

GARRARD 501-TIME MACHINE

The Garrard 501 will take you back to the good old days- musically. Your vinyl collection will be transformed.

I haven't listened to the Beatles Blue Album for a long time. Side A " Strawberry Fields " flows from the loudspeakers. I remember the day when I first heard this track on the radio. How incredible it seemed, and when we get to " Penny Lane " I'm thrilled. At that time my parents had no Hi Fi equipment just a Philips tube radio with magic eye tuning. In those days broadcasting studios didn't use any old turntable but superb heavy duty EMT's, not direct or belt drive, but idler drive.

I've got no concrete proof but I have a feeling that the Garrard 501 is giving the music the same emotional power that these tracks had when I first heard them on the radio, as a thirteen year old boy. When stereo came to our home, evolving from a basic setup to a costly high end system , interest in the Beatles faded, bit by bit. Thanks to the Garrard 501 with idler drive just like the excellent EMT's , I was back in 1967. Or am I dreaming.....

The story of Garrard is unique. At it's peak this British company (Swindon based) employed more than 4000 people. In the early 1980's this famous marque went bust. Thousands of robust idler drive Garrard 301 and 401's had been sold and required occasional attention,. Enter Terry O'Sullivan

AN IDLER WHEEL, SOME MISTAKE SURELY ?

Terry is a real enthusiast and is ably assisted by Nigel Pearson and Martina Schoener the German side of Garrard. He acquired the Garrard brand name and restores 301 and 401,s in his small and bijou workshop. You can buy a fully reconditioned and reworked Garrard 301 with a 3 year guarantee for £2695.00

If you want more you'll have to dig a bit deeper. A new Garrard 501 (without arm) starts at £10,500.00. The standard model has an aluminium chassis and motor cradle. A reference model " The Inspiration " using stainless steel . For these parts the price is £2000 more. We tested the 501 with an Origin Live Conqueror Tone Arm and Lyra Argo cartridge. This graceful slightly retro deck has the charm of the 1950's but is in fact cutting edge technology.

The idea of building a new Garrard originated in the 1990's and by 1999 a reviewer from "Audio", Bernhard Rielschel, tested an early 501 in "Audiophile " magazine (issue 2/99). It was already a fine deck with great potential but not yet perfected . The weakness of the idler drive, rumble measured at -69dB was not yet state of the art. However , the problem with belt drive is that although the measured performance may be excellent the belt itself ,weather round or flat , causes tiny inaccuracies in musical texture. The idler system, on the other hand , mercilessly explores deeper into the music.

People are reminded of old cheap and cheerful record players when they think of idler drive turntables (and, as I said earlier , the wireless sounded better) but the Garrard 501's quality and precision of manufacture is the polar opposite of cheap and cheerful, only the best will do.

PRECISION IS EVERYTHING

O'Sullivan and Pearson are not satisfied with off the shelf parts. So they get their own components built, by hand picked specialists, to record breaking standards of precision with the utmost care. The idler wheel that transmits drive from the inner edge of the platter receives very close attention for example. The power supply and control unit are amongst the finest and have been subjected to exhaustive lab tests.

(View from technical consultant)

Before Peter Schuller , a lab tester put the 501 on the test bench he did a listening test " That's how a turntable should sound "he said, based on 20 years experience. Then after several hours of technical tests he added "That's how a turntable should measure "unlike the early 501 the rumble was -79dB, a very good result. What fascinates technical testers most is a look at the lab test graphs. A dozen test runs were carried out and each graph came out exactly alike.

A WINNER IN THE LAB

A belt drive deck may measure similarly and will rotate 33 1/3 times a minute, the speed will in fact fluctuate slightly and this can affect vinyl reproduction.

Using an old direct cut disc ("Super Tough" JVC) with a very accurately recorded Grand piano the Garrard proves it's absolute stability. Other decks wow and flutter (waver) on these kind of Passages, not the 501.

The unique precision and grip of the deck means that it is like hearing for the first time again. Tying out LP's that have become old friends I reached into the archive for ' Heavy Whether ' by Whether Report and lowered the stylus onto a track called Teen Town. Here Jaco Protorius plays Bass and Drums and its incredible how accurately the 501 reproduces these multifaceted instruments. I've not heard it as good as this before. What we get are fragments of what the Garrard delivers (whole) complete. Pick any LP from your collection and you'll find the same . You don't even need the stainless steel "Inspiration " model , the standard will still do this. It leaves other decks behind.It furthers the state of the art in turntables, and with the Inspiration blacks are blacker, whites are whiter closer to the original - The new Reference at AUDIO magazine

CONCLUSION

Things have changed at " Audio " since the Garrard took it's place in the listening room. We normally use CD players on group test days but now we are focusing on LP's again. With the 501 you can hear more detail and play at higher volume without fatigue. You don't have to use high end amplifiers and speakers . The dramatic difference in measured performance will be revelled sonically with any decent and speakers. Ambitious high end lovers must listen to the 501 at least once. Many will happily join the three month waiting list.