

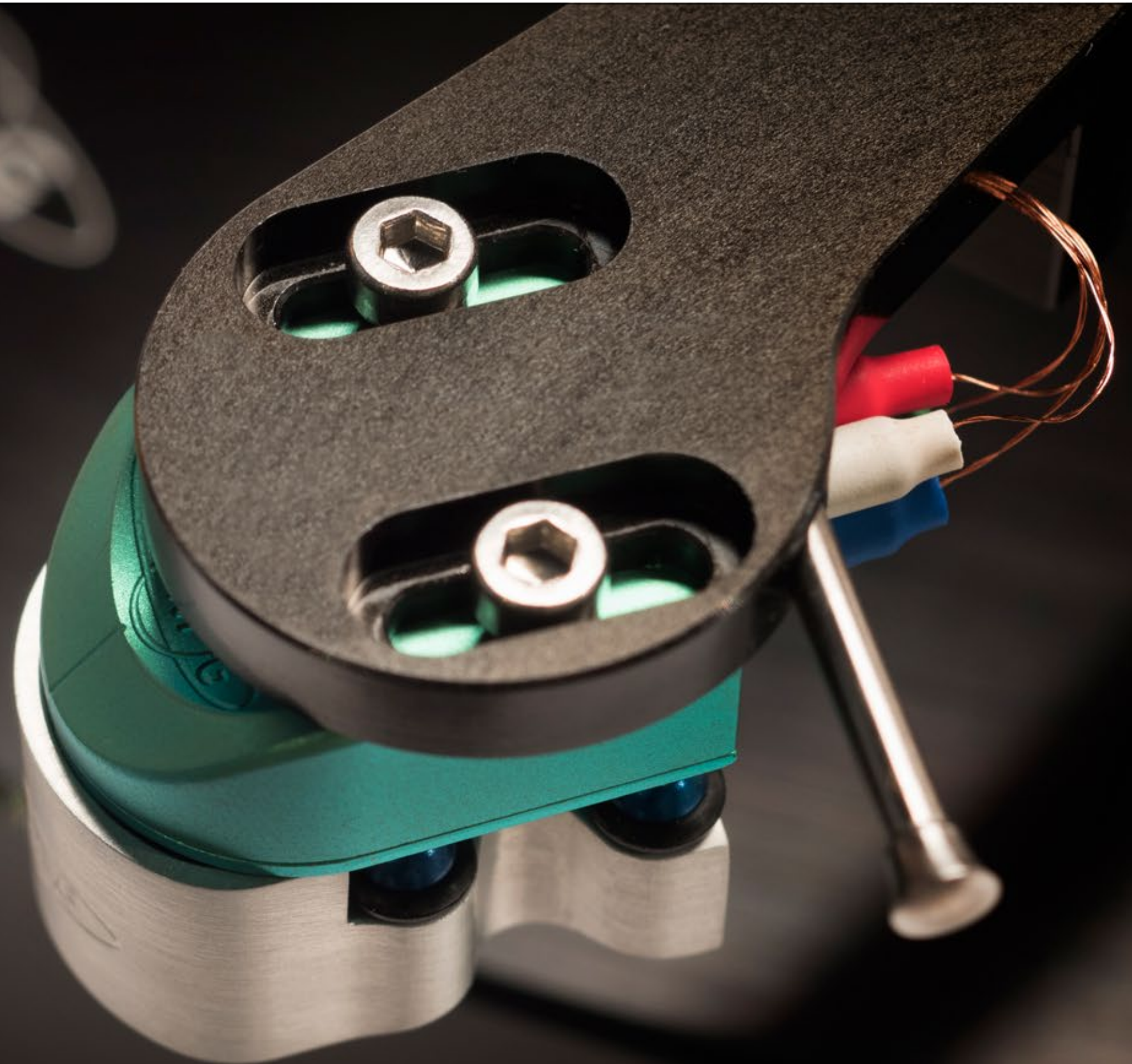
The Essence of Analog Simplicity

The AMG Giro Turntable

By Jeff Dorgay

Despite all the enthusiasm for analog these days, the analog versus digital debate remains a heated and polarized one. Much as I enjoy both, great analog at its best is still slightly more special, more organic, more engaging than digital. The gap has closed tremendously, but there is still something glamorous about the sound of vinyl. Particularly the way you can just keep turning the volume up when listening to analog, it's a picture that you can keep enlarging without loss of detail, where digital seems to pixelate at a certain point. It's like using big, incandescent lights to take a photograph rather than LEDs or flash – it's a continuous tone thing.

Which leads us to the next argument: how much is enough to spend on a turntable, tonearm and cartridge? Of course, this will vary depending on your system, bank balance and priorities, but in the context of a "destination" turntable, I see the points of diminishing return at \$1,000, \$4,000, \$15,000 and again at about \$50,000. Feel free to send all the nastygrams you'd like; you won't change my thoughts on this one.



\$50k and up tables are limited to a select, well-heeled few, but a \$15k turntable is much more approachable than you might realize. I've heard squawking about this price from many a vinyl lover who has a motorcycle they barely ride, a boat that gets taken out a few times a year, or a pile of camping equipment that they never use. And chances are you probably won't opt in at \$15k; you'll trade up from something else as your appreciation for analog (and record collection) grows.

Don't look to me to be the voice of reason as I've eaten more than my share of ramen noodles and Wendy's dollar menu items over the years to be able to spend a disproportionate amount on turntables. At \$12,200, the AMG Giro turntable and Teatro MC cartridge will even leave you a few bucks left for some decent dinners.

Immediately engaging

The subtle vibrato in Annie Lennox's voice on the Eurythmic's classic "Don't Ask Me Why" instantly justifies the purchase of an AMG Giro. It pulls so much information out of the grooves of a normal record, one that's been played many times over the years, that you instantly sit up in the chair and take notice. This just doesn't come through with the same delicacy and tenderness, if you will, with digital – even great digital. After a few weeks of careful listening, I question whether you'll need to jump to the next level. No matter where you choose to swim in the analog pool it's all good, but once you make the leap to a table in this league, analog is seductive.

Three years ago, I reviewed and purchased the AMG V-12, the Giro's bigger and more expensive sibling with a 12-inch tonearm that is nearly identical to the one on the Giro. According to importer Jesse Luna of Musical Surroundings, the 9W2 9-inch arm is a bit more traditional and "has the same bearing function, but redesigned to accommodate a shorter tube. This is not just a shorter arm with the same bearing, the entire arm is scaled down." German precision at its finest I say.

Listening to both tables side by side confirms that the Viella indeed reveals more music, but it's not a major jump – it's more like going from an Audi A4 with the sport package to the full-blown S4. If you've got the extra dough, by all means spend it, but you won't be disappointed with the Giro or the Viella.

Like the Viella, the Giro is a non-suspended table, so that may require more coddling from some environments. Musical Surroundings had supplied us with a custom base for the Viella made by HRS for more acoustically live listening rooms, and if that is your fate, this may help you get every bit of performance from your AMG table. With our test example placed on the top shelf of the SRA Scuttle Rack, we noticed no problem whatsoever.

Smaller in physical scale only

At first glance, the Giro looks almost exactly like the V-12 Viella without the wooden skirt, but when you see the two together, it's easy to see where else the design has been simplified. Where the Viella uses a complex armboard assembly allowing easy swapping of tonearms, the Giro limits you to the AMG tonearm. While some analog maniacs might think that is a terrible thing, you wouldn't put a different tonearm on your Linn LP-12, would you? *(continued)*



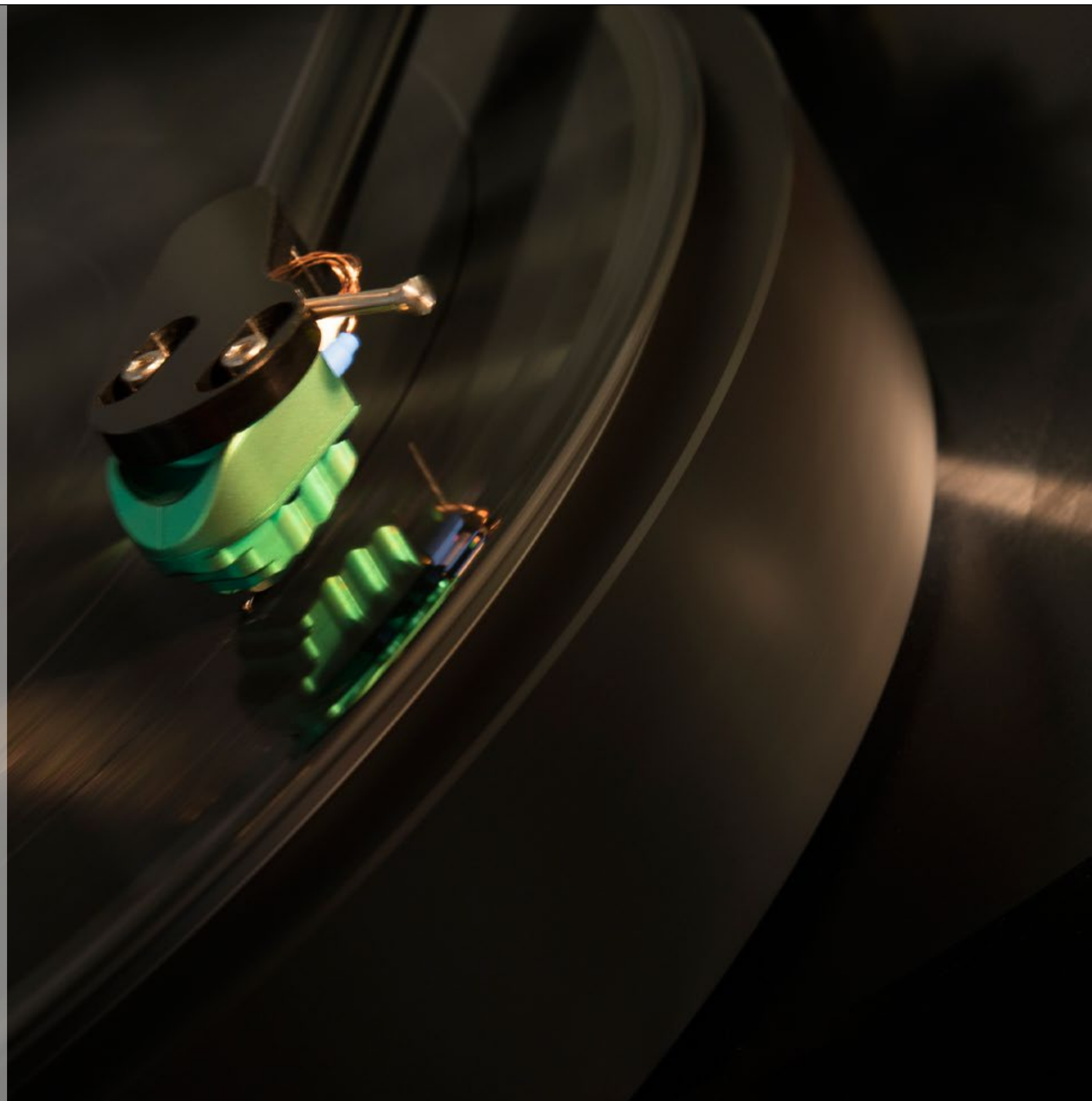
Just like those who put a Chevy V8 in a Jaguar, it never looks or sounds as right as what the factory provides. The same goes for the AMG. I can't imagine another arm on this table for aesthetic or performance reasons, but vinyl lovers with diverse record collections might want a second AMG arm with an alternate cartridge, making the Viella more attractive.

The Giro's tonearm is as finely machined as the Viella's, with equally fine and delicate adjustments; so proceed with care and caution during setup, as these tiny screws can be easily misthreaded. Luna had the Giro/Teatro combo spinning in no time at all and the overall balance is spectacular. For investigation's sake, I took the time to mount a couple of other similarly priced cartridges from Ortofon, Lyra and Grado, and there wasn't a pair that I liked as much (again) as the factory mount. Plus, the machined metal stylus guard is tough to beat!

You can use your own tonearm cable, but the opening in the Giro tonearm is somewhat tight, so I suggest using their cable, sourced by Cardas. Like all Cardas cables, it's soft, wiggly and not too large in diameter, so it makes a perfect mate for the Giro—and I'm very familiar with the sound, which makes this table even easier to evaluate. Again, unless you just have to tweak, go all AMG and be done with it!

Investigating the Teatro

A hifi system, like any other luxury pursuit, needs a point of engagement that has to be reached in order for you to stay engaged. You don't need to spend ten large to spin or enjoy records. However, if you can make the jump to this level in your analog journey, this is the point where it becomes more than interesting—it becomes immersive.



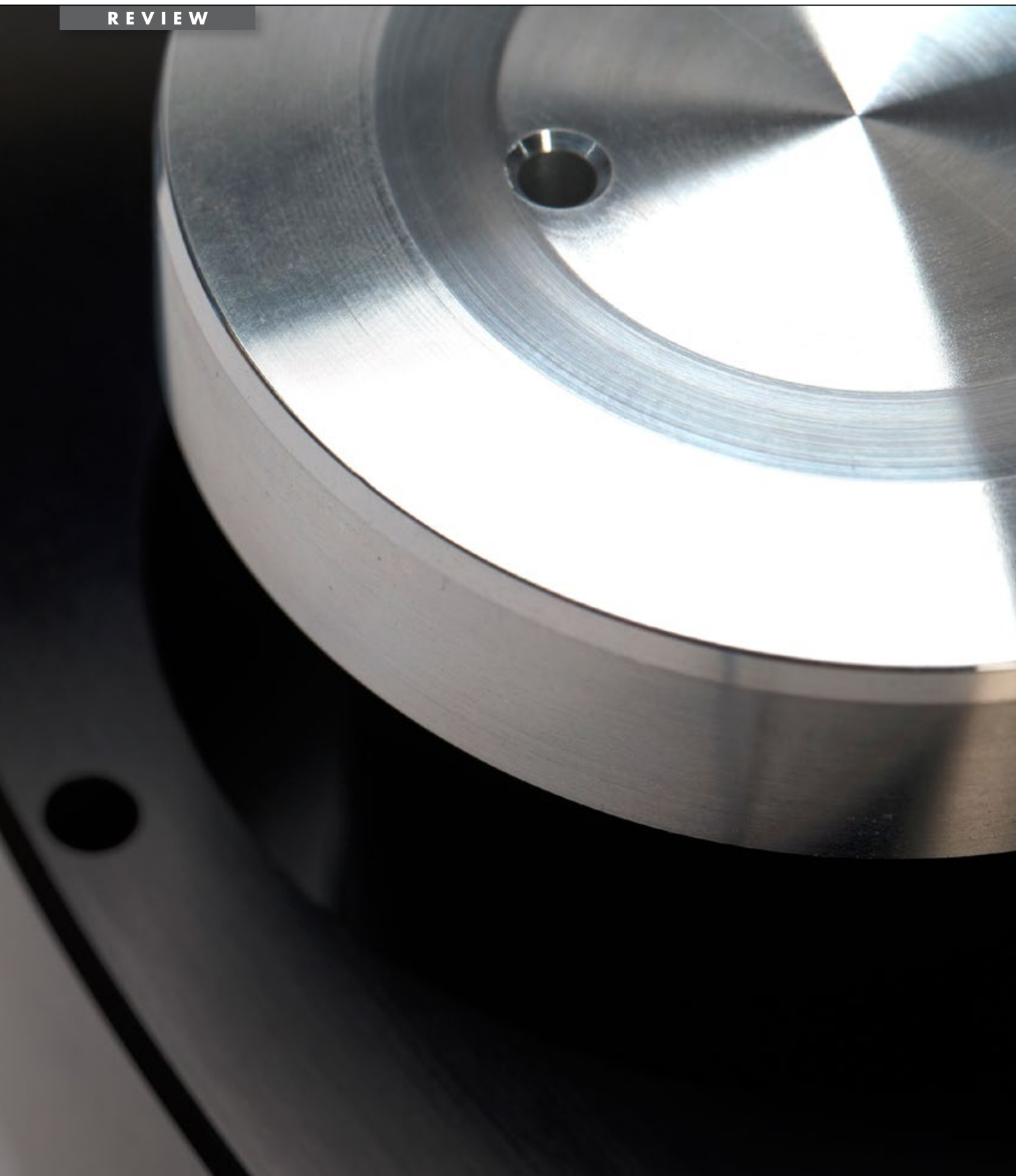
Of course for some, this point may vary, but after spending the last 12 years or so evaluating many turntable/tonearm/cartridge combinations from \$500 to over \$100,000, \$10k–\$15k is a wonderful stopping point.

The Teatro has an output of .4mv, so it should work well with most MC phono stages having upwards of 60dB of gain. Suggested loading is 120–500 ohms and used with the Simaudio 810LP/820S combination, 120 ohms proved the perfect balance of tonality and dynamics. When paired with the Pass XP-25 and ARC GSPre, 200 ohms was a slightly better match.

AMG suggests a tracking force of 1.8–2.2 grams and after a fair amount of experimentation, 2 grams proved optimal. However, this is a very easy cartridge to set up and get very good sound right away. Unlike some more finicky MC carts, the sweet spot is fairly wide with the Teatro, so don't panic if you don't get it perfect on the first go.

As mentioned, the overall tonal balance is just slightly on the more romantic side of neutral, so your system's overall tonal balance will be the determining factor. If we call an Ortofon SPU a 10 in terms of extreme tonal warmth, a Grado Statement 1 an 8, and a Lyra Titan i a 2, I'd give the Teatro a 6, with five being tonally neutral. Just a little bit extra tonal saturation but not enough to overly embellish.

Moving the Teatro over to the AVID Acutus Reference SP and Feickert Blackbird turntables confirms this decree and how neutral the AMG table happens to be. The Teatro fully retains its character in the other setups, yet has an amazing synergy with the AMG table, as it should. No matter what genre of music you may love, the Giro/Teatro completely disappears in the service of the music. *(continued)*



You get what you pay for

While some argue about fit and finish, whether it is a necessary expense in fine audio components, I certainly argue for it. When you are spending this much money on a turntable, I feel it should look as good as it sounds. AMG has put all the effort beyond that spent on R&D in execution. There's no wasted effort and cost in a fancy box or packaging; this is efficiently achieved. All of the time and effort have been spent on making a product that sounds fantastic and looks at home in any circumstance.

Like the Viella, the Giro is a piece of audio fine art that does not sacrifice a molecule of performance to serve its aesthetic beauty. Both complement each other. It might seem a bit outlandish to give a \$12,000 turntable an exceptional value award, but the AMG Giro offers such a huge helping of what many \$50k and up turntables reveal, I do consider it an amazing value. Once you've heard the Giro, it might be tough to convince yourself you need to spend twice as much on another table, especially if you are an audiophile who likes to stick to a single tonearm and cartridge. If you are stepping up from a more modest turntable, the experience will be a revelation. You'll be glad you did. ●



The AMG Giro Turntable and Teatro Cartridge

MSRP: \$12,200 (table and cart)

MANUFACTURER

AMG

CONTACT

www.amg-turntables.com

(manufacturer)

www.musicalsurrroundings.com

(NA distributor)

PERIPHERALS

Phonostage Simaudio MOON 810LP w/ 820S Power Supply

Preamplifier

Audio Research GSPre

Power Amplifier

Audio Research GS150

Speakers GamuT RS5, Quad 2218

Cable Cardas Clear Reflection

Power IsoTek Super Titan