

High Fidelity

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High Fidelity | *Wojciech Pacula* 2014

CEC CD Transport TL 0 3.0

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Text excerpt from High Fidelity | Review New CEC Belt Drive TL 0 3.0

CEC CD Transport TL 0 3.0

The brand new CEC Double Belt-Drive CD Transport TL 0 3.0 consists of two parts, isolated from each other with rubber damped spring assemblies. The bottom chassis houses the control circuits and display, and the upper drive mechanism with laser assembly.

The proprietary belt drive mechanism has been developed by CEC and is manufactured exclusively by this Japanese company. Here we see its top, double belt version. One belt is used to rotate the disc and the other to move the laser pickup head. For all that to work properly, CEC engineers came up with upgraded firmware; a change of servo, shortening of the signal path and improved ground path weight are the most important improvements compared over the TL0 X. (predecessor model)

The CD is placed on the platter through a thick metal spindle and clamped from the top with a 460g heavy „stabilizer“. The whole looks like a turntable platter and bearing assembly, with a long spindle that extends far below the point of support, has a large diameter and is quite heavy. The upper chassis is decoupled from the bottom using three rubber-damped spring assemblies, a solution called D.R.T. S. (Double Rubbers & Triple Springs).

The bottom chassis features a small, front panel display behind a mirrored glass, and control buttons. The buttons are repeated on a very solidly built and user-friendly remote control unit, which can also be used to dim the display backlight and operate a CEC amplifier. The CEC Company exclusive focus has been on CD transports and D/A converters.



The Heart of the new CEC TL 0 3.0. The Double Belt Drive with CEC D.R.T. S. Sytem.

Compared to the previous version, the rear panel now features a whole array of outputs. In addition to the optical and coaxial S/PDIF, and balanced AES/EBU outputs, we now have the proprietary Superlink that transmits music signal and synchronization (clock) signal separately via 4 BNC 75 ohm cables. It is used to connect a CEC DAC.

Mr. Aker from Tokio owns a complete flagship source from Accuphase. He is extremely pleased with it. And yet he has kept transport Compact Disc that he owned previously – the TL0 X from CEC. And he believes that CDs sound best on the latter. Hence, I duplicated his system. During the auditions, I additionally used the Ayon Audio Stratos DAC and the Auralic Vega. The transports that I used for comparisons against the CEC included the Accuphase DP900 mentioned above and the transport section of the Lektor AIR V-edition CD player, i.e. the Philips CD-Pro2LF drive.

I think that despite the passage of so many years, digital audio technology is still somewhat of a puzzle and mystery. Engineers with good...

theoretical background, familiar with professional literature, perhaps even with experience and accomplishments in programming or in other areas where their knowledge translates to practice, tend to have a short simple answer – „a bit is a bit“. And if you think differently than they do, you're a moron or a troll (but still a moron). Digital audio is nothing but a „stream of bits“ that cannot be degraded, as long as they are transmitted in an appropriate manner. I keep it in mind each and every time I listen to digital audio sources designed by other type of engineers, who studied from the same textbooks and who operate within the same laws of physics, but who also have an extra asset that gives them a huge advantage over the first group.

They know that theory does not describe everything and that its refinement leads to surprising results. And thus requires further research. First of all, in a laboratory, but in the next stage also in a listening room. The greater the product shows differences in signal reading, decoding and sending it out to the DAC, the more I try to keep it in my mind. And the CEC TL0 3.0 changes the



the sound in a unique way. Its sound cannot be mistaken for anything else. It is in a category of its own and is significantly different than that offered by the transports from Reimyo, Accuphase and Ancient Audio. It brings an interesting combination of an incredible saturation of the lower midrange (but also the whole midrange as such) and of detailness. Both of these aspects, I'm sure, result from resolution, which is here absolutely astonishing. Playing any CD, the first thing we hear is the density and energy in the subrange that has been responsible for notorious accusations hurled at the CD format. If there is something the CD has been criticized for, based on experience with vinyl, it is for sounding thin and dead. Both of these things, combined with the brightness of treble, resulted in the CD being labeled as sounding „digital“. These days, „digital“ is commonly associated with „better“. However, in the circle of perfectionist audio for many years, and to a large extent even today, it has been synonymous with a sharp and unnatural sound.

The CEC easily proves that this is rubbish, and the CD players that sound that way are simply bad players. Period. At any price level, it is possible to put together an audio system with a CD player in the main role, which will sound at least satisfactory. However, if we take the CEC we can create an absolutely top high-end digital system.

As I said, its primary characteristic is an incredibly dense midrange, especially its lower part. Next to the CEC, the Philips transport used in my Ancient Audio CD player seems quite unremarkable. And yet the latter is fantastic on its own; I know it well from dozens of very expensive audio products and it has always stood up to the task. In audio, any product is fine and great as long as we don't hear something better. After such an experience, something „clicks“ in our mind and

we hear everything from a different perspective, wider, deeper and further. As if we were too close before to see the details. A better unit helps us see our previous reference component from a proper distance, with all its advantages and limitations.

Although now we get too close to the „new“ to see its own limitations. And it remains that way until we come across something even better. To put it simply, a sonic improvement gives you a different perspective. You can now hear what your previous „reference“ has been lacking. What the Philips drive is lacking is more density and selectivity. With the best CD players I know, like the flagship Ancient Audio, Vitus and Jadis, the sound is outstanding. But to some extent it is the result of further signal processing in their D/A converters. The transport itself is excellent, one of the best designs that have graced the audio industry.

However, there are even better ones, like the CEC for example. The density I am talking about results in a sound that is very similar to what we hear from high-end turntables. Elvis on his album *Elvis is Back!* sounded insanely good: deep, low, with clearly emphasized low registers (emphasized by the sound engineer, not by the system). *Fever* was as moving as rarely ever before. Played shortly after that, Michael Bubl  rendition of that song was interesting, but not half as inspired. It also sounded much worse – flatter and boring. And just to think that it has already been 54 years since *Elvis is Back!* was recorded!

The best transports and DACs sound as if they were diamond, beryllium and ceramic domes, best ribbon drivers and Heil's Air Motion Transformer. Among them, the CEC is „first among equals“. For the first time since the TechDAS Air Force One turntable had left my system,



I was listening to CDs with pleasure. It was a kind of longed-for breath (see [HERE](#)). No, it was not identical sound; the Japanese turntable has been unrivaled and only a full dCS system and a reel to reel recorder managed to show something on its level (although each format in its own way; see [HERE](#) and [HERE](#)). And this time I had neither the master clock nor the upsampler that are key to dCS sound. I remembered the effect of the upsampler in the system, and how the sound was affected by different master clock cable, not to mention the clock itself.

Here, I simply had a „bare“ transport. And, as such, it was simply outstanding.

Conclusion

I have mostly concentrated on the tone color that we are able to get with the TL0 3.0. The reason is that it seems to me its most important asset, in which it approaches the best turntables. It is exactly the same philosophy of sound as in the Air Force One or products from SME.

I'll bet dollars against donuts that a 90% of credit for that goes the sound processor and master clock. With them, the CEC transport could show something even better. Marveling at the color I have not forgotten about the space (holography) and dynamics. Both are excellent, although one can indicate their certain „tendencies“. That includes bringing the image closer to the listener, which favors smaller jazz ensembles and classical music. Large ensembles, such as Benny Carter's big band accompanying Dizzy Gillespie on the album *The New Content*, were beautiful in their dominance, order and composure.

But yet, over time I preferred to listen to more and more albums featuring smaller ensembles. On the other hand, rock albums were unbeatable, especially if they had been recorded and produced so carefully as *Republika's Masakra*. Electronica was flawless, too. I doubt I'd ever heard such great sounding krautrock albums at home, except perhaps on vinyl. I would love to have something like that only for myself, with a dedicated master clock and upsampler.

Design

The TL1 from CEC was a belt-driven design but it had a totally classic look. The disc was loaded from the top, like in all transports using the Philips CD-Pro2 drive mechanism. The TL0 was a complete departure from that, by separating the upper section with the drive mechanism. It is decoupled from the bottom chassis by means of three rubber-damped springs assemblies called D.R.T.S. (Double Rubbers and Triple Springs). The whole rests on three metal spikes.

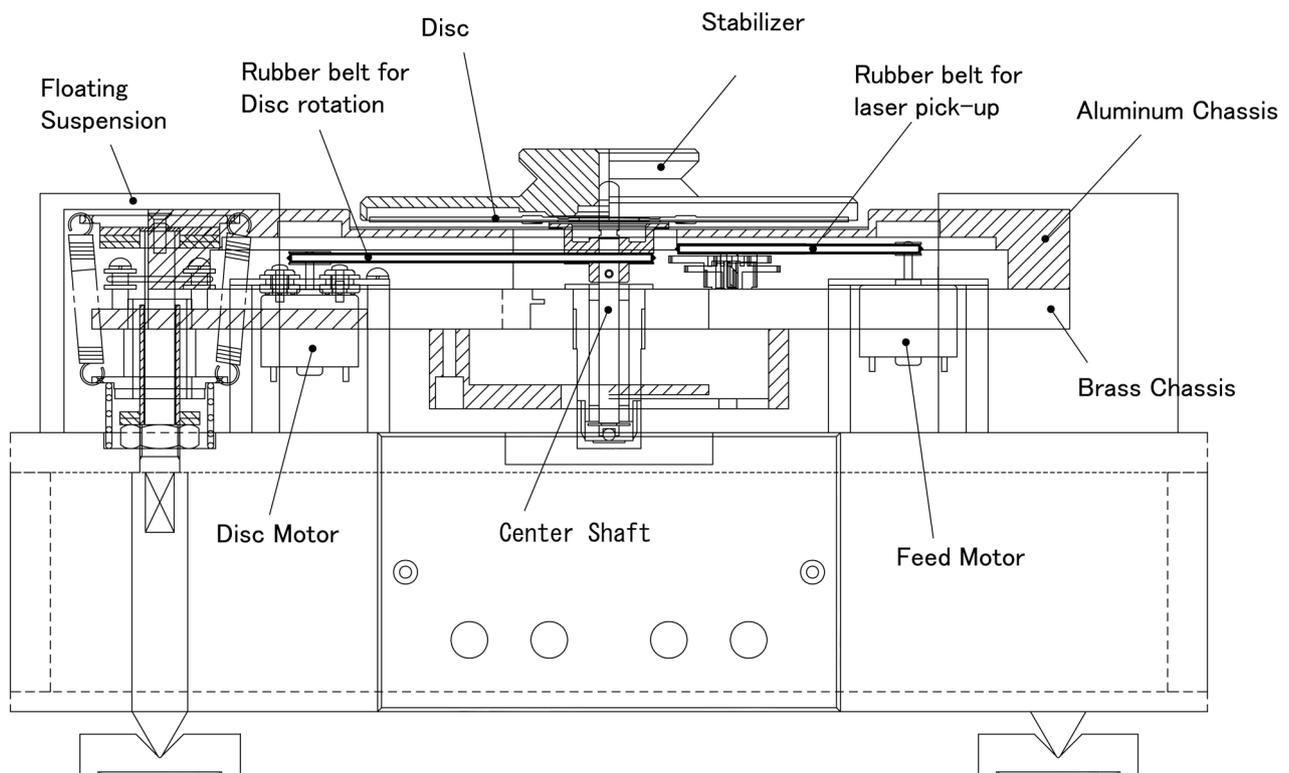
It is notably reminiscent of the design solutions used in turntables, and that was exactly the idea. This is not the first case that certain design solutions employed in a mechanical system, which is what the turntable is, are applied to – seemingly – fully electronic mechanism, which is the CD player. Fortunately, we know that the turntable is not only mechanics, and the CD player just electronics.

The CEC of the upper drive mechanism chassis is

a sandwich of two different types of metal, a 20 mm aluminum top plate and a 10mm brass bottom plate.

The motors and the bearing are mounted to the bottom plate. This sandwich design is extremely effective in damping vibration. The main bearing assembly is as solid as a turntable bearing. The 5mm spindle is belt-driven from the adjacent engine.

The disc is clamped to the platter with a 125mm diameter stabilizer clamp weighing 460 grams. The stabilizer is designed to cover both the entire top and outer edge of the CD to prevent internal reflections and scattering of light. The player is a joy to operate – we center the disc on the spindle and affix the stabilizer atop. The player has two photo-optical sensors. One detects if the disc has been placed on the platter; the other is activated by the stabilizer. TOC is loaded automatically when everything is in its place.



The power supply has its own separate enclosure that is coupled to the main chassis via a 1.5-meter umbilical cord with multi-pin, gold-plated Cannon type connectors. The transport weighs 16 kg without the power supply, and its build and finish quality is fantastic.

TL 0X vs TL 0 3.0

CEC's flagship model TL0 X be refined for 2014 as CEC TL0 3.0. - Major points of improvement are as follows:

1. The servo PCB circuit has been redesigned to shorten the signal pass and strengthen the grounding. This will minimize the deterioration and the distortion of the digital signal recorded on the CD.

2. Word-clock input has been newly installed. Having the same outer clock as the D/A converter, jitter will be remarkably minimized to improve sound reproduction.

3. The height of CD stabilizer (puck) has been decreased by 5 mm to stabilize the rotation of the disc.

4. CEC's original Superlink connection has been fitted for the first time in the TL0 series. When connected to the D/A converter equipped with Superlink inputs, the shortest and most direct digital signal transportation is available without passing through encoding and decoding procedure. The left/right-clock data, bit-clock data and digital audio music data are all transmitted from the CD-transport to the DAC while the master-clock is generated inside the DAC and sent to the CD-transport.

5. The external appearance has been upgraded for the first time since it's original release in 1993. The visible fixing screws and housing have been minimized at each edge of the housing components.

Specifications CEC TL 0 3.0

Drive System	Double Belt Drive // Spindle & Pick-up
Playable Discs	Audio CDs & Finalized CD-R/RWs
Power Supply	AC 100-240V / 50-60Hz
Suspension	D.R.T.S. (Double Rubbers and Triple Springs)
CD Stabilizer	Brass, nickel plating (ø125mm, weight:460g)
Digital Input	Word Clock BNC x 1: 44,1kHz
Digital Output	SUPERLINK×1(BNC×4): 2.5Vp-p/75Ω TOS ×1: -21 ~ -15dBm EIAJ COAXIAL(SPDIF) ×1: 0.5Vp-p/75Ω AES/EBU(Balanced XLR) ×1: 2.5Vp-p/110Ω
Dimensions	300(W) × 317(D) × 158(H) mm
Power supply	125(W) × 250(D) × 103(H) mm
Weight	Unit 16 kg // Power supply 4 kg
Color	Silver

Conclusion:

"I have mostly concentrated on the tone color that we are able to get with the TL0 3.0. The reason is that it seems to me its most important asset, in which it approaches the best turntables. With them, the CEC transport could show something even better.

Marveling at the color I have not forgotten about the space (holography) and dynamics. Both are excellent, although one can indicate their certain „tendencies“. That includes bringing the image closer to the listener, which favors smaller jazz ensembles and classical music."

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CEC CD Transport TL 0 3.0 | www.cec-international.com
High End 2014 - Hot Product



High End 2014 • Hot Product | CEC New CD Belt Drive Transport TL 0 3.0
Tucked away between the expensive boxes driving even more expensive boxes in the Living Voice Vox Olympian/Vox Elysian system was the new CEC TLO 3.0 CD Transport. Making its international debut as the sole (or should that be soul?) source in **the best-sounding system at the show**, this £24,000 CD-only disc spinner might have seemed like an anomaly in this day and age of high-res file replay, but it proved conclusively that there's still life in the old Red Book format. With notably softer styling than its predecessor, the new unit seems set to maintain CEC's position as the supplier of transports of last resort for those who still want to play physical media. It's still built like a battleship, but now it looks more like a stealth cruiser. (Audio Beat | UK audio magazine)

CEC The Drive | since 1954

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