

Tangerine Revolver LP12 platter upgrade

Wednesday, August 14, 2024
Chris Kelly



Tangerine Audio Revolver LP12 platter

Those of you who have been kind enough to read any of my pieces for The Ear over the past few years will know that vinyl is my favourite music replay medium and that, unless there is a guest turntable in the house, I use a Linn Sondek LP12. You may also recall that I bought this wonderful thing on a well-known auction site from another music lover who lives not far from me in South Devon. He had marked the shipping options as collection only, which probably deterred some potential bidders, allowing me to secure it for a very reasonable price. After consulting with a very knowledgeable and trusted existing LP12 owner as to the best way forward with my new pride and joy, I basically had it completely rebuilt by Gulliford Audio in Exeter.

Out went most of what I had bought, leaving me only with the original lid and the Ittok arm. I had them upgrade the power supply to a Lingo 4 and the bearing to a Cirkus. I had a Tangerine Audio Plateau sub-chassis fitted along with their Karmen top plate. I also needed a new sub-platter and outer platter to complement the Cirkus. The whole thing was encased in an oak plinth which was bought from Infidelity in Hampton Wick. Gulliford fitted my Lyra Atlas MC cartridge and with more care than I lavished on our first child when we brought him home from hospital I loaded the plinth with all its new innards, the outer platter and the lid into the car and gingerly brought it the twelve bumpy miles to our home.

Once there the whole careful process was reversed until my new primary source unit was safely in place on the top shelf of my Quadraspire XL rack. Tracking weight and alignment were given one last check. It was properly plugged in and off I went. I cannot recall exactly which album was first up, but I suspect it was the Rolling Stones 1969 belter *Let It Bleed*, which has always been one of my go to records when I feel the need for loud music, recorded the old-fashioned analogue way.

Gimme Shelter came roaring out of my Harbeths, and I knew every penny that I had sunk into the new record player was money well spent. That was back in June of 2018, since when I have had various cartridge swaps but other than those the only changes have been the switch to a Collaro platter mat and the addition of a Tangerine Audio Evenstar puck, both of which I have written about in these pages. With this set up I have enjoyed countless hours of musical pleasure, with a variety of phono amplifiers, integrated amplifiers and loudspeakers. At the moment I am using my Lyngdorf TDAI integrated amplifier and Harbeth C7ESXD loudspeakers. The cartridge fitted is my own Vertere Dark Sabre moving magnet, with direct wired connection to the very good MM phono stage in the Lyngdorf.



Tangerine Audio

Tangerine Audio was set up by Mark Digman and the late Derek Jenkins, who was one of a handful of UK LP12 specialists who were recognised by name in Sondek circles. I had the great pleasure of getting to know Derek when we both worked at the same London retailer, and we became good friends. Watching him working on an LP12 in the workshop was to be present at the intersection of art, science and engineering, filling me with huge admiration for his skills and a deep awareness of my own inadequate fine motor skills. Time spent in Derek's company was always entertaining. He was one of the most amusing people I have known, and combined with his gift for mimicry, he could have me crying with laughter. Thus when I heard of his sudden death in May 2019 it came as a profound shock and the news moved me to tears. I can scarcely imagine the pain felt by those closest to him, including his business partner Mark. Some of us feared that Mark might call time on Tangerine Audio but I am glad that we were mistaken, for Mark has pushed forward with new products, including the Evenstar and the Revolver. I was honoured when he entrusted me with this review of Revolver, and I hope I can do it justice in words, for both Mark and Derek.

What is Revolver?

Unlike many belt-drive turntables, where the belt fits around the outside of the platter, the Linn system has the belt around a smaller sub platter and the outer platter then fits snugly on to that. The Linn outer platter is cast from alloy, and that casting process will inevitably lead to small imperfections within the structure. Air bubbles and slight differences in metal density occur in all metal castings, so this in no way a criticism of Linn. Indeed I have been happily using my Linn platter for more than six years.

Mark Digman is an LP12 aficionado and user himself, so started to research areas where the player might be improved without compromising its Linn-ness. His first effort was the Evenstar puck, a triangular piece of aluminium, milled from a solid billet and weighing just 118g. As I found, the Evenstar made an audible improvement to my own LP12, to the extent that I purchased one and use it whenever I play records.

Armed with that experience, Mr. Digman turned his attention to the outer platter of the LP12. He reasoned that starting with a solid billet of stainless steel, an outer platter could be



formed with meticulous machine-work and banish the inevitable inconsistencies in a cast version. The cost of producing a prototype which met his exacting standards was steep, but perfectionism never comes cheap. The specialist firm with whom he worked usually craft parts for the aerospace industry and were slightly startled that Tangerine Audio insisted on even tighter tolerance for the Revolver than were specified by their primary market. Once both manufacturer and customer were satisfied, an initial run of five Revolvers were produced, and I have had the privilege of having one of them here.

The reviewing process

I set a full day aside for the initial review activity. My methodology was simple enough. Play one side of an album on the Linn platter, without the Evenstar, then add the Evenstar and play it again. Then, donning the white gloves supplied with the Revolver, switch the platters and going through the same two-stage listening.

Not one to miss an obvious pun, I decided to use the remastered version of the Beatles' Revolver to start proceedings off. I have loved this record since I first heard it as a teenager, and it remains as one of my Desert Island discs to this day. I hadn't played it in a while though, so this was a welcome excuse. The opening track Taxman burst in to the room, and even though the lyrics fix the song into its own era, I thoroughly enjoyed the sound that flooded out of the Harbeths. I let all seven tracks play and then carefully lowered the Evenstar and played it again. There was a subtle but audible increase in the clarity and definition, which simply confirmed what I already knew about this combination, and the musical involvement was definitely greater.

Now attired in the white gloves, I took off the Evenstar, the record, the Collaro mat and the outer platter. Carefully lowering the Revolver onto the sub platter the first thing that struck me was how beautiful it is. Totally blemish free to my naked eye and polished to a very fine sheen, it fitted perfectly into place. The mat and the album followed, and the LP12 started up. It takes a few seconds for the motor to get the record spinning at 33.3 rpm. but once the red LED dimmed to confirm that the proper speed had been reached, I carefully lowered the stylus onto the outer grooves and took my listening seat.

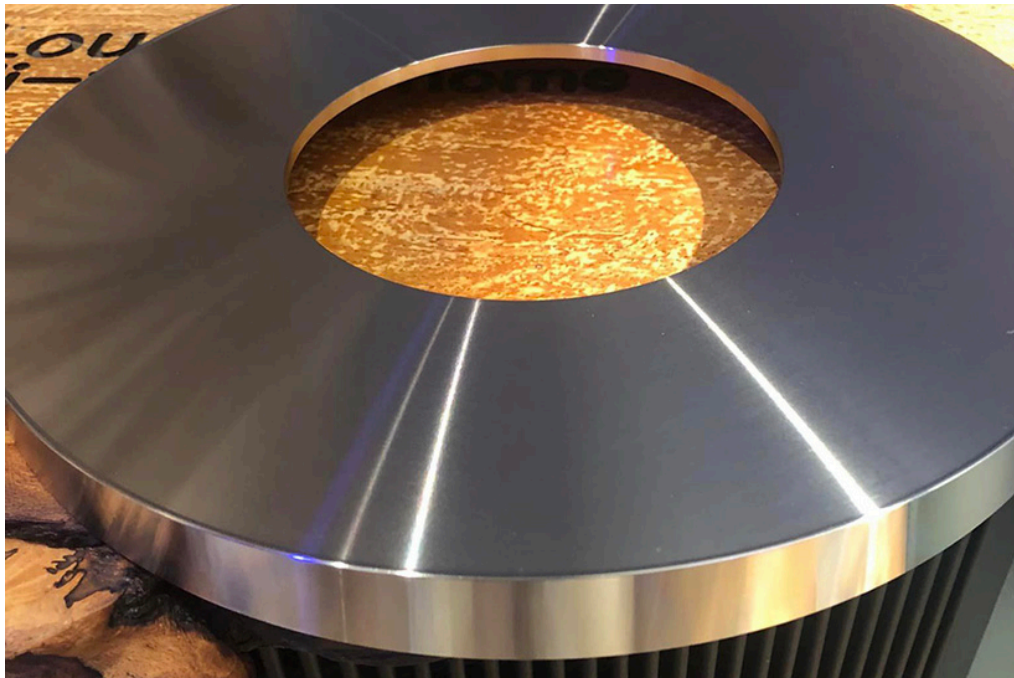
In truth, up until that point I had felt that my LP12 was as good a record player as I could ever hope to own. I have loved the way music flows from it and that it is unashamedly analogue in the way it presents the sound. The first minute or so of Taxman brought me to the realisation that I was wrong. The difference that the Revolver was making was very obvious. Suddenly I felt that I had moved from the front row of the auditorium into Studio 2 at Abbey Road with the band. Every instrument seemed more clearly defined, voices more realistic and the skill of all concerned laid bare to be admired more than ever.

Following my chosen protocol, I played side one once more, this time with the Evenstar perched on the Parlophone record label. To my amazement this lifted the performance again. This time it was more subtle than it had been on the original outer platter, gave me access to a

Tangerine Audio Revolver

tad more detail, letting me hear each singer more clearly when voices sang in harmony, for example.

Thereafter, I left the Revolver in place and ran through my usual repertoire of favourite albums, including inevitably *Let It Bleed*, and every single one of them derived the same benefit from this system upgrade. Music seemed to have more life, more height, width and depth. I started delving into different musical genres in my collection, and of course the enhanced LP12 sounded superb with all of them.



During my time with the Revolver I received a copy of the new pressing of *The Yes Album*, released as part of the Atlantic 75 series of reissues. It is a co-operative effort between Rhino, the reissue specialists, and Analogue Productions, celebrating 75 years of music from Atlantic.. I now have several of these and without fail they have been deeply impressive. The Yes release was especially enticing as it has been on my Desert Island disc list since its release. I saw the band playing it in its entirety at what was then the Guildford Civic Hall in February 1971, and that remains one of my most fondly remembered gigs of all time. This new release is a 45rpm double album, giving much more space for the remastering engineers across four sides of flawless vinyl. I lowered the stylus on to side one and Yours Is No Disgrace came at me like an express train. It was genuinely astonishing – in a good way. Nine minutes and 36 seconds of musical transcendence later I had to rouse myself to walk over and lift the arm back to its rest. The Revolver LP12 was made for this.

Summing Up

It would be incorrect for me to describe my attitude to the Revolver's potential as sceptical prior to using it, because I have the utmost respect for the quality and efficacy of all the Tangerine Audio parts that I have already purchased, and I know that Mark Digman would never release a product from which he himself did not derive an increase in sonic performance. He and I are both of the school that uses a system to listen to music rather uses music to listen to a system, to paraphrase Alan Parsons' famous observation. However, nothing had prepared me for the scale of the upgrade to my own LP12 brought about by the Revolver.

The original LP12 first took the audio world by storm more than 50 years ago, and has evolved over the decades to still be relevant as we approach the end of the first quarter of the twenty-first century. That is in itself a magnificent achievement. Today it faces fierce competition from a myriad of rivals, many of which are equally worthy of praise. However, if you are an LP12 owner, it is reassuring to know that there are still new ways available of improving its already splendid performance. The Revolver outer platter deserves an audition on your LP12. If like me you are amazed at the way it improves the sound from your lovely Linn player you will, I suspect, find it almost impossible to resist.



The ear is all about great music and great sound. It is written by hard bitten audio enthusiasts who strive to find the most engaging, entertaining and great value components and music of the highest calibre. This really is what living is all about.