



EQUIPMENT REVIEW

Bergmann Sindre turntable and arm

by Alan Sircom

Air-bearing tonearms are rare, air-bearing turntables are very rare. The combination, especially from one company, is as rare as hen's teeth viewed by the light of the blue moon. So Bergmann's Sindre pairing is one of the most important new decks to have hit the UK in some time. It would be important if it looked as ugly as a sack of hammers, but the fact that it is seriously elegant makes it a vital addition to the high-end scene.

The Sindre is a complete three-box package; deck and arm, speed controller and pump box. All three are finished in a matt black with a contrasting flat silver for the arm, feet and logo. The acrylic platter blends in well, too. The net result is refined and sophisticated, but not a garish money-screamer. As with seemingly everything audio these days, the Sindre is Norse named – Sindri was Odin and Thor's metalworking dwarf (and, confusingly, it's also the name of the hall dead warriors dwell in after Ragnarök; I suspect mistakes were uncomfortable for the dwarf) – but given a lot of good hi-fi is coming out of Nordic territories and Johnnie Bergmann is Danish, the mythological nomenclature is forgiven.

The Sindre's slick looks and prosaic description hides one of the turntable's biggest selling points for anything air-bearing'd – the disturbingly silent air pump. Air-bearings in

audio tend to use pumps from paint sprayers, pressure washers, occasionally kidney dialysis machines or fish tank aerators, but they all have one thing in common... The phut, phut, phut of the pump motor. Inevitably, this pump noise is loud enough to warrant removing the pump into another room. Not with the Bergmann, because that pump housing cuts out almost all the noise. If you can put your ear to the pump housing and its sound is drowned out by the hissing of the air evacuating the tonearms (itself hardly a loud hiss, the sort of thing that would be almost inaudible in all bar the quietest rooms). That is little short of incredible.

The platter is a thick, 4kg slab of semi opaque acrylic. This – and the aluminium sub-chassis – float on air. This works by introducing a thin cushion of air between two aluminum plates, while the spindle itself sits in a vibration damping engineering plastic housing. It's essentially designed to sit 'soft' until a record is placed on the platter and the clamp screws the platter, subchassis

and record together to form a complete unit. The assembly is easier than it sounds, although the belt connecting the platter to the DC motor requires someone with several hands and experience as a circus-trained blindfold knife thrower to get right. The third box of tricks – the speed box – comes with two tiny front-mounted recessed trim pots to get the speed control just right. The usual plan with DC motors is to let the record player spend three days continually playing to allow the motor to bed in.

The parallel tracking arm works in exactly the same way as the Cartridgeman's Conductor, a hollow tube with air holes along the top allowing the tonearm sleeve to travel freely (think of an air hockey table top, but with the hockey puck constrained to travel back and forth). But where the Conductor is quirkily Best-of-British shed-fi in its looks, the Sindre arm is elegant and minimalist. The Sindre's tonearm lift/lower lever for example is a knurled knob built into the arm base, not something bolted onto the side of the arm (in fact, the Conductor ultimately works better, because this lift/lower arrangement is damped... it's just the Bergmann looks the part). Like any parallel tracker, it looks delicate – the thin carbon-fibre arm tube and the hair-thin tonearm wires make it something close to the anti-SME (you could defend a small village from marauding bandits and dig your way out of a POW camp with an SME V, and still play records afterwards) – but unless you cue up your music with a pick-axe, the Sindre arm is rugged enough for the job. You get to choose phono cables too, as the deck terminates those lead-out wires with a set of WBT phono sockets at the rear of the plinth.

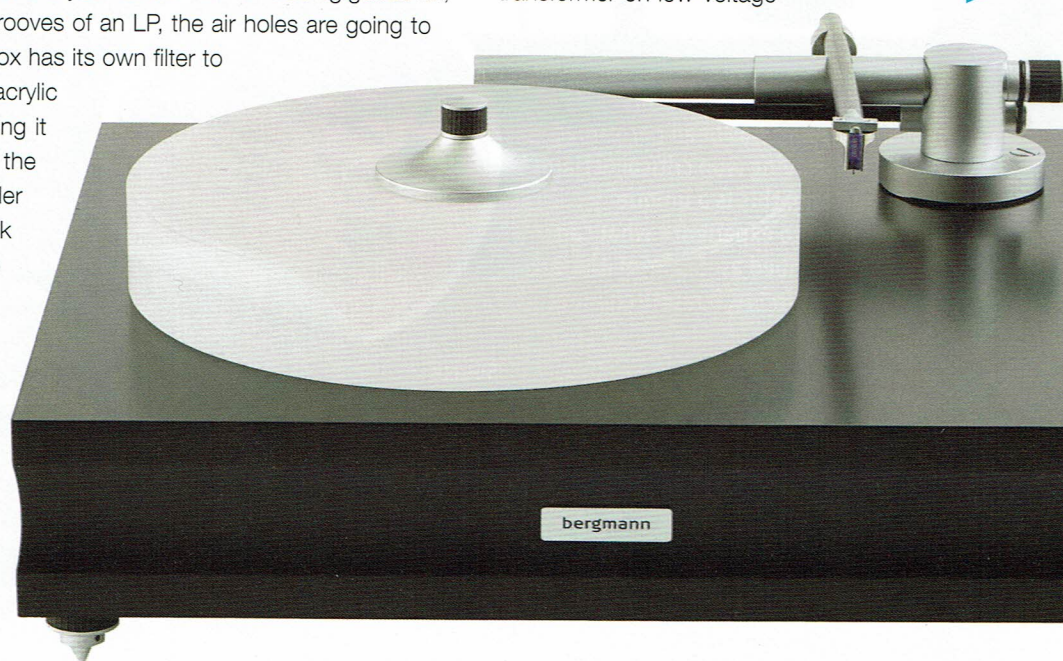
“The sound was, quite simply, stunning. Stunning more for what it didn't do than for what it did.”

What's surprising about the Sindre is it's essentially 'fit and forget', which is uncommon for products that sit on a cloud. OK, if you have pets that smoke and burn incense over your records and you have a habit of rubbing goose fat, motor oil and sawdust into the grooves of an LP, the air holes are going to gum up periodically. The pump box has its own filter to change, but investing in a good acrylic dust cover is an idea. As is playing it regularly; pump pressure through the air holes in the arm tube and under the platter should clear out gunk as it arises, but don't leave it to settle. And if that isn't the best

excuse to have regular listening sessions, what is?

Cueing up the arm is easy, once you get used to the undamped lift/lower. Gently raise the arm (apply too quick a twist and it feels like the arm is about to backflip), position it over the groove exactly where you want it, lower gently. The accuracy of the cueing process is always spot-on, because the arm stays in place. 'So what?' I hear the pivoted bearing folk cry, 'they all do that!' But the first time you try the Sindre, you quickly discover just how much wiggle room we put up with in reality. This is pin-point precision.

Used with a Transfiguration Axia cartridge, the sound was, quite simply, stunning. Stunning more for what it didn't do than for what it did. What it didn't do (of course) was the sort of end of side tracking error distortions you sometimes hear on pivoted bearings; these don't necessarily manifest as obvious graunching distortion, but are more akin to a not totally balanced transformer on low-voltage



- lighting. It's the sort of thing you don't notice until it's taken away. It just sounds more right. It's a texturing and layering of instruments – unamplified, amplified or even pan-potted – and a centre image that is controlled, solid and sitting right in front of you.

I went for an older pass through my record collection, playing albums like *Ragged Glory* by Neil Young and Crazy Horse. This wry slice of proto-grunge (released a year before *Nevermind*) revisits some of Young's work from the 1960s and 1970s with some fantastic wailing guitar from Frank 'Poncho' Sampedro. I put this away some years ago because the album can easily sound messy; raw and fun, but screechy. The Sindre shows that is more to do with tracking than recording or mastering. This time it was raw, it was fun and it sounded like a band in a studio. It has that ability to allow the listener to focus in on individual musicians at work, but never once taking your attention away from the whole event. This followed with track after track, from cool jazz to acid jazz to acid rock to classic rock to classical... how's that for a montage?

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It was also good at discerning the difference between pressing quality. Play a side from each of any two random LPs and the difference in noise floor, general tone and dynamic range of the two recordings should be clear to hear, as it is here. That's not always the case, even with some decks that cost a king's ransom. It's not hard on bad recordings, but a cheap Spanish copy of Dylan's *Blood On The Tracks* I played showed its limits all too easily. That said, this particularly undynamic print of the album should sound like that.

My main concern with parallel trackers – aside from the whole falling-to-bits thing that modern designs like this, the Cartridgeman and the Kuzma have cracked – is the lack of boogie factor. It's been a long time since I was a Flat Earther, but I still remember to check for the elusive 'tune' from time to time. In this setting, I used a Well-Tempered Amadeus with the regulation Dynavector cartridge as brief riddim comparison. And used Ivan 'Boogaloo' Joe Jones 1975 rare groove 'Sweetback' from the Luv 'n' Haight/Ubiquity *Bag Of Goodies* album to lay down the tunes. And, yes... the Flat Earthers have got a point – the sound from the Well-Tempered was just that shade more funky and the beat more obvious and even easier to follow. Both were more than entertaining and easy to live with, but where the W-T had a tauter bass and more rhythmic control, the Bergmann sounded more open, dynamic and less congested. This was an impressive confirmation of what the Sindre is doing right, because 'congested' is not something I would connect with the W-T under any normal setting.

The thing with air-bearing arms – and especially on air-bearing decks – is they are usually a frustrating glimpse at the best vinyl can do. Frustrating because for every record played, you spend twice as much time tinkering with the thing to make it play again. But not the Bergmann. It just kept on playing. No fuss, no bother, no panic. And no distortion. How cool is that? +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Turntable: Airsupported platter, centred by a steel spindle/hardened low friction polymer bearing

Motor type: DC. Beltdriven

Plinth: Solid fibreboard

Platter: Acrylic, 4 kg.

Subplatter: Aluminium, 3,2 kg.

Dimensions (WxHxD): 50x21x47.5cm

Total weight: 23 kg

Tonearm: Linear tracking airbearing tonearm. Hard aluminium alloy/carbon

Effective mass: 10g

Speed box: Separate, 33 & 45 rpm

Airsupply: Silent, clean, dry and smooth airflow

Dimensions (WxHxD): 21x41.5x22cm

Weight: 8.4kg

Price: £11,995

Manufactured by

Bergmann

URL: www.bergmannaudio.com

Distributed by

Midlands Audio Exchange

URL: www.midlandaudiox-change.co.uk

Tel: +44(0)1562 731100

