

Soulines Kubrick DCX/ Timestep tonearm

A new name in turntables from Serbia and an equally new arm from Timestep in the UK make for a very stylish combination. But do they sound as good as they look?

Review: **Adam Smith** Lab: **Paul Miller**

It's not every day one comes across a turntable named after a film director but the Soulines Kubrick DCX really has been christened in honour of Stanley Kubrick. Soulines is no stranger to this naming practice, its other models being the Elgar and Satie (composers), Dostoyevsky (novelist) and Hermes (Greek god). Designer Igor Gligorov says he drew inspiration for the look of the £2995 Kubrick from the spinning, double-wheeled Space Station V depicted in the film director's movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* and that the name naturally followed.

SHAKE, RATTLE 'N' ROLL

The company itself is another relatively new brand among a band of turntable manufacturers that seem to be growing quietly in number in Eastern Europe. Pro-Ject in the Czech Republic is clearly the most well known, closely followed by Kuzma in Slovenia. But other names, such as J Sikora and Zontek from Poland and SAM in Croatia, are gradually gathering awareness. The region has always boasted a strong heritage when it comes to mechanical design and manufacturing, with many well-known consumer electronics brands owning factories in the area. It therefore comes as no surprise that newer turntable designers would gradually appear.

In the case of Soulines, however, Igor Gligorov has a degree in Mechanical Design and Engineering and confesses to being almost obsessive about vibration control. After commencing operations as a recycler of old turntables into new [see boxout, p45] Gligorov created Soulines in 2009.

RIGHT: Pictured with its cork/rubber mat in place, this overhead shot also reveals the 33.3/45rpm speed selector and trim pots [far left]. Note the continuous curve of the Timestep tonearm's titanium tube (minus headshell here)

In his own words, his primary aim was to 'combine musicality and beauty in an electro-mechanical object that plays vinyl records with exceptional sound quality, and ease of use and set-up'.

To this end, extensive development was carried out using CAD – specifically a program called SolidWorks. The great advantage of this approach is that it allows the modelling of stresses, vibrational behaviour and the mechanical interaction of components before any lathe or CNC machine is fired up. In the case of the Kubrick DCX, this has led to the use of a highly rigid aluminium plinth and sub-plinth built from differently shaped blocks. These are coupled together, strategically damped and mounted on three adjustable feet. In

the words of Soulines itself, 'even though the Kubrick DCX looks asymmetrical or unbalanced, it is in perfect balance, providing smooth platter rotation together with steady tracking'.

The 3.2kg platter is acrylic and 40mm thick, and runs on an inverted main bearing machined from solid brass. Drive is supplied from a DC motor via a white high-precision belt. Speed is changed with a switch, and both 33.3 and 45rpm speeds are adjustable using trimpots found on the top of the motor cover. A combined cork/rubber mat is supplied, as is the company's 'Protractor' LP for cartridge alignment. This features Baerwald, Stevenson and Loefgren options, so you can experiment to your heart's

'It has energy and exuberance that many will find addictive'





content. The armboard is replaceable and pre-drilled SME, Rega or Jelco/Linn types can be supplied to order.

As the Kubrick DCX is distributed by Timestep in the UK, our review sample was supplied with that company's new and highly distinctive looking T-609 tonearm. This can lay claim to a strong pedigree, being based on a current model from a European OEM manufacturer, but with a handful of tweaks and special options specified by Timestep's Dave Cawley.

JUICY FRUIT

The arm's pedigree stretches back even further when you consider that the OEM design itself is based on classic transcription arms of the 1950s and 1960s. The arm bears more than a passing resemblance to the original 'banana' arm – the EMT 997 from 1974 – and it is intended for use with higher-mass cartridges, such as Ortofon SPUs and the Denon DL-103. That said, the T-609's construction is bang up to date, featuring

ABEC7 bearings in a stainless steel bearing block, and frictionless magnetic anti-skating set by a delightful micrometer control. For the Timestep version, the armtube is made from titanium and the company issues its own PTFE and gold output connector to the manufacturer for free to replace the original item.

The arm is available in 9, 10 or 12in lengths (designated T-609, T-610 and T-612 respectively) and all cost £1350. The arm mount is separate, costing an additional £50, and is available in Linn/Jelco or SME fitments. Timestep also supplied one of its tonearm cables for the review, which retails at £50, plus the excellent £59 Audio-Technica AT-LH13 headshell (the LH15 and 18 are also options). This brings the total to £4504 but the complete package is on offer for £4250.

I would add a note of caution here, however. When I came to install my Denon DL-103 into the AT-LH13 headshell, there was insufficient clearance for the output tags to connect. Furthermore, the range

ABOVE: Simple, but elegant, the Kubrick's modular construction confers a high degree of flexibility. The acrylic platter surface must be kept scrupulously clean...

of overhang adjustment on the headshell, which is quite short, was not sufficient to enable me to obtain the correct alignment. I therefore used an Ortofon LH-2000 headshell for the review.

TRUMP CARD

With the turntable set up and spinning, it soon became apparent that the deck and arm gel very well and that Timestep has played a bit of a trump card in putting the two together. The combination sounded delightfully expressive and emotive, at the same time revealing a fine sense of purity in whatever was played.

Whereas sometimes instruments can be lent something of a 'flavour' by a turntable, albeit a very palatable one, this pairing gave the sense that it was pulling exactly what was needed to be heard from a recording. Leading edges of notes arrived at just the right moment while the tail ends faded away with a well-judged sense of atmosphere. The deck proved masterful at maintaining an easy sense of rhythmical flow, never missing a beat.

The Soulines and Timestep combination is one of the most neutral I have heard at the price. However, this is not to say that it sounds a little safe or dull. In fact, when called for the pairing has an energy and exuberance that many will find addictive.

At the bottom end, I was struck very early on by the bass performance, which was big, beefy and solid. The kick drum strikes on the introduction to Steve Earle's 'Copperhead Road' from the album of the same name [MCA Records MCF3426] ↗

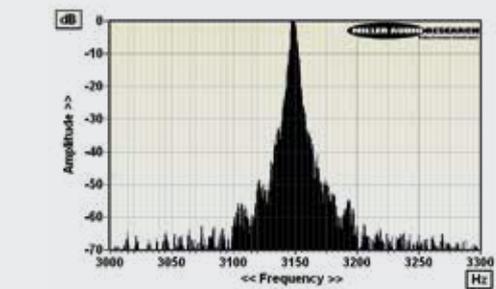
WHAT GOES AROUND...

Soulines CEO Igor Gligorov's first venture into turntable manufacturing came courtesy of a company called 'tt recycled' that built new items from old. It offered upgrades and modifications to customers' existing turntables, as well as accessories. These included the cork/rubber mat seen here, the 'Protractor' LP and a base platform. All normal enough, though some of the turntable designs were magnificently outrageous. Examples of these decks can still be seen on the company's website (www.ttrecycled.com/engpages/recttseng.html) and, as it explains, the idea was to re-use those old decks languishing in cupboards and attics, some of which were highly capable. Gligorov's creations are typically arresting, but my favourite is the White, which used the motor from a C.E.C deck with the platter from a Technics deck and a BSR arm. Then there's the Mini-PC, which rests on a base made from a washing machine pulley, and the Half Moon, which, in tt recycled's own words, comprises 'several different turntables, a VCR machine, a wooden barrel cover, hockey pucks and scrap MDF'. Yes, really...

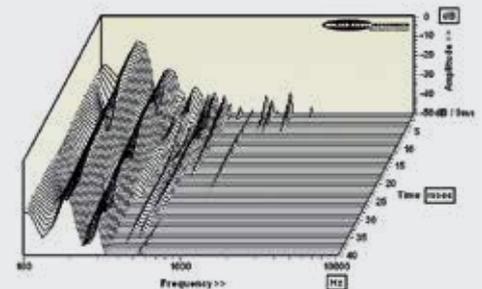
SOULINES KUBRICK/TIMESTEP

The combination of an inverted brass/stainless steel bearing and acrylic platter was first unveiled in the original Pink Triangle deck of the early '80s, but Soulines' Kubrick looks to be a more substantial example. The 40mm-thick, 3.2kg platter is machined from an acrylic laminate and driven via a soft belt and medium-torque DC motor which – as supplied – was running about 2.5% slow. The spectrum [Graph 1, below] was obtained after adjustment and betrays rather less low-rate drift than we've seen from other DC designs, although peak wow is still moderate at 0.06% and flutter not dissimilar at 0.05%. Start-up time is a modest 6 secs. Through-bearing rumble is –68.4dB (DIN-B wtd, re. 1kHz/5cm/sec) although noise is successfully attenuated through the acrylic platter where through-groove rumble/noise – with or without the cork/rubber mat – is very low at –71.6dB.

The Timestep T-609 tonearm is evidently quite 'lively', its curved titanium tube offering a broad low-Q resonance at a low 55Hz [off the scale of Graph 2] coupled with secondary bending and twisting modes, and/or harmonics, at 96Hz, 180Hz and 280Hz, the latter two at higher amplitude and not especially well damped. Higher frequency mid/treble modes are certainly less aggressive and the claimed ABEC7-tolerance bearings were certainly free of detectable play while offering a low ~15-20mg stiction/friction in both planes. The counterweight and magnetic bias adjust are essentially uncalibrated while the unspecified 'high effective mass' rather depends, in practice, on your choice of headshell. A figure of 20g will be typical, suiting high mass/low compliance MCs, although those 'energetic' varieties that exhibit obvious needle talk should probably be avoided. PM



ABOVE: Wow and flutter re. 3150Hz tone at 5cm/sec (plotted ±150Hz, 5Hz per minor division)



ABOVE: Cumulative tonearm resonant decay spectrum, illustrating various bearing, pillar and 'tube' vibration modes spanning 100Hz-10kHz over 40msec

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Turntable speed error at 33.33rpm	33.29rpm (-0.13%)
Time to audible stabilisation	6 seconds
Peak Wow/Flutter	0.06% / 0.05%
Rumble (silent groove, DIN B wtd)	-71.6dB
Rumble (through bearing, DIN B wtd)	-68.4dB
Hum & Noise (unwtd, rel. to 5cm/sec)	-58.5dB
Power Consumption	2W (1W idle)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	470x160x350mm / 14kg



ABOVE: The Timestep tonearm accepts an SME-style DIN adapter so, while the company offers a proprietary cable, this may be changed/upgraded at a later date. Note also the earth cable and flying female PSU adapter directly under the DC motor

hit home with an impact and snappiness that was very impressive. It was not all bang and slam, though; the bass guitar notes on the title track of Donald Fagen's *Morph The Cat* [Reprise Records 9362-49975-1] were as detailed and well-rounded as I have heard them on any turntable at this level.

This continued to be the case on tracks with a driving but simple bass, the only tiny drawback revealing itself with material featuring more complex low-end action. As an example, later in the Steve Earle track, more bass drums roll across the rear of the soundstage and things sounded a little reticent compared to when the track is played on rival packages.

In order to find the cause of this I mounted the arm on my Michell Gyro SE turntable and played the same track again. The presentation was similar, leading me to conclude that it is part of the arm's character. In this one area, it doesn't quite live up to the likes of my usual SME 309 arm for bass clarity and separation.

BEYOND REPROACH

This single niggle aside, the arm's performance is largely beyond reproach and it's happy with a wide range of cartridges. Although most of my reviewing was carried out with the Denon DL-103, which really sang, I also used an Ortofon 2M Black MM [HFN Mar '11] with fine results. In both cases the T-609 showed that it can dig right to the heart of the music.

At the top end, the Kubrick DCX and T-609 offered a delicious sense of clarity and openness that pulled performers expertly into the room. This character extended down into the midband as well. The effect here was to ensure instruments occupied their rightful place within the

soundstage while sounding exactly as they should. 'The Awakening Of A Woman (Burnout)' from the Cinematic Orchestra's *Man With A Movie Camera* LP [Ninja Tune ZEN78] was a perfect case in point, the stringed instruments being brought expertly to the fore. The percussion took its rightful place in leading the track, with the subtle cymbal effects crisp yet never overbearing.

As a final observation, a spot of experimentation during the review did lead me to conclude that the supplied rubber/cork mat was of benefit to the sound. Without it, high frequencies were very impressive indeed, but its use on the platter made sibilants that little more precise and cymbals and hi-hats just that little bit crisper.

This paid real dividends on the likes of 'A Man Alone' from the soundtrack to *The Ipcress File* [Decca DL79124] where the frenetic percussion that underpins the track was an absolute joy. The deck and arm kept up the breathless pace without breaking a sweat, while missing nothing that was going on behind this main action. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Not only are the Soulines Kubrick DCX and Timestep T-609 compelling products in their own right but, fortuitously, they also work very well in combination. The turntable is well engineered, looks like a piece of sculpture and sounds very fine indeed. Meanwhile, Timestep's new titanium tonearm is the icing on the cake, sounding especially sweet with low compliance moving-coil pick-ups.

Sound Quality: 81%

