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IN THE GROOVE:
Taking Vinyl Playback
to the Next Level

BRYSTON

PLUG-AND-PLAY: Bryston's Excellent Analog Adventure

I SPEND SOME OF MY IDLE HOURS lurking on various audio-video sites. One of my favourites is AudioCircle.com, which hosts a multitude of lively forums (or "Circles," as the site calls them) on subjects as diverse as room acoustics, high-res audio, headphones, home theatre and computer audio.

There are also several Industry Circles hosted by specific companies, one of which is Canada's Bryston Ltd. Last spring, I was mightily surprised to see a thread started by Bryston Vice President James Tanner, entitled "Bryston Turntable."

"Hi Folks," Tanner wrote, "Working on an idea for a Bryston turntable;" and then his post showed several pictures of a gorgeous prototype. Over the next few months, the thread generated over 170 messages, including one with a mock-up of this issue's cover!

Making a Table

The gestation of the BLP-1 goes back about two years, when Bryston introduced a series of one-third-size products. The series started with a compact optical disc transport, but soon grew to include a phono preamp and moving-coil step-up transformer.

"In the process of developing the phono stage, we discovered that there is a lot to be said for the way analog sounds," Tanner relates. The company had another insight as well: it knew a lot about the electrical interfaces between components, and about mechanical resonances; and that this knowledge was highly applicable to vinyl playback.

As Tanner observes, "Matching the cartridge to the tonearm and phono stage is required if you want to get the most out of your LPs. I liked the idea of a plug-and-play system from Bryston, where we could control those variables."

The first step was to find a manufacturing partner. Vince Scalzitti of Tri-Cell Enterprises Inc. put Tanner in touch with the Italian manufacturer Goldnote, whose turntables, tonearms, cartridges and phono stages Tri-Cell distributes. Goldnote's parent company Akamai Audio manufactures turntables and tonearms on an OEM basis for several well-known brands.

Bryston had a good idea of what it wanted. "We had decided on a price between \$3,000 and \$5,000," Tanner says. "We wanted a product that would combine high performance and high value."

Bryston arranged with Akamai to produce a belt-drive turntable using the best bearing it had

available, and matching the turntable with a six-segment titanium tonearm. The BLP-1 has a host of interesting design features, including an acoustically inert 35mm Delrin platter and 30mm MDF plinth with circular grooves that divert resonances from the platter.

Power Play

A key piece of technology comes from Bryston. The companion power supply is designed and manufactured by Bryston at its Peterborough, ON headquarters. The BTP-1 supplies the motor with a perfectly clean sine wave power source, for rock-solid rotational speed. As Bryston notes, this is vitally important for pitch perception.

Using buttons on the BTP-1's front panel, users can tune the frequency of the output to make very fine adjustments in speed, with the aid of a stroboscopic disc or test record.

Tanner says the power supply would retail on its own for \$1,000, and the tonearm for \$2,200. That makes the \$4,000 retail price for the BLP-1/BTP-1 package a tremendous value, he states.

The BTP-1 did create a small headache for Bryston. Unlike wall warts, which are made for many different products, the BTP-1 is a purpose-built power supply, and had to go through a certification process. Getting this clearance cost Bryston \$8,000, and delayed introduction of the turntable.

Bryston delayed introduction of the BLP-1 for another reason. The announcement generated huge interest among dealers and audiophiles, so the company decided to bump its initial order from 50 to 200 units. That first batch sold out almost immediately.

Bryston is looking at expanding into a related segment. At one point, Tanner entertained the possibility of bundling a cartridge with the BLP-1; but abandoned that idea after realizing that selling and installing cartridges is an important value-add for dealers. Now, he's talking to potential suppliers about possibly doing a Bryston cartridge. — *Gordon Brockhouse* [wh](#)

