

## Well Tempered Amadeus

By Michael Jones

December 2008

**Well Tempered Amadeus turntable. \$4400 in standard version, \$5700 in GT version.**

Innovation. It's a word often bandied around but rarely seen in reality. But some 20 years ago we saw some innovative thinking from Bill Firebaugh, a newcomer to the audio industry, with a well thought out tonearm and then a turntable.

The Well Tempered turntable and tonearm displayed clear thinking and remarkable results. I well remember a broadcasting professional upon hearing the Well Tempered for the first time, exclaiming that it didn't sound like a turntable.

It didn't. And that's what made it so special.

Bill Firebaugh is back, in conjunction with New Zealand audio industry personality Frank Denson, to present the new **Well Tempered** turntable – the Amadeus.

“I have concentrated on achieving a high degree of mechanical stability,” says Firebaugh. And stable, in its positive connotations, is a word that comes to mind when listening to the Amadeus.



The Well Tempered Amadeus, shown on its isolation base (click for larger image)



The tonearm, including the golf ball (click for larger image)



### **Anyone for golf?**

The tonearm is some 10.5 inches long (266mm), filled with sand and literally hangs from a string instead of normal tonearm bearings. However, the most remarkable visual aspect of the turntable is that it incorporates a golf ball. Yes you did read that correctly. The golf ball is used because they are precisely made, dimensionally stable and cheap. Might as well make use of someone else's millions of dollars of R&D!



One nice touch is a small mirror underneath the cartridge (click for larger image)

The golf ball is partially immersed in a pot of silicon fluid, enabling damping to be applied to the tonearm. The effect of this is immediately obvious – my woofer cones stopped flapping around when playing LPs!

The turntable plinth is made from two layers of MDF, possibly with some secret ingredient between the layers. The GT version – the one I was loaned because it was already open – is made from two layers of black acrylic. I asked WT importer if the two models sounded different. “Jonesey ya plonker...” was his reply, which I’m guessing means no. The turntable sits on a separate isolation base. So installed, the Amadeus is surprisingly immune to footfalls, or even insistent stamping by reviewers.

An oversized acrylic platter is used with a bubbly vinyl coated foam plastic mat. The belt is a tiny polyester string, with (gulp!) a knot tied in it. Curiously, the knot doesn't appear to affect the stability of the plater.

### **Stable and fluid**

Stability was the aim of Firebaugh's research and development and stability is what he achieved. Music from the Amadeus is fluid, incredibly dynamic and largely free of extraneous record noise.

One of the reasons that many people have stuck with vinyl is that it often has a greater sense of musical flow compared to CD. The Amadeus has this in spades, with a seamless sound that invites further listening. There's a wealth of detail presented, allowing the listener to hear into the recording. One experienced listener heard details of treasured LPs that he had never heard before.

Part of the magic of the Amadeus is the unrestrained dynamics. Many other turntables sound strangely compressed and congested in comparison.

Part of what makes it all happen is the remarkable way that record noise is reduced when playing LPs on the Amadeus. Records sound quieter than I'm used to, even on “quiet” turntables such as the VPI Scout. The level of ticks and pops appears to be greatly reduced. The level of vinyl roar is also reduced to almost silent levels.

So how does it compare? I'd take the Amadeus without a moment's thought against any Linn I've heard (and I note that the entire turntable and tonearm costs less than Linn's Keel upgrade). It's also a leap ahead of the VPI Scout that has been spinning vinyl here for the past year or so.

There are plenty of expensive turntables out there and I can't claim to have heard even a quarter of them. But I can say two things. The first is that the Amadeus sounds better than any turntable I've heard. The second is that, given its low price compared to many turntables, the Amadeus is the best value turntable out there. The quality of sound for the price is outstanding.

The Well Tempered Amadeus is special. It's one of those products that makes reviewing hi-fi so very exciting. The Amadeus is my product of the year.

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