Toughness

Tonearms are amongst the things in record playback where a few real innovations are still possible here and there. As this beautiful piece here, for example, convincingly proves.

A connection cable according to SME standard is plugged in from below

I can't remember exactly when I first came across Alexey Korf online - it was quite a while ago. It was the blog that he meticulously maintains on his website, where he keeps publishing things about record playback that you simply won't find anywhere else. He delves deep into very specific problems and documents his research with impressive thoroughness, because: Alexey Korf puts a considerable amount of metrological effort into his research. For example, he has spent a long time thinking about how to determine the vibration behaviour of headshells using measurement technology. One result of this is his own ceramic headshell with SME connection, which is available to buy for 200 euros.

Alexey Korf is of Russian descent and runs his company in Klosterneuburg in Lower Austria - which in itself is a very exotic constellation. However, this does provide a certain geographical proximity to Munich and so the opportunity arose to meet the man in person at the High End show a few years ago. The result is this story about Alexey's new 'big' tonearm, of which he is understandably incredibly proud. As you can see from his blog, the beginnings of the

The TA-AF9 has an effective mass of 21 grams

development go back to at least 2018. Now it's ready and I'm delighted to be one of the first to report on it.
As the type designation suggests, the TA-AF9/10 is available in nine or ten inch effective length. Both versions cost the same, namely 3200 euros. I find the fact that the sometimes brazen surcharges for a slightly longer arm tube are saved here very appealing. There is a choice of a Linn-compatible flange or an SME 'sliding base'. I had the latter, which costs 200 euros extra. The installation distance of the nine-inch head is 214 millimetres, its effective mass is 21 grams. In his blog, Alexey Korf provides impressive metrological evidence that you shouldn't worry too much about the effective mass; in practice, this parameter is far less important than assumed.

Bearing technology

The first big surprise comes with the question of the bearing: the TA-AF9 is in part a gimbal-mounted tonearm. Two silicon nitride bearings are used for the vertical deflection, which have one of the lowest breakaway torques of all available roller bearings. A bearing based on the 'Flexure Pivot' principle is used for horizontal deflection. The function is achieved by the bearing elements being subjected to bending loads. This works excellently in the range of rather small deflections, has no breakaway torque, no friction, does not need to be lubricated, has an unlimited service life and is also electrically conductive. The principle is over 60 years old and it is astonishing that it has taken until today for it to find its way into a tonearm. Korf has packaged it elegantly, the bearing block of the arm looks completely innocent from the outside and feels exactly like a classic gimbal-mounted tonearm. There is also an azimuth adjustment option: after loosening a screw at the top of the bearing housing, the arm tube can be rotated. An indicator shows the zero position.

The arm tube

The tonearm tube is a relatively thin ceramic tube. Nevertheless, it is twice as strong as a steel tube of the same weight and even six times as strong as an equivalent aluminium tube. This makes it a perfect match for the ceramic headshell that adorns the front end of the arm.

Teammates

Turntable:
· TechDAS Air Force III

Pickup Cardridges:
· Rega ND3
· DS Audio DS003

Phono preamplifier:
· DIY Röhrenphonovorstufe
· Soulnote E-3

Line preamplifier:
· NEM PRA-5

Power amplifier:
· 2 x Yamaha P-2200

Loudspeaker:
· JBL 4355

Competitors

Tonearms:
· Reed 1X
· Schick 12"

The counterweight of the TA-AF9 is designed in two parts. The small part is only needed for heavy cartridges

Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds – Ghosteen

What we played

Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds
Ghosteen

Peter, Paul And Mary
S/T

Dillon
Kind

LA4
Just Friends

A separate cable is used to earth the pick-up housing, as the headshell and arm tube are clearly electrically non-conductive. Cardas strands are used for the internal cabling, which are drawn into an extremely delicate copper braid for shielding.
The scope of delivery includes a two-part counterweight. The second part is only used for heavy pickups. The height of the TA-AF9 can of course be adjusted. If it is used in the SME base, as shown here, this clamps the arm shaft at the desired height. The desired height can be set using a knurled screw so that the setting does not change when the slide is moved. The same applies to the Linn flange. Here, too, the designer has avoided the usual unspeakable grub screw, which presses on the arm shaft and inevitably scratches it.

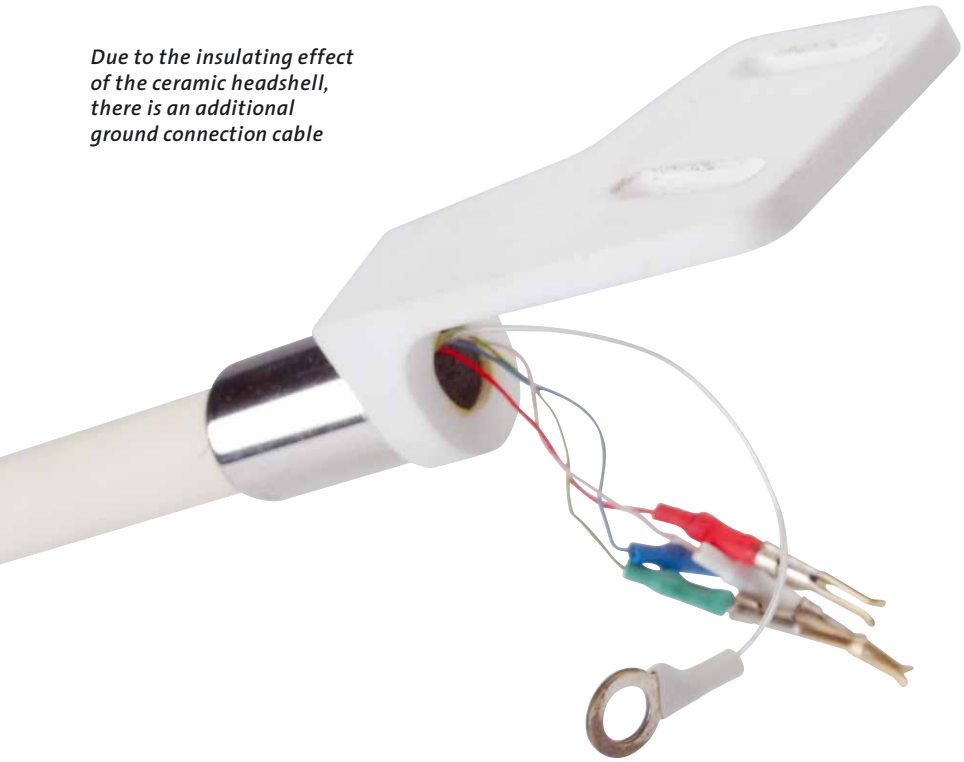
The SME 'sliding base' allows easy mounting on a variety of turntables

Among other things, the bearing block conceals the tricky flexure bearing

Adjustment template

Korf includes a special adjustment template with the arm. The neat 3D-printed part is clipped onto the arm tube directly in front of the headshell and has a groove at the front in which the diamond ideally comes to rest. Sounds good, but only works to a very limited extent in practice. On the one hand, it only does the trick with cartridges of a certain (relatively large) height; with flatter cartridges, the stylus is too far away from the groove to be able to position it properly. Of course, the Korf can also be perfectly adjusted with any standard adjustment template.
the manufacturer recommends the one from Dr Feickert.
Anti-skating? That's also available. It can be adjusted in the tried and tested manner using a small knurled wheel from the base of the arm. Alexey Korf quite rightly argues that he is not using the best bearing technology on the planet in order to add new breakaway torques via an anti-skating system using a boom, thread and weight.

Cessaro GmbH
Heidestraße 2
35625 Hüttenberg
Germany
Phone: +49(0)6441 200961-0
https://www.cessaro.de



Due to the insulating effect of the ceramic headshell, there is an additional ground connection cable

The anti-skating is adjusted from the side using a knurled wheel

Assembly

Assembly proves to be completely unproblematic. In this context, I gave the Air Force III a new SME base that was as compact as possible, on which the Korf fitted perfectly. In terms of operation, the arm is completely unproblematic. It feels good, everything looks high quality, the lift has just the right amount of damping and it is obviously compatible with a large number of cartridges. Even with my new favourite MM, the Rega ND-3, the Korf reveals a striking degree of clarity and transparency. Under the ceramic headshell, the 230-Euro pickup immediately becomes a few classes more expensive. And so I'm amazed at the fervour with which the combination reproduces Nick Cave's dark statement 'Ghosteen', how energetic, emotional and driven the Australian gets down to business here. Tonally, the Korf is completely inconspicuous. It produces a beautifully colourful but largely unobtrusive bass range that is neither lean nor exaggerated. This is also evident when the DS Audio DS003 takes the MM's place. Of course, it's a different world in the low frequencies, but the Korf domesticates the extreme low-frequency capabilities of the electro-optical pickup in an exemplary manner. The 2013 remaster of the 1962 Peter, Paul and Mary album reproduces the combination with a dynamic range that is hard to believe from a 1962 recording, but nothing seems exaggerated. The vocals stand as if nailed down, nothing trembles or even wobbles. In fact, this is probably one of the most spectacular tonearm/system combinations I have come across over the years. The brittle organ of the Brazilian singer Dillon sounds as intense as rarely experienced and anyone who still claims that analogue sounds soft and a bit cosy is beyond help.

Holger Barske

Korf Audio TA-AF9

· Price	3,200 Euro
· Distribution	Korf Audio, Klosterneuburg, Österreich
· Internet	www.korfaudio.com
· Warranty	1 years
· Weight	approx. 500 g

Korf Audio
TA-AF9

International 3/24

»Alexey Korf's new tonearm is a firework of good ideas and a sonic masterpiece: the cartridges used have hardly ever sounded so direct, transparent and intense.