltage optimised high-end power amplifier. In view of the almost obsessive care that was used to tune each motor component to absolute true running, anything else would just have been a waste of time, effort and talent – let alone money.

Since the aim is maximum phono sound, Schoener has left none of the remaining factors to chance either: The table (optionally in upright or horizontal format) is custom-made for the TR just like the tonearm, which Origin Live

**VARIABLE:** Each rotating speed has its own fine adjustment with an enormous setting range.

For rarity collectors there is also an 18 rpm version available on request – or with any other exotic speed..

builds specifically in England for the chosen pickup cartridge. Normally this system is a Lyra Atlas – there is also a close cooperation with Lyra.

In the AUDIO listening room the Transcription Reference was playing at the new Harbeth Monitor 40/2 (page 22) and the phantastic "Rauschfrei" phono preamp by Joachim Gerhard which we are going to review in one of the next issues. Music like we've never heard coming from a turntable: incredibly dynamic, intimate and direct, yet with an ultimately fine resolution. One could fill pages with listening examples, but the superlatives would merely repeat: none of the records we were listening to had ever been heard like this before. And never before had our digital reference, the venerable Linn Klimax DSM, looked so pale by contrast: when even a Klimax can't win a single trick, then digital won't make it at all. Not only does the TR come closer to reality than previous turntables – with vinyl it creates a musical parallel universe.



**AUDIO**  
RECOMMENDATION  
BEST ANALOGUE SOUND

**PROFILE**

	<b>L'ART DU SON / GARRARD TRANSCRIPTION REF.</b>
Distribution	Martina Schoener, L'Art du Son, +4917661556790, m.schoener@garrard.de
www.	artduson.com.de
Listenpreis	80.600 EUR
Garantiezeit	5 years
Dimensions W x H x D	60 x 30 x 45 cm [23.6 x 11.8 x 17.7 in]
Weight	50 kg [110.3 lbs.] (incl. power supply)
Drive	idler drive
Speeds	33, 45, 78 (others on request)
Speed change	electronic
Arm height adjustment	•
Height-adjustable feet	•
Pitch control	•
Fully automatic operation / limit stop	- / -
Special features	incl. arm (Origin Live Enterprise), system (Lyra Atlas) and superstructure

**AUDIOGRAM**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➕ Overwhelming dynamics, sublime transparency, heart-stopping promptness</li> <li>➖ regrettably expensive</li> </ul>
Sound	135
Features	very good
Operation	very good
Workmanship	superb
<b>AUDIO SOUND VERDICT</b>	<b>135 PUNKTE</b>
<b>PRICE/PERFORMANCE</b>	<b>HIGH-END</b>

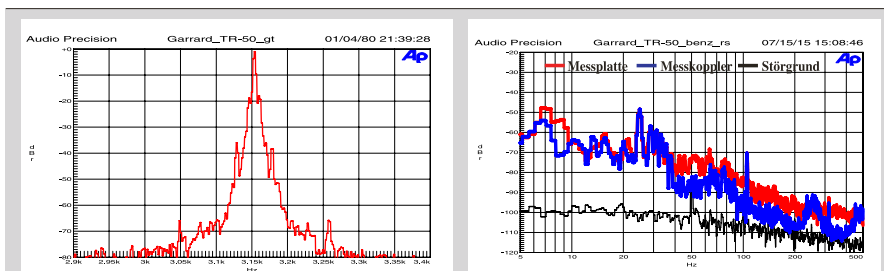
**FAZIT**



**Bernhard Rietschel**  
AUDIO-editor-in-chief

The Transcription Reference combines ultra-grade analogue technology from England and Japan to fully exploit – or more precisely burst – the technical limitations of the friction wheels turntable and the MC pickup system. Yet it's not only the individual technical performances that account for the unforgettable sound of the overall player, but their perfect composition matured in numerous years and also the manufacturing care which L'Art du Son uses in each individual case.

**MEASURING LAB**



75 dB of unweighted S/N ratio with the measuring record and even 79 dB via measuring coupler mean that nothing undesirable from the TR's friction wheel drive (2) will get through. The wow-and-flutter spectrum (1) shows (weak) sidebands typical of a friction wheel drive, but also a rock solid nominal peak. The 2-sigma-weighted timing error is a very good  $\pm 0.067\%$ .