



Bergmann Audio Sleipner

Written by Dirk Sommer

Nowadays many high-end turntables seem like analog altars. Quite the contrary when it comes to the top model from Bergmann: The Sleipner is quite close to the classical form, even if it proves to be a little bit larger than Thorens, Linn and others. An unequivocal indication that we are not dealing with everyday technology is the air compressor that belongs to this system. The Sleipner not only provides complex solutions, but is a secret tip for all analog fans.

Even if I am repeating myself: As a young hi-fi fan, it was important for me to get to know the people behind the products. For I am totally convinced that one recognizes one or another character trait of its developer and often even its distributor in each piece of equipment. I claim sometimes, for example, that fun-loving, music-loving loudspeaker designers create speakers that are especially fun to listen to without worrying at all about having a totally flat frequency response. As the longtime owner of a Roksan Darius, my assumption was confirmed when I met its creator years after making my purchase. Even though I prefer a more neutral loudspeaker today, it does not change the fact that the Darius provided me with many years of musical enjoyment.

But back to the Sleipner and Johnnie Bergmann, who quite simply used his family name for the company name. He used trips into Nordic mythology for the names of his models: Sleipner was thus the first horse, in fact an eight-legged one. But the term also means weightless gliding. And that's precisely what the platter of the drive should do: While the two smaller models have air bearings in the more classic design with air flowing around its axis, the lower edge of the Sleipner's platter sits on a fixed block with air flowing from its surface lifting up the 9.2 kg platter. Laterally in the bearing block side air vents ensure a counterforce to the tension of the drive belt and a centering of the platter. This delicate setting - we are talking about an area in the double-digit μ range - can be



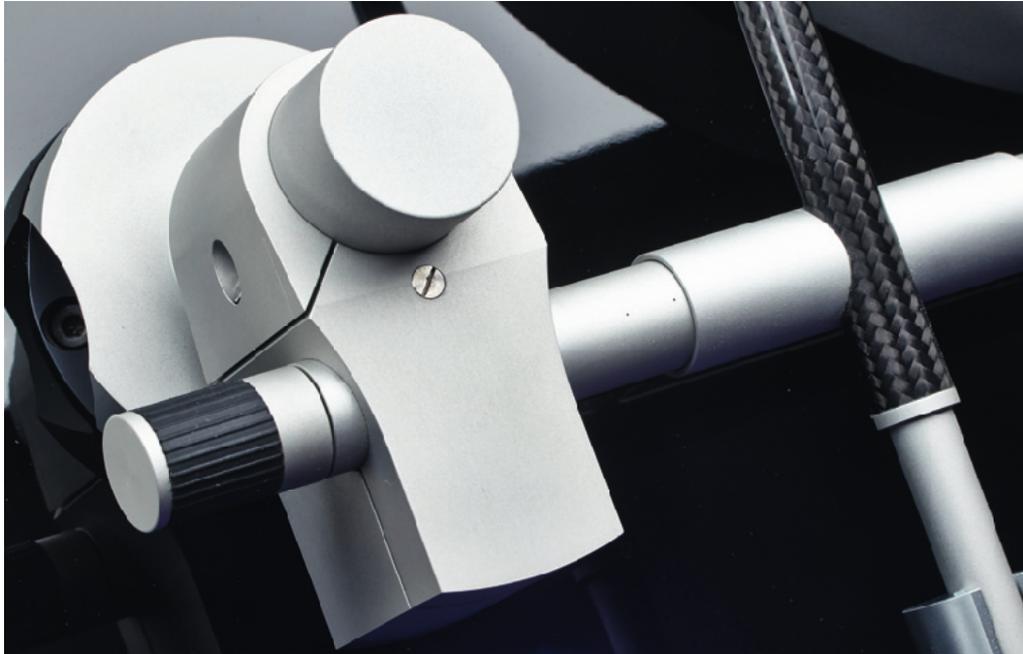
The Sleipner comes pretty close to the appearance of a classic turntable, while coming across a bit larger. The rather short connection cable of the motor control demands this setup option.

adjusted on the back of the chassis. Fortunately, the customer does not need to worry about these fine adjustments - even the amount of air for the arm and the horizontal bearing can be set here. The turntable is perfectly setup at the factory. Fortunately, I did not even have to concern myself with mounting the cartridge, a Lyra Titan i, because the developer set up the Sleipner in my listening room himself. While the Danes shared their ancestry with the Germans - who would have believed that with the name? - there was not even the hint of any marketing talk. Even regarding technical details, he only divulged that after repeated requests. It was not because he was afraid of anyone copying his designs, but because he made neither a big deal about himself nor his products.

Since the Westphalian author is blessed with a certain stubbornness - some also call it pig-headedness, Johnnie Bergmann could not help but reveal a little about himself. He had his first hi-fi experience at a tender age when he visited his best friend, whose father was - as one would say today - an Audiophile. His stereo system fascinated Johnnie Bergmann so much that he spent as much time in the listening room as he did with his friend. Even as a kid, he could tell that this system brought the music to life, revealed a lot of details as well as suggesting an astonishing sound stage. He was especially fascinated with the STD 305. As a teenager, Johnnie Bergmann studied Danish hi-fi and high-end magazines and invested first money he earned himself in audio equipment. His first turntable was a Micro Seiki DDX 1500. At this time he also read about air bearing technology and was immediately convinced that this was the best approach for the design turntable. So he thought intensely about this type of bearing and possibilities of its further development. At the age of 22, he made a sketch of the bearing employed in the Sleipner today. But then, the great era of the CD began and turntables seemed to be a dying species, so for the time being, Johnnie Bergmann's design idea vanished into oblivion.

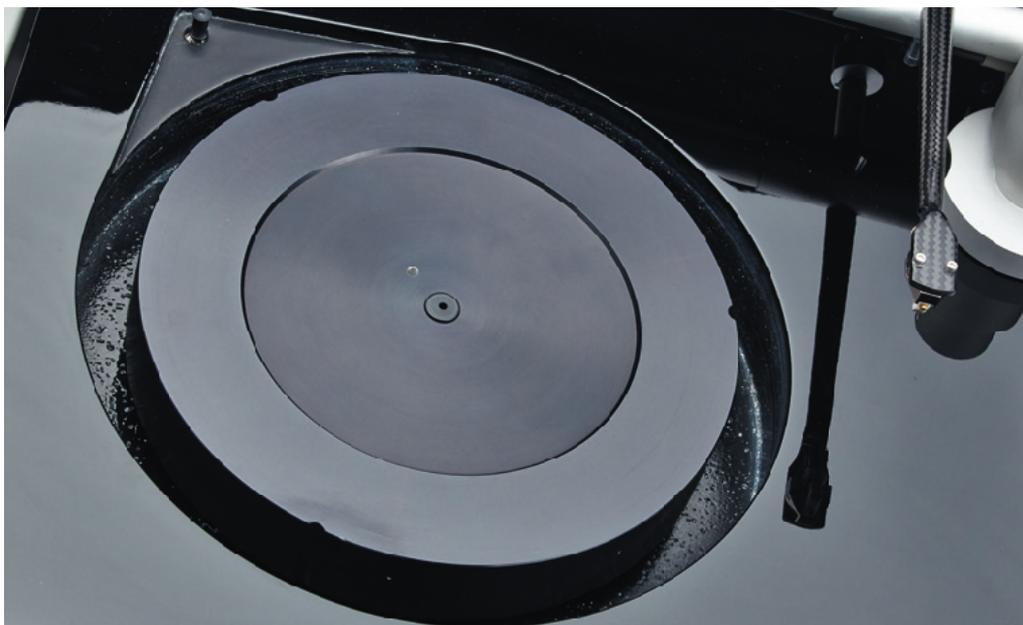


Tonearm tube and headshell are manufactured in one piece. The arm tube is internally damped, the counter weight decoupled.



The tonearm is very finely adjustable in every way. The possibilities for this are rather hidden. The solid construction assures no chance of unwanted vibrations.

Twelve years ago, he remembered again about his plans and finally wanted to find out whether the idea of an air-bearing and self-centering turntable would work. As a mechanical engineer, he was naturally able to produce a prototype by himself. The first sample worked well and thus Bergmann Audio was born. Meanwhile, the company produced all the mechanical parts itself and procured the other parts from a few Danish suppliers. Johnnie Bergmann shared in an e-mail that Bergmann Audio consists of 100% Danish handmade products.



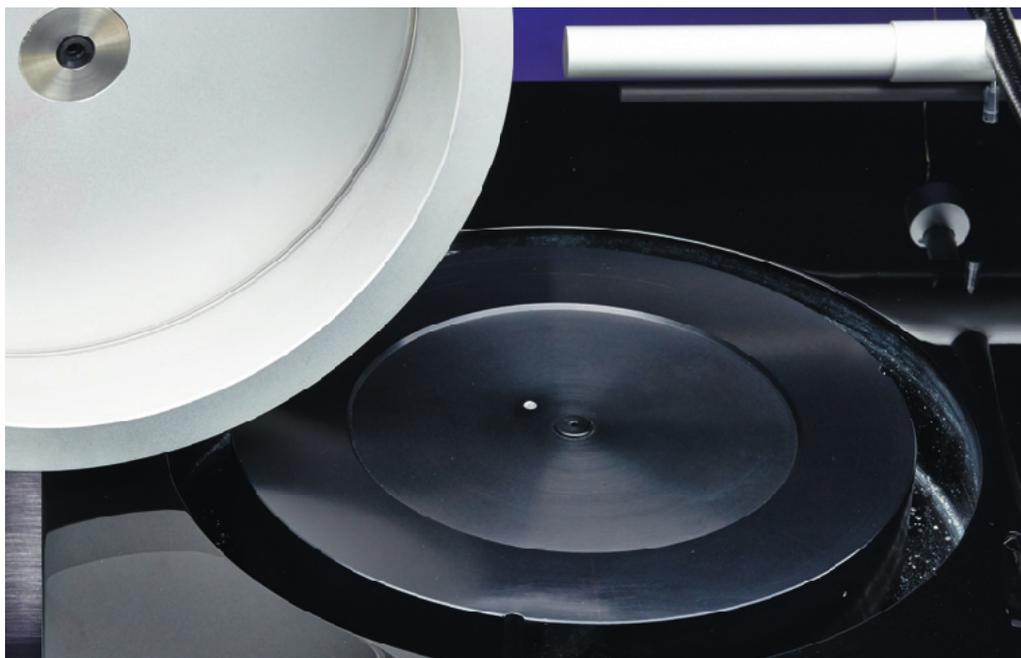
The bearing unit is solidly connected to the plinth. Air flows out of the top and side to lift and center the platter.

In his e-mail, he didn't expose any other technical aspects than in the specification section of the owners manual. The brief facts are given, as always, at the end of the review. Briefly, Johnnie Bergmann goes into his product's basic philosophy: Simplicity is the key word when it comes to his self-centering, belt-driven, air bearing turntable with a linear tracking air bearing carbon tonearm. He is looking for well thought-out, simple technical solutions that can be implemented with as few parts made of solid materials, so that no unwanted resonance can develop and optimal stability is guaranteed.

When Johnnie Bergmann had finished setting up the Sleipner, Helmut Baumgartner and I could not wait to listen to the turntable immediately using the same record that just played on the LaGrange with the Thales Simplicity and Lyra Olympos, even though it was clear that after a few moments of rest, the Titan i would need at least a half an hour to play with total openness. The qualities of the Sleipner were instantly evident: In terms of soundstage depth, image stability, transparency and dynamics, the Danish-Japanese trio currently became my favorite combination. More precisely, my favorites up until now were already behind, regarding room and detail reproduction - even though I think the Olympos is clearly superior to the Titan. I do not have to start mounting one or another cartridge from here to there: It is already crystal clear to me now that the Sleipner belongs to the two or three best turntables that ever stood in my listening room. Anyhow, one of them was the Continuum costing more than double the price!

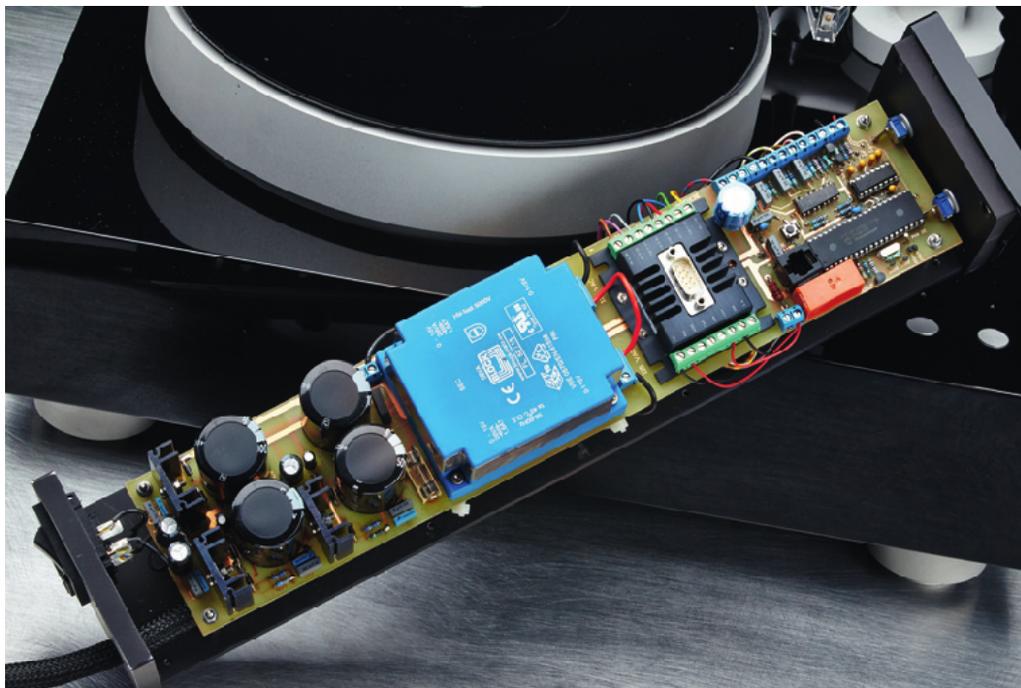
Fortunately, I had a whole lot of time to either just enjoy listening to music with the Sleipner whenever I felt like it or to use the relevant test records to check its performance in different sub-criteria. In everyday use, it is striking that the simple design with its high-gloss surfaces also has its drawbacks: With probably no other turntable was the microfiber cloth more often used. Particular attention should be paid to the platter. It should be kept completely dust free, so no tiny particles of dirt get pushed into the grooves when the record is sucked on. As a potential buyer, I would opt for the alternatively offered record clamp. Of course I have also done the tap test: The stylus is lowered onto the record, that is not turning. By knocking on the plinth and the shelf, it quickly becomes evident how well the design protects the sensitive signal pickup from outside influences. The Sleipner is 100 percent successful! Knocking on the housing and the top shelf of the Pagoda Rack can not be heard through the speakers!

The vacuum suction of the record works absolutely safely and simply: All you need to do is stick the littel puck over the center spindle and the vacuum is immediately produced.



In the version with the vacuum hold down, the only connection between the plinth and platter is represented by the rubber ring under the stainless steel plate and the bearing - besides the belt. In the version with the record clamp, there is no contact at all in this area.

But back to more musical signals: I remember one tough evening after a very busy day when Hajo Weber and Ulrich Ingenbold's Winterreise (ECM 1235) was on the turntable again for the first time in a while. The quiet songs for two guitars and occasionally an additional flute fascinated me with a number of naturally integrated details and far away imaginary spaces. However, the great achievements of the analog trio was not what was so special in these individual disciplines, but the amount of fine information - and they are relatively tiny signal particles, that give us the size and position of the instruments in the room. Even at this "evening" listening level, it clearly stood out. When testing, I usually listen at a rather high volume. But, as I said this time it was different during this pleasurable evening listening session. However, the usual effect that fine information is not clearly reproduced at lower listening levels was not the case with the Sleipner and Titan. If you looking for an explanation, the closest reason is that the frictionless, almost coming into contact, and therefore, totally silent bearing of the Sleipner is responsible.



The Sleipner's motor control: At the push of a button the selected speed can be finely adjusted.

With the indispensable Elegant Punk (Day Eight Music DEMLP 004 TS), it becomes clear that the Sleipner does not drift into the esoteric from sheer fine resolution, transparency and spatial imaging: The reproduction of deep bass and impulses goes without saying as well. Certainly, I can not remember ever having heard deep vibrations so clean, yet powerful as in the song "Drone". The bass attacks on "It's The Pits, Slight Return" come with the usual force, and the incoming vibrations, then decay suddenly come more into consciousness. Even in the wildest musical fray you still have the impression of hearing more information. However, the enormous resolution of the Sleipner also has its dark side: Any fret buzz, or string noises are now so meticulously documented, that you would like to warn Jonas Hellborg to play with a bit more precision.

No special test record is required to register that Sleipner and Co. elicit more room information than most competitors with well known recordings: The sound emanating from the speakers is happening even more naturally, imaginary rooms seem even more sweeping - I really have to pull myself together to avoid the obvious term "airier", otherwise it would have been too close to a comy pun about the bearing technology of the Sleipner. The tonearm and turntable convey the music completely without any spectacle or effects. The Sleipner keeps the sound of the record in the foreground - the turntable is far too reserved to impose its own stamp on the whole thing. However, the quality of the tonearm and turntable steered clear of reproducing any mechanically induced artifacts like few others - again a parallel to the Continuum. This freedom from noise not usually detectable on the record, is first produced during the playback operation. It enables the Sleipner to apparently extract more information from the grooves. Of course, other turntables also pick this up. However, they do mask tiny fine information with only the slightest bearing noise.



Available by request, the tonearm is supplied with either RCA, XLR, or DIN connectors. The amount of air emitted for the arm as well as the horizontal and the vertical bearing is adjustable from outside.

Just for fun, I put on the stereo laboratory version of the London/Decca SXL 6529: Holst "The Planets" with an orchestra array like in a widescreen format picture, full of dynamics and emotion, and yet so refined as never before. Of course, there are Japanese audiophile pressings with slightly less operating noise than German or even American pressings. But, if my memory serves me correctly, the silence in the record grooves with no signal, thanks to the Sleipner, is once again even more intense. The instruments of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra shine more impressively and with stronger tonal colors than ever before. No wonder that I didn't have to activate the tonearm cueing mechanism as I am used to doing during the sound spectacle "Mars", but let the record play through to the end. No, I do not want to invoke the cliché that you will re-discover your record collection with the Sleipner. But even if you have previously enjoyed your records with extremely



The compressor is well damped and really very quiet. I would still set it up in a room next door.

good equipment, you are likely to discover even more room information and some additional detail with the Sleipner. Too bad that Johnnie Bergmann is going to pick up his top model soon to demonstrate it at the High End show in Munich. I can not say how well the rest of the system there will harmonize with the room or whether the neighboring exhibitors will be limited to volume levels that allow the great skill of the Sleipner to be experienced. If it plays there the way it did in my listening room, this experience alone justifies a visit to the trade show.

Briefly back to my initial thesis: Thanks to its very special platter bearing technology, the Sleipner keeps itself sonically out of the music more than almost any other turntable known to me. And this restraint is shared with its developer: There aren't any showmen at work here.

STATEMENT

The Sleipner turntable/tonerarm duo is, thanks to the airbearing technology, perfectly isolated from its surrounds and doesn't mix any self-generated noise into the signal while playing a record. For that reason, it produces fine details and information tremendously well. Peak performance is reached in all other hi-fi criteria: The Bergmann Sleipner is one of two best turntables I've ever had in my listening room.

LISTENED WITH:

Turntable : Brinkmann LaGrange with tube power supply
Tonearm : AMG Viella 12", Thales Simplicity
Cartridge : Brinkmann EMT ti, Lyra Olympos SL, Lyra Titan i
Phono stage : Einstein The Turntable's Choice (sym)
Preamplifier : Brinkmann Marconi
Power amplifier: Ayon Epsilon
Speakers : LumenWhite DiamondLight Monitors
Cables : Precision Interface Technology, Audioquest Wild Blue Yonder and Wild Wood, HMS Gran Finale Jubilee, Audioplan Powercord S
Accessories : PS Audio Power Plant P5, Clearaudio Matrix, Sun Leiste, Audioplan Powerstar, HMS power strip, Acapella bases, Acoustic System feet and resonators, Finite Elemente Pagode Master Reference Heavy Duty and Cerabase, Harmonix Real Focus, Audio Exklusiv d.C.d Base, feet and Silentplugs AHP fuses

Technical Specifications

Bergmann Audio Sleipner

Turntable : Airbearing design. Vacuum hold down or clamp. High precision digital controlled DC motor. Belt driven.

Plinth : Outer layer 12mm Polyvinyl. Painted and hand polished. Inner part is a 6-layer sandwich construction of different materials for optimum resonance control

Platter/Bearing : aluminum platter supported and centered by air. Bearing/air supply creates a thin air-film, both vertically and horizontally between platter and bearing - no mechanical noise - no friction.

Platter weight : 9.2 kg

Record Mat : 21mm, 3 layer construction. 2 layers of polycarbonate. 1 layer of acrylic.

Feet : adjustable aluminum/ceraball construction.

Dimensions : (W/D/H) 495/440/230mm

Total weight : 35 kg

Tonearm

Tonearm : Linear tracking airbearing Tonearm. Carbon armtube and headshell molded in one piece for optimum stiffness. Armtube damped inside. Counter weight decoupled from armtube. Adjustable in all angles.

Wire : Internal tonearm wire in pure silver

Clips : Silver plated copper

Connectors : XLR, RCA or DIN

Effective Mass: 11g

Motor control

Motor control : High precision digital controlled DC motor, with hallsensor and encoder Supported by an ultra and oversized power supply
33 & 45rpm. Fine tuning by microprocessor controlled push buttons.

Dimensions : (W/D/H) 99/440/105mm

Weight : 3.6 kg

Air Supply

Air Supply : Silent, clean, dry and smooth airflow.
Easy accessible dust filter for easy cleaning or replacement

Dimensions : (W/D/H) 226/440/232mm

Weight : 17.2 kg

Price : 44,000 Euro

German Distributor

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