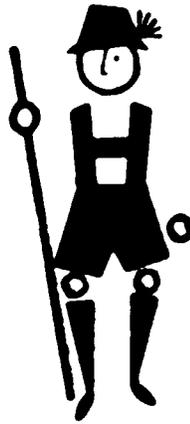


# The Legacy of **THORENS**

## "TD" Series Turntable Classics



by Dr. Stefano  
Pasini

*Put on your lederhosen  
and spin a platter on that  
Gepanzert Plattenspieler...*

In the history of home audio, the name 'Thorens' and 'turntable' are more or less synonymous. Very few audiophiles haven't bought and used, at one time or another, one of these beautifully-engineered machines, either of the Swiss-era or of the later years, when their factory was moved to Germany. Wonderfully well-engineered, built so sturdily that they look like they're armour-plated, heavy, completely reliable and, if the need ever arises, hard-working like real professional decks, the best Thorens turntables are a joy to own and a pleasure to use.

The Thorens tradition is now carried on in Lahr with models like the '521/520', the sophisticated 'Ambience', the versatile '2001' and many other excellent decks. But the two real 'Golden Classics' of this marque were born many years ago; they are as different as they might be, but the Thorens 'TD-124' and 'TD-125' were, and still are, top-of-the-line machines. Like Ian Fleming's diamonds, Thorens are forever.

The history of Thorens began in 1883 in St. Croix, Switzerland, when Hermann Thorens founded a firm for the manufacture of clockwork for carillons, cigarette lighters, razors and harmonicas that eventually expanded to employ a workforce of 1,200 in 1929. Disc-playing Thorens machines were already well-known even before World War II, as the firm had already probed the world of music reproduction since the late Twenties with direct-drive motors (a Thorens patent of 1929!), 'Miratona-Radio' receivers, 'Discophones' gramophones and

even separate cartridges, like the 'Omnix' (1933) that required a tracking force of 'only' 110 grams, quite moderate for the times.

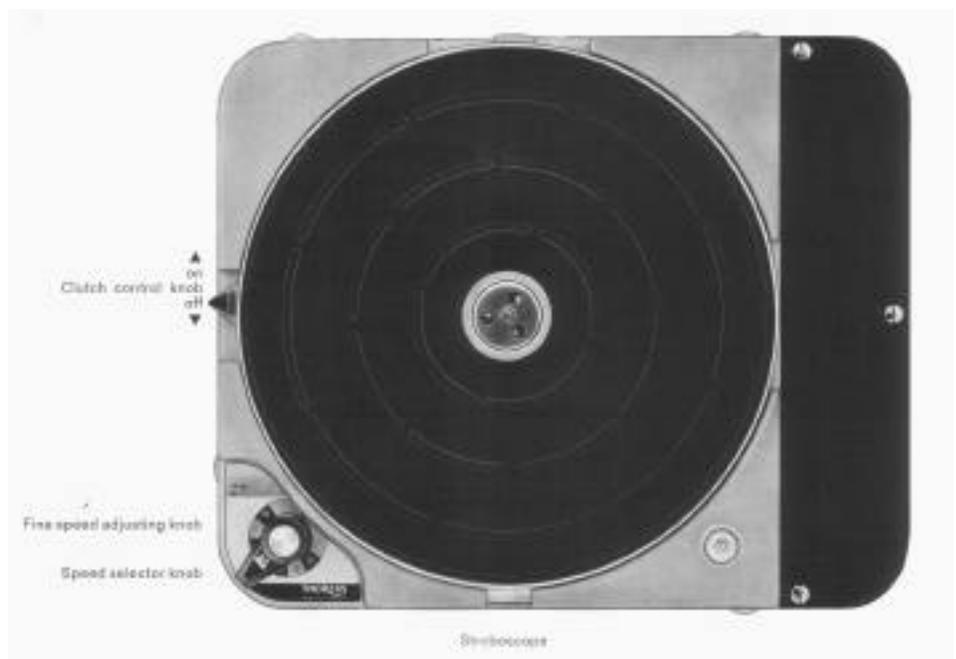
Switzerland just barely managed to stay out of the catastrophe of the war, and between 1939 and 1945 Thorens built, amongst other items, high-quality disc-cutting lathes for the Swiss PTT. In 1943 it introduced into its tiny home market a new record changer, the 'CD30', followed by the 'CD50', 'CD43', and various other models, simple motors and platters with no pretense of 'hi-end' performance, something for the average home customer of the times.

On the other hand, the market for sound-

reproduction gear was expanding, and the pros were eager to buy new machines. After the end of the war, radio broadcasts resumed in earnest, and Swiss firms like Studer or Nagra, not having been bombed flat during the war like their German colleagues, were ready to build new advanced machines for the well-heeled professionals. Before the cautious managers of Thorens could build a deck to fulfill the needs of the radio stations, Wilhelm Franz beat them and the rest of Europe's industry with his formidable EMT '927' (1950), the Alpha and, for 27 years, also the Omega of the broadcast turntables.

The Thorens' forthcoming 'high-fidelity' turntable remained in the making for a long time. It is not unreasonable to think that in the process they exchanged data and information with EMT, as the relations with Herr Franz in Lahr had always been good. This might explain why, when the first high-quality Thorens 'TD' finally appeared, it sported a clear and utterly reassuring EMT flavour. But one may also be excused for suspecting that the Thorens managers, before finalizing the design of their turntable, had taken a close look also at the excellent Garrard '301' (first introduced in 1953). In fact the Thorens 'TD124', being aimed not at the all-out 'broadcast' market but at the wealthy amateur, is closer in design, size and philosophy to the British machine than to the German Leviathan.

The '124' was introduced in 1957, at first as a motor chassis only, leaving the choice and installation of the tonearm up to the cus-



Top view of the famous Thorens TD-124



## ...finer for stereo...finer for mono

If you move in circles where component hi-fi is a by-word, you've no doubt heard about the Thorens TD-124 transcription turntable and its fabulous performance. But for late-comers we'd like to point up just a few of the really big features (non-technical readers may skip remarks in parentheses): • **Extra heavy table for constant speed** (10 lb rim-concentrated table insures low wow and flutter; higher moment of inertia than any similar table). • **Exact speed** ( $\pm 3\%$  adjustment on all speeds— $16\frac{2}{3}$ ,  $33\frac{1}{3}$ , 45, 78—with built-in illuminated strobe for setting after stylus is on record). • **Easy on records** (unique two-table design permits starts

after you've placed stylus, permits  $\frac{2}{3}$  rev. starts, makes cueing easy). • **Extremely low rumble** (mirror-finish main-bearing, nylon-seated ball-thrust-bearing reduce both vertical and horizontal rumble to a new low, so important for stereo). • **2-way motor rumble reduction** (both an extra-large idler and an ultra-compliant belt-drive keep motor vibration and speed variations from table). Driving parts electronically balanced. No costly base necessary (only \$9.00). 50/60 cycles, 100/250 volt operation.

These are just a few of the TD-124's features. Ask your dealer to tell you the whole story on the fabulous TD-124.

### Now two budget-priced TD turntables

These 4-speed turntables have same basic adjustable-speed precision-drive as famous TD-124 but you save two ways: (1) they come already equipped with stereo-wired professional arm without overhang making them ideal changer replacements. (2) Some TD features have been eliminated to save you money. But they still top the performance of every similar turntable and player on the market. TD-184 has semi-automatic operation. TD-134 is manually operated. Precision metal stroboscope (50/60 cycles) furnished with each unit. 100/250 volt operation. Wooden base only \$6.00.



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tomers. That's why today you find so many '124's fitted with SME, Empire, FR-64, Shure, Ortofon or even Rek-O-Kut tonearms. Then, in 1958, the stereo record was officially introduced, and almost simultaneously Thorens unveiled its first really high-quality arm: the 'BTD-12'. Every EMT enthusiast will recognize this classic design as an ancestor of the fabled '929' professional arm.

Later on, just as Garrard re-designed the '301' to produce its '401' (1964), Thorens modified the '124', introducing its 'MkII' version in 1966. The most significant improvement was probably the installation of the 'TP14' arm with a redesigned, lighter-looking headshell, minor tweaks being at the same time applied to motor and transmission. The elegant cream paint of the '124' was thought to be old-fashioned, so, with a decision that I personally find regrettable, it was changed to a more sober (some might say *duller*) medium-grey finish. The speed-change lever and the speed adjustment knob were modified as well. The overall layout was unchanged since it had proven to be a winner.

The main feature of the '124'/'124 MkII' is its extremely sturdy aluminium chassis; another is the unusual transmission, designed to combine the advantages of the two main drive systems of the time, the vibration-filtering qualities of the belt and the rigid coupling of the idler-wheel. A powerful synchronous motor (which in the USA, in the style of the times, was christened 'Roto-Drive') turns a pulley and a short, thick belt, this one then driving the stepped pulley, the idler wheel and finally the heavy 4.5 kilograms cast-iron platter, whose 14 mm shaft rotates in a high-quality main bearing. It works very well, though at the price of a hefty weight (almost 15 kilograms for a '124 MkII' with 'factory' arm and plinth) and a remarkable degree of mechanical complication. You only need to compare the underside of a '301' and of a '124' to understand ....

All the moving parts of the '124' are generously oversized, to enhance the stability and reliability of the turntable. The main platter is designed to be always rotating, like a big, heavy flywheel, whilst the actual platter is the light aluminium disc placed over it.

The speed can be finely adjusted by means of a magnetic brake controlled by the owner with the rotation of a small knob on top of the speed-selection lever, and checked with the aid of an illuminated stroboscope, whose dots are painted under the

outer edge of the main platter, constantly illuminated by an orange neon bulb, reflected by a mirror and visualized through a tiny window in front of the platter. Clearly this was an advantage over the Garrard '301', which at the time offered a 'strobe' platter only as an option and without on-board illumination.

Thorens allowed for the 16 rpm record, just in case, fitting a gear for this speed. The '124' was therefore one of the very few turntables that were born with a complete choice of speeds, 16, 33, 45 and 78 rpm.

Instead of opting for a pure 'Transcription Motor' approach like their British rival, Thorens decided to offer a chassis incorporating on its right side a wooden board, rigidly fixed with three screws to the underlying aluminium chassis, that could be drilled for the installation of any given 12" arm. The result is that the '124' and its arm form a reliable, vibration-free assembly with no possible reciprocal movement between arm and platter.

Though quite expensive (\$99.75 for the deck alone without tonearm at the time of its introduction in the USA), the '124' enjoyed very good success from the beginning. Its very pleasant lines and the high quality of its construction were strong selling points, and the integral armboard of the '124' was probably a real advantage over the Garrard, because, as Haden Boardman rightly pointed out in SP Vol.2 #1, in those years nearly nobody understood the need for a stable, heavy plinth to mount these heavy decks on. Most '301' therefore ended up in overly-resonating cabinets, or, worse, sprung on a board while the arm was fixed to the same, with predictably horrifying results.

Though the '124' minimises the problem mounting the arm on the same chassis as the platter, one must admit that Thorens apparently had no clearer ideas than Garrard in this area. In the 'MkII' instruction manual, They advise customers that "....additional protection against acoustic feedback.... can be obtained by mounting the board freely on thick rubberhair or foam rubber mats. Special steel coil springs (parts CB 1172 and CB 962) are available as accessory upon request, to be used in place of the rubber dampers for installations where the turntable is submitted to strong extraneous vibrations...." You can sneer at these words, but this was the state of the art in 1966.

The winning image of the '124' had a positive effect on the other products of the Thorens range, like the much cheaper 'TD184' (1958), 'TD134' (1959) and the

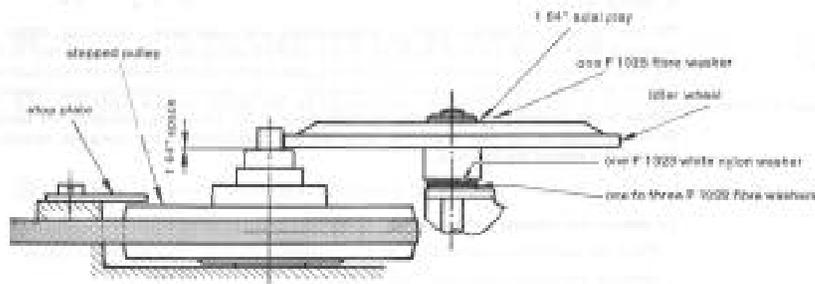


Fig. 8: Stepped pulley and idler wheel.

Underplatter view of the TD-124, showing drive system and detailed sketch of idler wheel mechanism. The stepped pulley is belt-driven.

very effective 'TD135' (1961), the TD-135 had no strobe nor separate armboard, but offered the same excellent drive system as the '124' with pitch control and the 'BTP12' tonearm of the more expensive model, later fitted with the 'TP14' when the 'MkII' version appeared. A '135 MkII' is a pleasant scaled-down '124/II', weighing 8.5 kg with a 2.9 kg platter on a 10-mm main shaft; the presence of a magnetic brake meant that you could vary its speed, but, lacking the built-in strobe of the '124', you had to pop a strobe disc on the platter.

An interesting but short-lived attempt to build an affordable high-quality deck was the 'TD121' (1962), a '124' without strobe and speed control but the same drive system, platter, bearing and tonearm. It was a bit like Porsche's strategy when they built

the simplified 'Speedster' to make the '356' more affordable for the money-conscious American public. The reaction of the customers was not as enthusiastic as for Stuttgart's racy machines: though the performance of the '121' was very good, but a saving of \$20 wasn't enough to lure the customer away from all the bells and whistles of the '124', so one either opted for the really cheaper '135' (and its speed control) or went to the top, buying the flagship of the range.

A very intriguing variation of the family was the 'TD-224', a fascinatingly complicated record-changer based on the '124' but with an unique feature: it could play a stacked pile of records not amassing them one after the other on the turntable, but actually *changing* them!. A 'robot' arm picked the

# Thorens' newest turntable with more freedom of choice!

THORENS, the world's leading transcription turntable manufacturer, has developed a new turntable — the TD-150. It offers the serious music lover a Thorens quality precision turntable, and it gives him freedom to select or change over conveniently to any tone arm or cartridge his system requires.

And because of its price, the TD-150 permits you to place your emphasis on the tone arm and cartridge — which is where it should be. For knowledgeable hi-fi enthusiasts know that the total performance of a record-playing system is no better than the tone arm and cartridge which track the disc.

Yet the TD-150 sacrifices nothing of Thorens' world-famous quality. Its features include:

- 12-inch, 7½-pound precision balanced non-magnetic platter.
- Two low-speed synchronous 16-pole motors on one rotor shaft to assure constant and smooth in-phase perfect speed.

- Uni-suspension — tone arm board and platter are a spring-loaded suspension system, minimizing vibrations and acoustic feed-back.
- Interchangeable tone arm mounting board.
- Dimensions: 15½" wide, 12¾" deep, with a total height only 3¼".

If you wish to make no compromises in the sound of your record playback system, a Thorens transcription turntable should be your choice.

From the still unsurpassed TD-124 Series II, 4-speed transcription model at .....\$149.50 or the completely integrated TD-150AB (a BEST BUY) at.....\$99.75 to the new "Freedom-of-Choice" TD-150 (base and tone arm not included) at only .....\$85 there's a Thorens quality turntable for every need . . . and every budget.

Satin walnut base (WB 150SW) .....\$10.00  
Dust cover (TX22) .....\$12.50

## THORENS TD-150



See the complete line at any franchised dealer. And for the music lover who is concerned about record wear, let Elpa tell you *why you cannot afford an inexpensive tone arm or turntable — why it is sound economy to get equipment designed for the job.* Send for the FREE, informative "Record Omnibook."

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record from a massive separate arm and returned it to this resting place when it had been played. An impressive machine, but its sheer size was probably excessive, like its weight and, of course, its price: the '224' was nearly twice as expensive as a '124'. As a consequence, the production figures of this weird, high-quality 'changer' were always quite low, though it was built for a record six years, from 1962 to 1968, always with the same '224' designation. There never was '224 MkII', like there never was a '124 MkI'.

A '124' or a '124 MkII' is one of the dreams of today's vinyl-oriented audiophiles, and for good reasons. Endowed with a well-engineered, heavy plinth, like Mr. Martin Bastin's amazing all-wood designs, and a suitable arm, its performance is staggering. And if you own a completely original, well-preserved deck of this series in fully original condition you will appreciate its build quality, its flavour, its unique style. It's one of those objects that you simply like to have around at home.

The second part of the Sixties saw a steady increase in the tenor of life of the Western Hemisphere. The citizens of Germany, Italy, France and the United States for the first time enjoyed the luxury of having some spare money and the time to spend it. Listening to good music became fashionable, and the second-rate sound of the old home systems, intolerable. The Japanese were the first to understand that there was a market that was just about to explode for good sound-reproducing equipment, and that this request would not be satisfied by the pricey high-quality components manufactured by the traditional firms.

Until then McIntosh, Garrard, Harman-Kardon, Marantz, Klipsch and, of course, Thorens had catered mainly for the needs of a restricted élite of wealthy individuals: the Far East manufacturers looked at the other end of the market instead, building cheap amplifiers and tape decks as copies of the Western originals, adding some convenience of use, a pleasant appearance, absolute reliability and, of course, a very low price. Their success was guaranteed by the inability of the 'classic' firms to react to this trend, to the general request for cheaper high-fidelity equipment for the home enthusiast that didn't personally own a bank.

To give credit where due, Thorens was one of the few manufacturers that had steadily explored the possibilities for less expensive offerings, and the proof is in models like the '121' and '135'. But the diffusion of high-

fidelity listening in lower-income households often meant also a troublesome placement of the equipment. Whereas in the past the wealthy enthusiast could engage a cabinet-maker to build a suitably sturdy housing for his '124', the newcomer more probably placed the turntable wherever his house (and wife) would allow it. Any flat surface large enough was considered, sometimes even the top of the speakers, with predictably disastrous effects on the acoustic feedback of rigidly-suspended, massive idler-wheel machines with their rigid coupling between motor and platter.

Though its sonic performances in the right environment remained absolutely excellent, the '124' suffered from this new situation, and a new technical layout was therefore necessary. It was also indispensable to renovate the styling: the saying of the racing world that "there is nothing looking as old as last year's racing car" is very apt to describe the difficult marketing situation of the high-quality, expensive Swiss deck that, even in the improved 'MkII' form, was looking really antiquated to the ruthless eyes of the mid-Sixties customers, taught by the Japanese to look for slimmer designs. Low-chassis and lightweight construction meant 'new', 'fashionable' and therefore 'good', 'desirable' and massive Thorens or Garrard idler-wheel decks were junked, as were other old classics like the towering Empire '398-598', the Rek-O-Kut 'Rondine De Luxe' and the Russco or Gray broadcast machines.

Before the introduction of a new product, Thorens had to rationalize its production and lower its production costs, and this meant that it was impossible to continue to produce in a country with labour cost as high as Switzerland. After a brief and unproductive marriage with Paillard (maker of the Bolex cameras) lasting only from 1963 to 1966, Thorens moved to Germany and established its new HQ in Lahr, in the Schwarzwald, joining forces with EMT to create 'Thorens-Franz AG'.

Lahr is in an area renowned for classic clockwork, where Dual, Perpetuum-Ebner, Papst and other important firms in the audio field (many of whom are now sadly extinct) had their factories. For a while, Thorens-Franz AG's mailing label carried both the logos of Thorens and EMT, and the stamp of the Wettingen, Schweiz, Post Office. (Things here get a little confusing even for the historians).

The need for a new product philosophy was addressed in a typically thorough way: the

complaints about the sensitivity to noise floor and acoustic feedback of the rigidly-suspended '124' and '135' led to the design of a completely different machine, the innovative mid-line 'TD150' (1965). Its style was completely different from its predecessors; compact and slim-looking, but still weighing 8.5 kilograms, with a low profile and a modern appearance, the '150' was a bold step forward for the tradition-oriented manufacturer. Instead of an idler wheel transmission on a massive, rigidly-suspended chassis, it had a floating subchassis, a tiny motor and a comparatively simple belt drive. This was the first Thorens with the 3.4 kg two-part main platter that was subsequently carried on with only minor modifications up to today's models. The belt moved by the motor runs around the inner, smaller platter, a thick light-metal cylinder with a diameter of 160 millimetres that turns on a 10-mm shaft; the main platter simply lies over it. Clearly, the accuracy of the machining of the two parts along the interfacing ring is crucial for the good functioning of the system.

The new architecture proved to be quite successful. The '150' quickly earned a reputation for being very quiet. Its floating chassis was able to insulate the record/stylus interface from the external shocks providing an effective barrier against acoustic feedback. It was a simple machine (it had only two speeds, 33 and 45 rpm, no pitch control, no stroboscope) and its first arm, the 'TP13', probably wasn't very good, so many '150's were fitted with aftermarket tonearms, but it worked well and it was comparatively inexpensive, enough that it actually was a viable alternative to the cheap turntables coming, in tidal waves, from Japan.

The new Thorens was available from the factory in four versions, as for later models: 'TD150 AB' was the complete deck with arm and base, the 'A' had tonearm, no base, the opposite of the 'B', whilst the 'TD150' had neither arm nor base. It was an instant success, and this paved the way for the replacement of the aging '124', a completely new product designed in the facilities of the fabled 'Geratewerk Lahr'—in 1968, Thorens finally unveiled the 'TD125'.

It was a timely introduction. Just at the moment when mass-market hi-fi began to explode, Thorens offered a thoroughly top-of-the-line turntable that combined the best of both worlds, i.e. high quality, quietness, and attractive styling in a product that was evidently of a class of its own, and that did

not have to fear any Far Eastern rival.

These qualities come, at least in part, from the thoughtful application of the solutions previously discovered on the '150' and '124'. Like its direct ancestor, the '125' has an integrated but detachable armboard, a strobe and a pitch adjustment, but the motor, substantially lighter than it had been in the '124', is controlled by an electronic system, thus allowing for the deletion of the magnetic brake.

Like the '150', the '125' is belt-driven and has a floating subchassis, but both the main frame and the suspended parts of the chassis are much beefier and heavier, putting the '125' in the same weight class as the '124'.

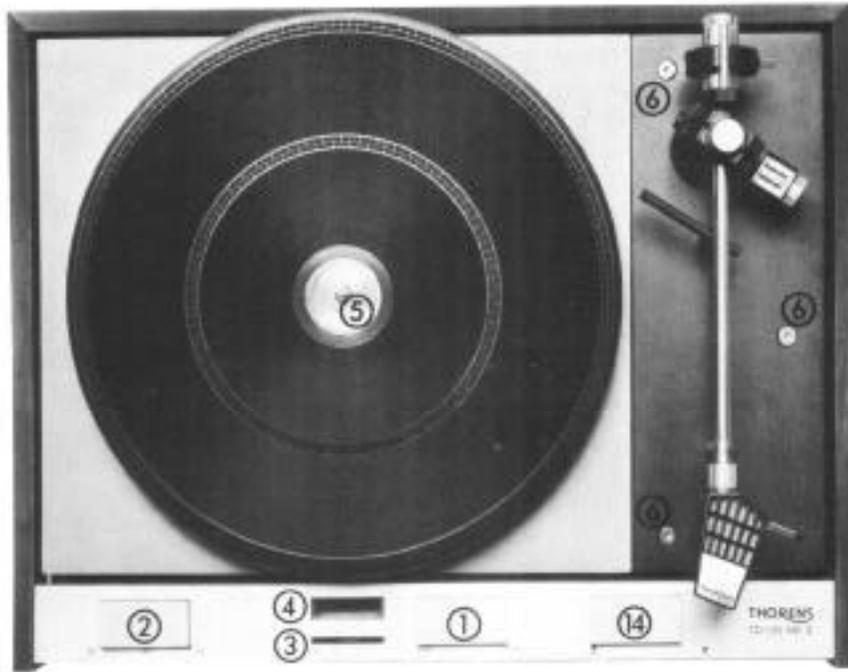
These interesting characteristics were assembled in a very heavy, stable deck with a unique styling. While the '124' had the overall appearance and finish of a vintage Swiss medical machine, the '125' was a sort of Sixties-German-hotel-furniture design, brushed aluminium mixing with straight-grain wood in an extraordinarily attractive design. The three laterally-sliding switches on the front panel (two for the machines sold without a stock Thorens arm and therefore without 'factory' arm lift) are still instantly recognizable as a trade-mark for that model, which also sported the added convenience of a hinged, spring-supported, high-quality Perspex cover.

The stock arm was the 'TP25' with the 'TP50' headshell (now very scarce!), a classic design that was a nice piece of kit for the money. A really unusual feature of the '125' was the choice of its three speeds: 33, 45 and 16 rpm. No 78 rpm! A very unusual, some might say weird, decision.

This layout was carried on in the 'TD125 MkII' introduced in 1972, improved with the provision of a friction device to smooth the start of the rotation of the platter, a different mat, and a better tonearm—the all-new 'TP16', a high-quality, still undervalued straight arm that was to be Thorens' battle axe for many years to come.

Cleverly, the '125' was designed to be adapted easily to all the main markets, from Europe's 220 Volts/50 Hertz to America's 110 Volts/60 Hertz. Overlap between the production of the '124' and its heir was very short, almost non-existent.

The armboard design of the '125' is quite different from that of the '124', which is screwed on a metal frame on the right side of the main chassis. Being a part of the chassis' casting, this frame is unmoveable and makes the installation of some 12" and most



16" arms quite tricky on the '124'.

In the '125', the armboard does not have such limits, since it lies on three supports sticking out of the right side of the main chassis without any metal frame surrounding the edges.

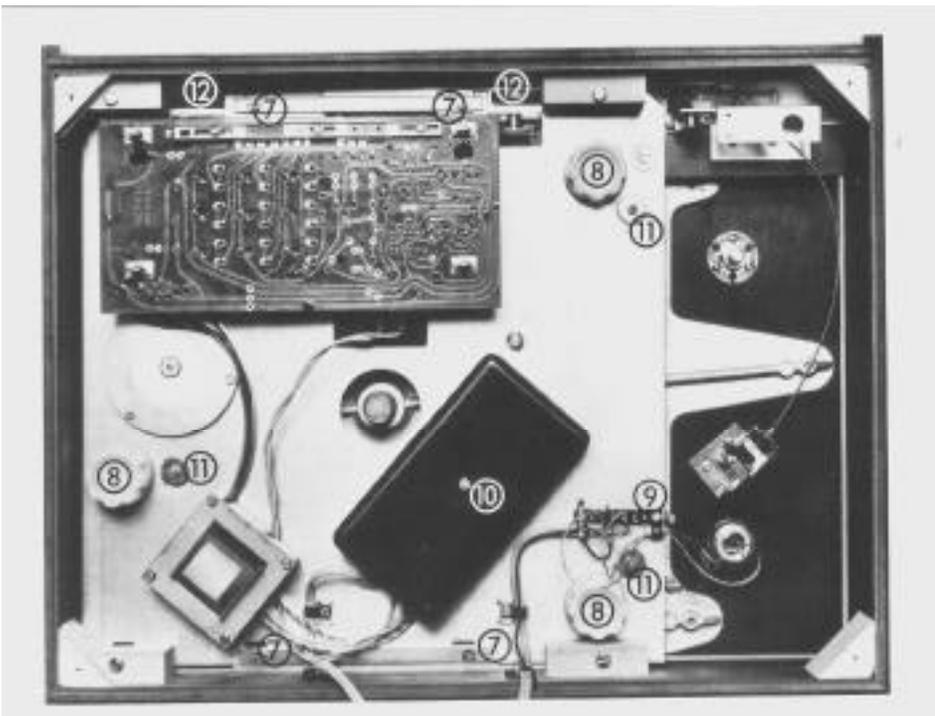
Therefore, even if the stock board and base supplied with the armless '125/125 MkII' were still not wide enough for 16" arms like the SME 3012, it was easy to fix the problem. The customer wanting to install his 'FR-66' or Grace '565' could order item #JP512, a factory-made conversion kit featuring a longer control panel for the base and a wider board, or simply make a custom base and wider board by himself. This voided the use of the mounting frame #CE 509, designed to install the turntable into 'furniture'. To stiffen the suspension of the '125' it was also possible to order purpose-built rubber grommets (#CB 909) to replace the chassis' springs.

The '125' design was so appealing, and its performances in terms of rumble so good, that EMT, involved from the beginning in the design of this model, developed a professional version. The 'EMT 928' was basically a '125' with a reworked electronic system, a much more sober look (all grey and black) and a '929' tonearm. It's obviously the 'definitive' evolution of the '125' design: it's heavy (15.5 kilograms), complicated, expensive, and extremely fascinating. Its performance is even better than the Thorens products, owing to the excellent characteristics of the EMT '929' tonearm, and also because of its completely different chassis.

Belatedly admitting that the wooden separate armboard of the standard deck isn't completely satisfying, at least for professional standards, the '928' upper deck is a single-piece metal casting. The hardware is all precision grade, as befits a beknighted EMT product. Wilhelm Franz decided for a different range of speeds as well, so the '928', very sensibly, offers to its users the joys of 33,45 and 78 rpm, which was exactly what Thorens should have done with the '125' in the first place.

The '928' also has a stylus illuminating device and can be fitted with transformers for the use of the excellent EMT 'TSD-15' cartridges (this was model '928 003'), a hugely stiffened suspension— a bit like the much later 948/950, and a splendid acrylic-felt platter. All in all, a superb, if somewhat cumbersome-looking, deck.

Unfortunately, the belt drive proved to be



unfit for a professional usage, and as the '928' cost almost three times as much as a '125', it couldn't be a real contender in the money-conscious amateur market of the times. The '928' was therefore quickly dropped and the German firm went on to develop its own formidable direct-drive turntables ('950', '948' and '938'). The '928' was the last EMT model produced while Wilhelm Franz was still alive (he died in 1972) and it's a clear proof of the high regard of the 'Thorens-Franz AG' people for the basic design of the '125'. Though scoffed at by EMT traditionalists, it is a really wonderful machine. If you fancy this kind of turntable, you can't find anything better than a '928'. It's very expensive, but extraordinarily fascinating, really the ultimate '125'. Grab one if you can... Trouble is, they made very few '928', so they're probably the rarest of all the EMTs now and priced accordingly....

The '928' story confirms that the design of the '125' is really extraordinary, so much that even dead-serious professional-oriented people like EMT thought that it deserved their sacred logo. Never mind know-it-all experts claiming that, apart from the monumental 'Reference', the '124' is the only Thorens to have. The '125' is an all-time classic, and the 'MkII' was, and I want to say that it *still is*, a formidable turntable. Its solidity, balance, and overall quality actually beat every other 'mainstream' deck on the market in those years. Considering its high price, it has been a real best-seller.

In USA, the '125' was quite expensive: in 1969 you would pay \$280 for a 'TD125', \$385 if you ordered the classic Ortofon arm, and it was a lot of money when an Empire '398' cost \$199 dollars, an 'AR' was \$78 dollars, and a Dual '1219' semiautomatic turntable was offered at \$159.50.

Not that it was much cheaper in Italy—a 'TD125 MkII' in 1972 cost 175.000 liras as a deck or 235.000 with the 'TP16' arm, and that was some money. To put things in perspective, the last great British machine of its kind, the Garrard '401', was at the same time sold at 140.000 liras (obviously without arm or plinth). The market success of the '125' helped the sales of the cheaper 'TD165' (95.000 liras) and 'TD160' (110.000 liras), both introduced in 1972, as heirs to the '150'. These smaller decks sold like hot cakes in the sellers' market of the time. Thorens, in the first half of the 70s, was quite a fashionable brand.

It's a pity that, having reached such a formidable peak of functionalism, styling and per-



The EMT '928'—Professional version of the Thorens TD-125

formance Thorens didn't stick to its guns longer. In 1974 the '125 MkII' was suddenly replaced by the 'TD126', a new deck with the same engineering concepts, more electronics, a larger chassis to accommodate longer arms (but still not the 16"), 33/45/78 rpm, and illuminated pushbuttons instead of sliding switches on the control panel. If you look at it as an improvement over the '125 MkII', you'd probably be deluded, as the performance isn't significantly better while the price, with the stock 'TP16' arm, was much higher. The '126' was good, but not good enough to replace its almost perfect predecessor, over which it didn't offer real advantages.

In hindsight, the '126', though a decent turntable, was the beginning of a long downslide for the Thorens name, 'Reference' notwithstanding. The arrival of the CD (1982) and the subsequent boom of digital audio destroyed the turntable market almost overnight. The firm went through a lot of troubles before being rescued a few years ago by wealthy investors who are carefully rebuilding its name and product range.

Now 'Thorens Audio HiFi-Vetriebs-GmbH', owned and managed by Herr Helmut Leitner, is a small, healthy firm that builds a complete range of really excellent turntables and tube electronics. Mrs. Evelyn Schmidlin, at the Export-Department, is as helpful as one can ever hope and she cares for the requests of foreign enthusiasts with real attention. Thorens today has factories both in Lahr and Berlin, and, although the famed 'Geratewerk' sadly doesn't exist any-

more, Thorens' quality level is still very high. The '2001 Isotrack' turntable is one of the best decks for the money I've listened to recently.

A little-known but really amazing fact is that for the 'classic turntable' enthusiast and owner, Thorens offers a real service lab where it is possible to service, repair and restore your old deck. And I don't mean antique '316's or 'Prestiges', I mean any Thorens turntable built since the '124'. They're quite busy these days, as requests for service and restoration of classic Thorens have boomed. The spare parts catalogue is two inches thick, and the kind lady managing the service department, Frau Renate Schmidt, remembers all of them by heart....

It's quite inspiring to see a new firm, firmly oriented towards the future of high-fidelity music reproduction, being still very much faithful to tubes, vinyl and their own old, fabulous turntables. Looking at their record, you understand that you can buy a new one with confidence, and if you can find a shop that has one connected in their listening rooms, I'm sure that you will. As soon as I can test one in a proper listening room (my own, for example....) of those new, wonderfully-designed and built Thorens, I'd probably buy myself a '2001' or an 'Ambience'...



