

Analogue Works Turntable One and Design Build Listen The Wand tonearm

by Alan Sircom

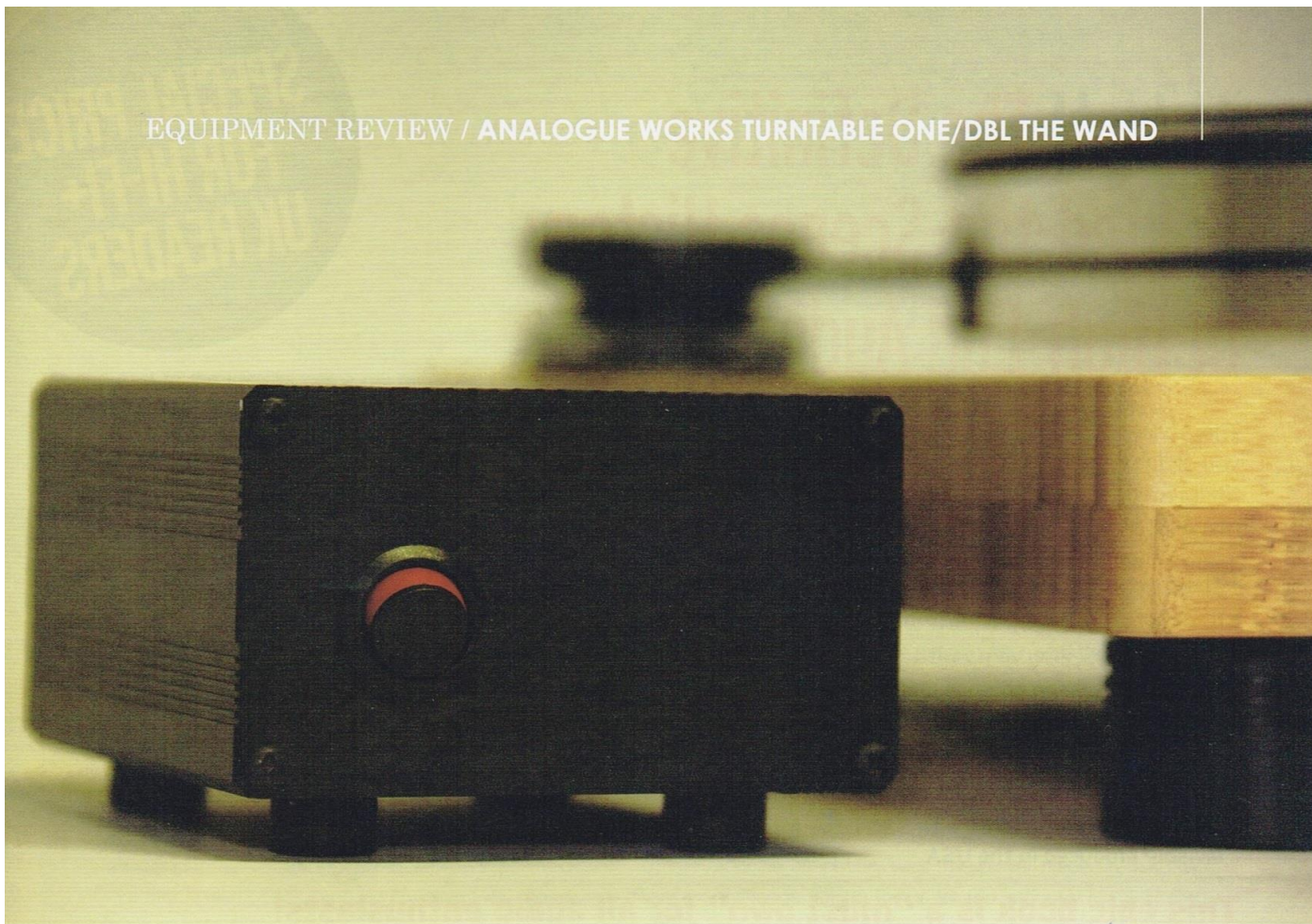


Turntable maker Tom Fletcher left a considerable legacy in his passing. There's Nottingham Analogue of course, which Tom handed on to family and co-workers as his illness progressed. Then there is (was?) Fletcher Audio that licensed his later designs, but that brand is undergoing something of a hiatus right now. And then there's the post-Tom designs that have filled the gap left by Fletcher Audio: Peter Mezek's Slovenian-made Pear Audio Analogue range, and Tim Chorlton's and Mark Groom's Analogue Works Turntable One made in Northamptonshire in the UK (arguably, the Palmer turntables is a close cousin of Tom Fletcher's designs, too).

This comes about because Tom Fletcher was a nice guy who had lots of friends, a turntable enthusiast of great repute, and someone who felt success was a dish best shared.

The Analogue Works Turntable One looks less like one of Tom's Nottingham Analogue turntables, and more something from his later designs. It still uses the high-mass platter with rubber dampening rings, a phosphor bronze bearing, a ply plinth, a low torque 'promotec' motor that runs constantly and the belt platter is push started and slowed. The Turntable One has an external power supply, "designed by a very clever man who is famous for doing this kind of stuff" according to the website (we're not giving the game away, but his name is an anagram of 'Bartin Mastin'). Early models had a birch ply only plinth, but subsequent models have a shiny black top. The deck itself sits on three adjustable feet, but there is provision for a suspension system (a set of upgraded Isonoe feet in fact, which act like the rubber bands in the SME Model 20 or Model 30 suspension towers, only beneath the deck itself), and a range of 'gimp' mats.

Tom Fletcher's decks have often been used with unipivots. In part, because Tom's own arm designs are unipivots, but also because Tom's decks do sound especially good with a unipivot arm in tow. The Analog Works project ►



► currently doesn't do tonearms; instead it comes with two options supplied pre-installed; the Origin Live Alliance (for an additional £295) or The Wand, for an extra £795. We went with The Wand, a unique carbon fibre unipivot from New Zealand-based DIYers Design Build Listen.

The Wand is essentially a straight, relatively large tube of carbon fibre, cut at the cartridge end at a fairly acute angle, and the cart attaches to a fixed metal block, which limits adjustment at the cartridge end to overhang. Away from the business end, the pivot itself (it's identical to Rega geometry) and counterweight arrangement is different from the norm. The arm uses a series of balance plates and a large bolt at the rear of the arm for fine-tuning. This means setting up a cartridge involves look-up tables alongside stylus gauges and Baerwald alignment protractors. The bearing itself is a 'defined contact' design, where the pivot point rests in the midst of three ball bearings inside the arm tube, rather than the more common point and cup. The anti-skate is a line-and-weight affair, but cleverly, the weight stays in the arm-rest position as the arm tracks a groove, rather than an outrigger. The arm cable is Cardas. Deck and arm came supplied complete and the arm came pre-fitted with a Goldring Legacy moving coil cartridge, which proved to be a fine match.

Arguably, a reviewer should divorce himself or herself from price throughout a review, adding the cost context at the end. That way, the device under test gets to stand or fall in absolute terms, and doesn't get pigeonholed into a price parameter. It's hard to 'unlearn' a price however, especially

if it's very low or very high. But it's possible, in part because of the Tom Fletcher giant-killer DNA running through the Turntable One. You quickly forget that you are listening to a £800 turntable, and just enjoy listening to a turntable.

I found my own way of changing records managed to include a thumb just near enough to one of the rubber rings to catch and slow the deck down slightly. Most people won't have this kind of problem, but it is a fair indicator of how good the Analogue Works Turntable One is, if a major criticism is your personal style of record playing. My extraneous thumb aside, the turntable behaved itself perfectly at all times.

Now, The Wand. I believe tonearms can be divided into three broad categories for users: those that limit the number of adjustments, potentially at the expense of the ultimate performance; those that have significant adjustment, but invite the user to constantly tweak their arm's settings, and those that demand significant initial adjustment when installed, but then become 'fit and forget' devices. The Wand very definitely falls into the latter category. The process of installing, aligning, and fine-tuning your cartridge is not for the faint-hearted and not for those of us who have a low threshold in such things might be picking bits of Wand out of a wall, but some of that is because it works differently to other arms. However, when set, it stays set. And it's not the kind of arm that invites tweaking, fiddling around, or on-the-fly adjustment.

What The Wand brings to the party is excitement. Not swivel-eyed loon excitement, but a sense of speed and energy ►

- and zest to the LP. Out came my minty *Art Pepper Meets the Rhythm Section* [Analogue Productions] released back in the 1990s. The first bars of 'You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To' are always firmly in the pocket, but that groove was even tighter than usual. It has good, tidy bass, but there are arms that go deeper than The Wand, but the bass has a real sense of 'shape' and dynamism to it. Soundstaging, image separation, and image solidity are good too, although The

Wand tends to cast a deep rather than a wide soundstage, even though you could push the deck still further arm-wise.

And that shows how the two mix together. The wide staging of the Turntable One and the deep staging of The Wand go together well, as does the cavernous bass of the deck, tempered by the deft touch of the arm. Where the Turntable One alone can sound a bit shut in at the top in loud passages, The Wand helps bring the sound back to life. Tom Fletcher favoured unipivots for a reason, and it's because they clearly work together well, and that's definitely the case here. The parts are good, but the sum of the parts is really, really entertaining. BBC Radio Two was having a 20 year Brit-pop retrospective at the time of writing this, and it seemed churlish not to spin some Blur and Oasis albums, but then I got better and played 'Vapour Trail' by Ride [Creation], a fine slice of shoegazy noise from the early 1990s. This engaged the LP time machine effect very well. The player helped remind me of ex-girlfriends, taking things far too seriously in my Breton shirt, and remembering why I used to think this was the best track ever written.

Finally, bring in the Gimp. I had a play around with the standard foam, silicone, neoprene, and cork/nitrile mats, and although there was much to like from all of them, I found myself returning to the balance of the standard foam; Or the cork, or maybe the neoprene. Truth is, you could almost be fine-tuning on a per record basis, but at between £10 and £15 each, you could also buy the lot and play.

That's the thing about the Turntable One, especially with The Wand in place. It's fun, unpretentious, fun, precise, fun, and fun. Like the Spacedeck and the Interspace, it doesn't gloss over bad recordings and badly abused recordings, but it recalls your vinyl in a manner that will keep you listening long into the past, and not many turntables at the price can do that so effortlessly. Highly recommended. +

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TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Turntable One Turntable

Type: Belt-drive non-suspended turntable with low-torque motor.

Rotational Speeds: 33 1/3 RPM, 45 RPM.

Supported Tonearm Length(s): 9-inch arms supported.

Drive Mechanism: Belt driven via Promotec AC motor, via external PSU.

Speed Control: Belt position change.

Platter Type: 6802 aluminium alloy with rubber damping rings

Platter Weight: 6.7kg.

Bearing Type: Phosphor Bronze Sleeve with Hardened and Polished Roller. Polished Silver Steel Shaft with Precision Ground Nipple.

Plinth Configuration: 4kg non-suspended birch ply plinth system.

Dimensions (HxWxD): 120 x 460 x 360mm

Weight: 12kg

Price: £799

Manufacturer: Analogue Works

Tel: +44(0)1536 762211

URL: www.analogueworks.co.uk

The Wand Tonearm

Type: Carbon-fibre unipivot phono pickup arm.

Tonearm Length: 240mm from stylus to pivot

Cartridge Mounting/Alignment: 12.7mm

Offset Angle: 23 degrees

Signal Cable Length: 0.9m Cardas

Weight: 500g

Price: £795

Manufacturer: Design Build Listen

URL: www.designbuildlisten.com