

Gold Note Pianosa turntable

by Alan Sircom



The Italian company Gold Note has a seven-strong range of turntables, although two are limited edition, made-to-order, super-high-end extravaganzas.

Of the five main turntables in the company's range, the Pianosa hits dead centre, with the two Valore models below and the Giglio and Mediterraneo above.

The Gold Note models eschew the hair-shirt approach of many modern audiophile turntable designs. It seems many designers forget that, while the worst excesses of audio ugly can be hidden from view in cabinets and the like, a turntable is almost always on show, so it better look pretty good. It's also a potential dust magnet, and Gold Note is one of the few higher end brands who supplies a dust cover these days.

The lines are simple, classic, and elegant. It's a simple poly-vinyl coated platter with a simple arm, on an elegant black lacquered MDF plinth, which sits atop a curvy lower plinth finished in walnut, black lacquer or white lacquer. The metalwork is black as standard, but can be anodised silver if requested. It features a round belt that encircles the platter, with a decoupled motor housing sitting quasi-independently on its own base to the back left of the deck. Speed and start-up are controlled by two buttons on the front-left. The deck sits on three adjustable conical feet and comes supplied with the brand's easy to use 9" B-5.1 gimbal tonearm as standard.

While its 'wall-wart' switching power supply may seem under-sized for a turntable of the Pianosa's price, there are some very good reasons why it was chosen: the power is generated and handled outside the turntable's chassis so there are no parts of the power supply placed inside it. The results achievable with a large linear power supply – as featured on other decks of the same price – could theoretically deliver slightly better performance but Gold Note took a 'smart' approach: it started designing a frictionless and high-efficiency synchronous motor, then an effective decoupling mount for the motor and finally developed the electronic controls in order to deliver the right amount of torque, power, and stability. ▶



► Far from being under-powered, in fact the switching power supply currently used is actually 'over-sized' resulting in more power than needed to drive the turntable under optimal conditions. And, while those optimal conditions are the test bench, in reality many turntables lead a sheltered life and will be close to optimal conditions in the home. However, this approach is a different from the standard: Gold Note tailors the motor and the electronics to each turntable's needs, while developing a standard power supply for all its decks. It's similar to the philosophy of Alfa Romeo and Lotus: instead of using humongous motors and power, these cars are designed to be efficient and precise. "Simplify, then add lightness," as Lotus founder Colin Chapman was wont to say.

This also means Gold Note can install all the mechanical/electronic parts on board to achieve a more compact design of the deck (obtaining a much higher density at the same time) by simply moving the power supply away from the deck itself. The motor is decoupled from the chassis through elastomer material thus acting as a floating element, which is also calibrated differently for each turntable in order to perfectly match the materials used for the chassis.

The Italian walnut used on the Pianosa is claimed to offer some unique advantages too, as it is extremely dense but has good damping properties at the same time. When you lift the deck you can feel how its weight comes mostly from the wood. OK, so Panzerholz it isn't, but neither is it made from balsa or cheap MDF.

In fact, Gold Note claims only Italian walnut can offer the correct damping effect, in the process providing stabilisation, insulation, and rigidity to the turntable just on its own. However, it is also extremely difficult to work with and it takes a skilled craftsman to create unusual shapes - as on Pianosa - and to treat it properly. It is also expensive and rare.

The shape of the wooden plinth has been developed as an arch. Gold Note industrial designer Stefano Bonifazi used the mathematics behind the catenary curve to solve two problems at once: giving the best support and insulation from the surrounding environment to the chassis while providing the rigidity and virtual mass of a much heavier object.

The spindle/bearing system allows the turntable to achieve higher precision and control over the rotation of the platter. It also increases the overall rigidity of the system and ensures perfect alignment, in axis damping effect, and less potential oscillations. Like the choice of the wood, this long spindle/bearing system requires very precise processing of every single metal part.

The DIN connector used is the German DIN standard and differs from the common ►

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► – at least for the hi-fi industry – SME model. Gold Note adopted the standard DIN as it feels this is the “real” DIN and in the opinion of the designer it sounds the best, too. Gold Note uses Hirschmann connectors made in Austria, and premium versions of the phono cable are available as an upgrade.

Installation and set-up of the turntable is exceptionally easy, laying to rest the notion that high-end turntables are deliberately opaque in their installation so that the dealer can charge for set-up. It’s Ikea-grade simple to put together, although the manual does come with some helpful installation tips (such as the four-second ‘power chord’ required to switch from start/stop to speed adjustment mode). The arm in particular is extremely easy to use, and unless you are all thumbs, you’ll be fully set-up and running in no time (you’ll need a stylus pressure gauge, but not much more).

In turntable making, once you get past the super-cheap, there’s two or three clear sonic directions that turntable makers follow: ‘detailed’ (as in ‘bright’), ‘majestic’ (as in ‘warm but slow’), or ‘rhythmic’ (as in ‘the no-bass bounce’). The best of them combine two or more of these elements to make a sound that is well-balanced, and it’s this well-balanced approach that is what the Pianosa is so good at providing. There’s no exaggeration or marked emphasis to the presentation (although if you are looking for a sonic disappearing act, keep looking; the Pianosa trades absolute neutrality for a sound you want to listen to, instead of one you want to analyse). It’s an incredibly refined sound, too, the kind you normally associate with very expensive audio equipment. I played the Overture from my now almost worn-out copy of *The Pirates of Penzance* [D’Oyly Carte, RPO, Decca SXL], which is on the one hand perhaps the LP with the most natural soundstage I possess, and second a damn enjoyable piece of 19th Century operetta. If you find yourself playing air-triangle as I did here, you know you are on to a good turntable system. It’s not the fastest sounding turntable around (the emphasis is on image separation, coherence, and musical interplay) but what it perhaps lacks in four-on-the-floor rhythm is more than made up for in effortless dynamics and the sense of everything being musically connected.

I did find myself more drawn to the classical and jazz ends of my record collection and possibly slightly further from the selection of angular, spiky sounding music from the 1980s. I don’t play records by The Fall that often anymore, but I suddenly felt the need to play ‘Hip Priest’ from *Hex Enduction Hour* [Kamera] to get that full-on post-punk weirdness, and it showed what the Pianosa does well, and not so well. The random twists and turns of Mark E Smith’s drawl demand endless dynamic range (he often sounded like someone having a psychotic episode being thrown down a fire escape) and the Pianosa does surprisingly well in that respect, but it simply cannot paint the sheer bleakness required. Instead, the Pianosa finds the nice sounds and the happy place where possible, and with The Fall, there is no happy place.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Wow & Flutter: 0,1%

Rumble: -77dB

Speed: 33-1/3 and 45 rpm +/-0,1%

Speed changing: electronic with fine pitch control

Transmission: 70 shore rectified belt in poly-vinyl

Motor: 12 Volt High Torque synchronous externally powered

Platter: 23mm Dampened design in poly-vinyl

Platter spindle: GN Split-Spindle™

Platter bearing: 5mm ball bearing in chromed stainless steel with adjustable brass seat

Acrylic Dust Cover included

Finishes: Black, White, Walnut

Dimensions (HxWxD): 42.5 x 20 x 36cm

Weight: 13,5kg

Price: £2,230 (£2,500 walnut finish)

Manufactured by: Gold Note

URL: goldnote.it

Distributed by: Audio Pinnacle

URL: audiopinnacle.co.uk

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I’m not sure if that’s a benefit or a demerit though. Most music played on the Pianosa sounded lithe and elegant. It’s an easy sound, not a hyper-analytical one, but it still manages to make musical magic.

It’s easy to fall into geographic stereotypes, and if you do an Italian turntable is going to be elegant, seductive, but ultimately insubstantial. The Gold Note Pianosa gets two out of three right, and fortunately it’s the right two. It is an elegant design with a similarly elegant sound, and it has seductive looks. Add to that the simplicity of set-up and this is a turntable that should get lots of attention. It’s easy to use, easy to live with, and easy to love. +