

# CLEARAUDIO MASTER REFERENCE

AMG Wood, Master TQ-1 & Goldfinger V2 Diamond

*Incredibly subtle and stable sound from vinyl LPs*

PRICE AMG: £13,900; TQ-1: £4,830; Goldfinger: £6,500 CONTACT Audio Reference ■ 01252 702705 ■ www.clearaudio.de

Most turntables with leanings toward the high-end are expensive. Precision engineering and costly materials equal money, probably always will. But there is expensive and *expensive*. The Clearaudio Master Reference AMG Wood falls squarely into the 'arm and a leg' category. Except, the arm is extra.

Just so there is no misunderstanding, £13,900 buys you the turntable. The Master TQ-1 linear tracking arm and Goldfinger V2 Diamond cartridge are extra – £4,830 and £6,500 respectively. Now then, calm down. Don't fret or write angry letters to your MP – it's only money. If you are a Premiership footballer (or editor of *Hi-Fi Choice*) such things are easily affordable. And even if they are not, you can always pray your Lottery numbers come up.

At this point, anyone with an ounce of sanity will probably be asking whether any turntable really justify such a huge price tag. Not just in terms of materials and engineering, but actual results.

Now I'm glad you asked me that, he said, reverting to politician mode. But, before I answer, there are a few things you should know. The turntable under review is the Master Reference AMG Wood, a more expensive variant of the Master Reference with a three-layer chassis, each section utilising special bullet-proof wood (Panzerholz) and aluminium sandwich construction.

This is to eliminate resonance, although it might also be useful if you live in one of the world's trouble spots, like south London. It means the base support and sub-chassis are incredibly rigid and very heavy and solid. The massive turntable platter is made from silicon acrylic and is some 8cm thick.

The main centre bearing is around 2cm in diameter and very accurately made. The platter is belt-driven by three heavy powerful synchronous motors, and the belts are thin and white like vermicelli. The motors are controlled by a special Clearaudio accurate power generator supply that provides a clean noise-and-distortion-free AC signal. Speeds of 33 and 45rpm are provided.

The Clearaudio Master TQ-1 (Improved) linear tracking arm is a complex device, constructed from acrylic, brass, and lead antimony alloy, and is said to be specifically tuned for use on the Master Reference turntable. Being a linear tracker, there is no problem with cartridge tracing distortion. The record is played the way it was originally cut, tangentially.

Last, but certainly not least, is the Clearaudio Goldfinger V2 Diamond moving-coil pick-up cartridge. This is an improved version of the Goldfinger and features a boron cantilever with 24ct gold coils, plus a 14ct gold-plated body with a base shaped like a crown of fingers to

dissipate resonance. To impart a touch of luxury, there is a small diamond embedded in the front. It is a fairly heavy pick-up, weighing 16g, and it gives a healthy 0.9mV output. Tracking force is a high 2.8g, and the diamond tip is a Micro HD Nadelschliff type. The cantilever is long and rather exposed, but the supplied stylus guard offers complete protection.

As a design, the turntable is fairly simple, and assembling it is logical and straightforward. Installing the arm and cartridge proved more difficult, and careful adjustment is needed. It took a few hours before the deck was up and running, but I am a bit out of practise these days.

To be honest, for reasons too convoluted and boring to go into here, I have always had misgivings about linear tracking arms. The concept is fine; the difficulty is trying to make it work. Often, the 'cure' seems worse than the disease. But with the TQ-1 there are advantages; for one thing, you can have a short very rigid arm.

The TQ-1's arm is made from a solid-quartz rod with an alloy headshell. Effectively, the arm part is suspended in a cradle that is free to move across the surface of the record. One benefit is a lowering of mass, and an increase in arm rigidity. Any resonances and break-up modes will be well outside the audio band, and the bass resonance frequency should be low and well controlled.

Certainly, the bass quality produced by this combination is remarkable and exceptional. The bass is extremely deep and tuneful, yet clean and surprisingly nimble. You get clearly defined notes with distinct pitches, rather than just a heavy thud-thud-thud. Indeed, the overall tonality is quite light and airy, with a bright transparent balance that sounds open and neutral. Surface noise proved very low, and the music emanated from an inky-black near silent background.

Clearly, the arm and cartridge are in the highest class. But all this would come to naught unless the turntable provided a solid foundation, which the Master Reference most certainly does. It was immediately noticeable how solid and stable the music sounded. There was no hint of pitch waver, literally none at

all. Slight wow is something I am very sensitive to, and few turntables sound 100 per cent stable. But the Master Reference does; unless an LP is pressed off centre, it is effectively wow-free.

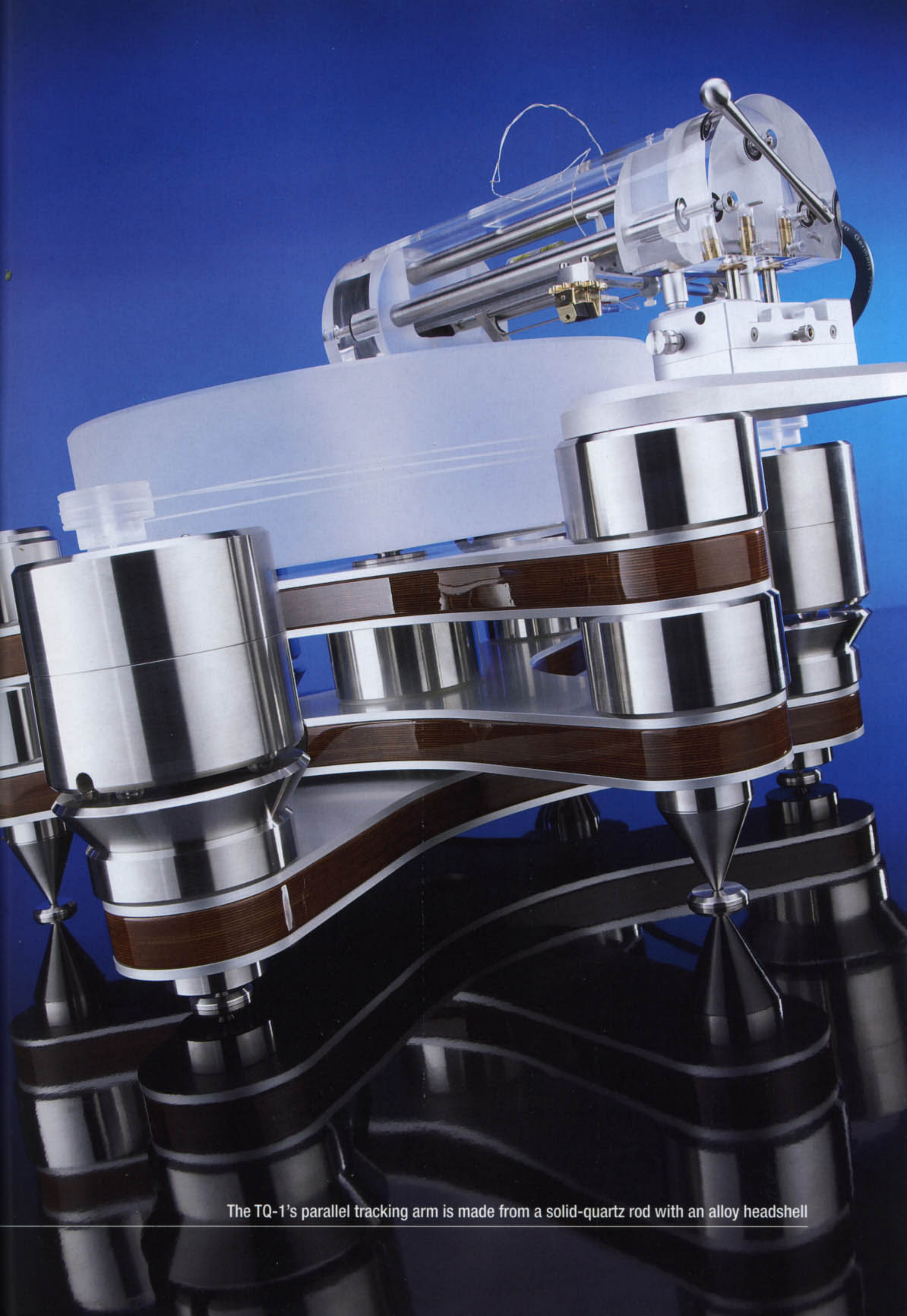
Of course, the price is absurdly high, making normal value-for-money judgements impossible. But the Master Reference package does deliver what it says on the tin. And while it is not cheap, it does give that final *n*th degree of performance – the difference is audible.

Now, where did I put that lottery ticket... ■■■

Jimmy Hughes







The TQ-1's parallel tracking arm is made from a solid-quartz rod with an alloy headshell