



DOUBLE SOUNDS BETTER

Acoustic Signature has designed its new Verona Neo for two tonearms of the same or different lengths. STEREO tests the elegant luxury turntable in a double-arm configuration.

Text: Matthias Böde

Teutonic Engineering“ is inscribed on the entrance door of analog specialist Acoustic Signature in the southern German town of Süßen as a motto, only half jokingly. The company’s turntable fortresses, which often appear to have been chiseled out of a solid block of aluminum and of which the Hurricane Neo tested in STEREO 2/22 is one of the more discreet ones, indeed radiate

the indestructible solidity that is associated with German construction worldwide, from Mercedes’ S-Class to the „Leo“ tank.

For those who prefer a more elegant look, and yet don’t want to do without the numerous special design features of this manufacturer – which will be mentioned later –, there is the smaller Double X Neo, as well as the new Verona Neo. This model is even prepared for two nine- or twelve-

inch tonearms. The completely black piano lacquer chassis of our test device or its alternative version – which has a high-gloss macassar veneer top – can be combined with light or dark aluminum parts. In the latter version, the three non-slip, gel-damped feet, which are perfectly coupled to the surface below and allow the drive to be precisely aligned horizontally, are also anodized black.



The „silencers“ pressed into the platter only make contact with it via their rubber rings.

owner and quality fanatic Gunther Frohnhöfer made the decision a long time ago after numerous problems with suppliers concerning poor reliability and faulty products. Now, he has everything under control and can implement ideas and improvements quickly.



Matthias Böde
Editor

»THE VERONA NEO OFFERS A TASTEFUL HIGH-END ALTERNATIVE TO ‚HEAVY METAL‘«

The Verona Neo is just under 55 centimetres in width and indeed looks as impressive as it does elegant. It, as well as its tonearms, are finished to perfection down to the tiniest detail. In addition to the generous use of materials, the conscientiousness and attention to detail are also „Teutonic“ here.

And the sophistication continues on the inside. For maximum stability, the 65 millimeter thick frame consists of a sandwich construction. Therein, MDF, steel and multiplex panels complement each other in the so-called „Constraint Layer Damping“ (CLD) design in terms of stability and resonance reduction. The actual drive unit only becomes visible after removing an aluminum cover underneath the platter.

As is usual, Acoustic Signature has mounted the two centimeter thick „Heavy Metal“ bases for two tonearms, in our case with SME milling, at the rear right as well as on the directly opposite side. We chose a mixed duo because, in addition to the drive qualities, we also wanted to check the sonic differences between the more normal, short, and the exotic long version of the TA-2000 Neo tonearm. The arm is

available in silver, black, gold or chrome finishes.

Precise Double Motor Drive

Like almost all metal parts of the Verona Neo, the Germans also manufacture their six tonearm models almost exclusively in-house. State-of-the-art CNC machines can be found in the halls behind the main logistics and development building. Company

VIEW INTO THE FACTORY



Acoustic Signature boss Gunther Frohnhöfer checks the designs on his computer.



Several state-of-the-art CNC machines are used in production at the factory in Süßen.



The production of almost all parts and the assembly of the turntables takes place on site.

Two AC motors keep the almost eleven-kilogram platter in motion. To prevent one-sided pull on the extremely low-friction, hard and durable „DTD“ bearing with diamond-coated spindle – a specialty of the manufacturer –, they are positioned opposite each other and drive the already massive sub-platter by means of short round belts.

This is prepared at the factory so that the customer only has to carefully (!) slide the platter onto its sub-platter and plug in the two supply cables to the external DMC-20 power and control unit, which come in the shape of ethernet cables and are color-coded. It is important that their blue and red marked outputs are connected exactly to the corresponding sockets on the turntable, as the digital motor electronics, including

the buttons connected to the controller, and the motor duo are supplied separately. The latter benefits from Acoustic Signature's innovative „Automatic Vibration Control“ (AVC) system. This minimizes any remaining movement resulting from tiny mechanical inaccuracies within the motors by measuring them and then counteracting them by shifting the phase of the control signal. Two small buttons on the back also allow the rpm of the record player to be adjusted in tiny steps.

With the exception of the physical strength required, setting up the Verona Neo, which weighs around 33 kilograms, is easy. A total of eight „silencers“ are pressed into the platter to eliminate any possible remaining vibrations. These are brass cylinders fitted with rubber rings that prevent

any resonance so that the platter is acoustically dead when faced with movement. A mat made of bonded leather fiber with a carbon pattern print, which the developers have determined to be optimal in terms of sound, forms the end on both sides.

Installing The Tonearms - What A Joy!

Before we could really get started, the tonearms of course had to be mounted. They each have a double-layer carbon rod, with the two layers being firmly connected by three thin bars of the same material. Thanks to precise templates, all the necessary tools and first-class, illustrated instructions in the accompanying accessories, this is no problem for any reasonably skilled analog fan after a short introduction, but rather a pleasure. For everyone else, please leave



Each tonearm comes with a template that has a fixed reference point on the platter axis. It defines the distance between it and the arm pivot point as well as the overhang and angle of the pickup.

WHAT WE'VE HEARD



FROM SCRATCH: FOTOGRAFIA

A jazz quartet plays the hits of bossa nova master Jobim. Top music and sound!



STOCKFISCH VINYL COLL. 4

Highlights from the label's program with a focus on singer/songwriters.



For more information and all STEREO playlists, scan this QR code.



After removing an aluminum cover (left), the view onto the solid inner plate and the two opposing motors, which wrap around it with short belts, becomes clear.

the job to an expert.

The not at all cheap Swabians have even included a high-quality „Golden Gate“ connection cable from AudioQuest in a practical length of 1.5 meters. However, this can only be used if the RCA sockets for the right and left channels on the phono amp are no more than about six centimeters apart, as a plastic separator prevents larger distances.

We equipped both TA-2000 Neo models with the top MC pickup Transrotor Figaro.

Both pickups are identical in sound, and we set them to exactly the same tonearm height and 19.5 millinewtons of tracking force. Be careful when attaching the connection pins of the tonearm cables – they bend easily. In our experience, the best way to do this is with tweezers or very small pliers placed directly behind the hollow pins. On a positive note, it should be noted that the counterweights, which run smoothly on their threads, can be fixed in place with grub screws after adjustment so that



Images: STEREO

The height of the tonearms was also meticulously adjusted by means of a block with dip marks.

nothing will be unintentionally adjusted afterwards.

The Verona Neo mastered its laboratory run with the expected stoic composure in terms of speed and synchronization consistency as well as restraint with regard to any rumbling. With that, we were optimally equipped for the listening test, which we were eagerly awaiting. Could the differently constructed, noble Acoustic Signature be able to stand up to the massive „aluminum blocks“ from the same company in terms

TEST TURNTABLE

of definition and incorruptible straightforwardness?

Anyone who harbored doubts about this can confidently bury them. The Verona Neo is excellently capable of delivering sound images that are both spatially organized and structured in every possible way. It indeed proved unaffected by any challenge we set to it in the listening room. In fact, it maintained its imperturbable composure even when the loudspeakers right next to it were playing with rather high volumes. The turntable didn't allow this to lead to any resonances in the slightest, for example delivering the dry and substantial bass of James Taylor's „Her Town Too“ crisply and profoundly.

In general, the lower frequencies turned out to be the icing on the cake in the already high-class performance of the Acoustic Signature. The turntable clearly benefits from its MDF-steel-multiplex-CLD backbone, which has evidently been combined just right. Bass lines were not just clean, agile and contoured. Rather, their springy elasticity, their pulsating drive drove the reproduction from the frequency cellar,

which literally gave it an extra portion of buoyant emphasis and kick.

To notice this, the bass part didn't have to be as dominant as it is in the Taylor song. The otherwise rather subtle bass line that drives the turbulent opener of Diana Krall's „Paris“ concert from the lower frequencies could be followed effortlessly. It was emphatically edgy, agile and came with a chugging agility, which noticeably enhanced the vibrant liveliness of the singer's performance. In addition, the German turntables' fluid timing, which certainly was neither sluggish nor rushed, but emphasized the sometimes brisk, sometimes sustained rhythm of the music, was captivating.

Proper Analog Fun

During the extended listening sessions, the comparison between the otherwise identical nine-inch and twelve-inch tonearms naturally provided additional excitement, or rather a great deal of tension. As with similar duels between arms from other brands, the long version produced an explicitly spatial performance. „The

Way You Look Tonight“ from Lyn Stanley's simply fantastic-sounding album „Novel Noël“, recorded with her „Big Band Jazz Mavericks“, took place on a wider and deeper stage, and the orchestra seemed to have fuller breath as soon as the twelve-inch arm was performing. Its shorter counterpart, on the other hand, focused on the attack and the snappiness of the song, making it appear a shade fresher and brisker. Presented by the longer model, it appeared in a more gravitational, calmer and composed aura. Overall, taste categories may also be touched here. In addition, the respective preference probably depends at least in part on the choice of music.

The fact that the differences were so significant is a surprise in and of itself. To attribute this solely to the slightly lower tracking error angle of the twelve-inch arm due to the slightly flatter arc of the circle that it follows over the tangentially cut record is insufficient. Due to its three grams higher effective mass – 9.6 to 12.6 g – the bass resonance resulting from the flexibility of the needle suspension of the cartridge



Power Ports:

The motors and drive control are supplied via colored ethernet cables via the correspondingly marked ports on the power supply unit.

Speed Select:

Two small „Speed“ buttons reduce or increase the speed in tiny increments. The factory setting was very precise.

Mains Phase:

The phase side of the mains cable should be at the bottom. Otherwise, the Verona Neo will not show its full potential in terms of spatiality and timing.



Each tonearm comes with a 1.5 meter long AudioQuest „Golden Gate“ phono cable.



A damping mat made of bonded leather fiber is applied to the underside of the plater.

TEST DEVICES

Turntable: Transrotor Rondino nero with tonearm TRA 9

Pickup: Transrotor Figaro

Phono Preamp: Brinkmann Edison Mk II, Nagra Classic Phono

Preamp: Audio Research REF 6 SE

Power Amp: Krell KSA-i400

Loudspeakers: B&W 801 D4, Gauder Akustik DARC 100 MKII, Wilson Audio Sasha V

Phono Cables: Audioplan Maxwell A, Van den Hul D502



For detailed information on all test devices, scan this QR-Code.

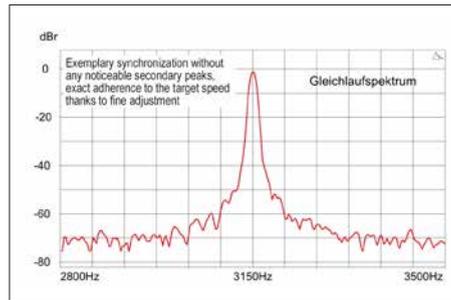
is slightly lower than that of the nine-inch model, which potentially enhances the bass response.

However, this could only be mentioned here to a limited extent at best. Perhaps it helps to point out that fans of rock styles will get on well with the nine-inch standard version, while lovers of symphonic music and opera should opt for twelve inches from the start. Or you can do as we did: Treat yourself to both tonearms – and then meticulously select the ideal pickup for each. A celebration for the analog heart!

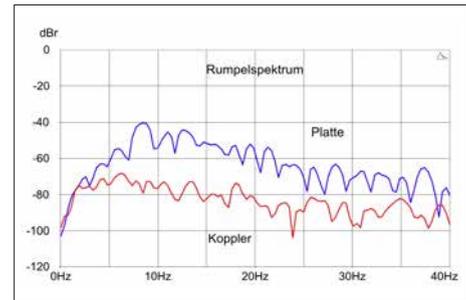
In the end, this is what Acoustic Signature made the Verona Neo for. It is also available with an unmilled base, but then a later replacement would cost around 550 euros. If you take a pre-drilled one and start with one arm, you can upgrade at any time. Because in the end this means twice the listening pleasure. ■



The neatly manufactured tonearms have smooth-running precision ball bearings from SKF.



The synchronization as well as the speed – accurate right from the start – are exemplary.



The rumble is very low, especially when using the measuring coupler.

ACOUSTIC SIGNATURE VERONA NEO

Product type / price range	Turntable / 7000 to 15,000 euros	
Web address	www.acoustic-signature.de	
Price in euro	around 15,000 (in black lacquer or with high-gloss Macassar surface, with a choice of two tonearm bases and nine-inch TA-2000 Neo tonearm in silver)	
Dimensions (W x H x dT) in cm / weight in kg	55 x 16 x 45 / 33.5	
German distributor / phone	AS-Distribution / +49 7162 207970	
Turntable type / drive type	manual / belt	
Bluetooth / connections	no / five-pin socket on the tonearm	
Integrated phono preamp / pickup incl.	no / no	
SOUND	60 %	very good 1.2
Sound quality	perfectly organized, spacious and impulsive performance with exemplary contoured, pulsating bass reproduction	
MEASUREMENTS	15 %	very good 1.3
Rumble	low	
Synchronization in percent	very good (<0,06)	
FEATURES	10 %	good 2.2
Including cover	no	
Haptics/workmanship	picobello finish, high quality feel	
Tonearm cable interchangeable	yes	
Speeds in rpm	33, 45	
Fine speed adjustment or automatic control	yes, manual setting, very fine adjustments	
Impact sound damping	yes, gel-damped feet	
HANDLING & OPERATION	10 %	average 3.2
Speed switching	very easy, push button	
Quality of the manual	very good and well illustrated	
Plug and Play	no	
Adjustability	tonearm height, foot height, azimuth	
Headshell removable	no	
SERVICE & ENVIRONMENT	5 %	good 1.6
Warranty in years	15	
Packaging	average, a bit much plastic	
Power consumption: Standby / Idle (in watts)	low (<0.5 / 9.2)	
Hard power switch	yes	
STEREO TEST RESULT	very good 1.5	