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- ' Dire Straits Week
- ' New discussion board for the web site
- ' For sale: Wilson Benesch Actor loudspeakers, records, Yamaha AV amplifier, LP12 turntable
- ' Technical Corner: Tracking weight
- ' Setting VTA: An expert gives his opinion
- ' AVSA Magazine, February 2006

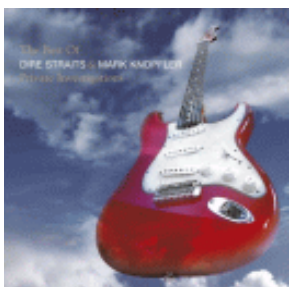
**DIRE STRAITS WEEK:**

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As mentioned last week, a few copies of the Dire Straits album **Brothers in Arms** were available and these were booked, ordered and sold within minutes after the e-mail announcement was sent. Now the Brothers in Arms album is not just any old piece of plastic. Pressed by Simply Vinyl on 180 gram virgin vinyl, anyone who owns one of these albums will testify to the fantastically clean sound and deadly silent surfaces which make these the best possible versions to purchase. This applies even more to the Music of Dire Straits and something like **Love Over Gold** demands a clean and open feel to the music. My copy of this album renders the braking glass on *Private Investigations* is so clear that one wants to look behind the loudspeaker for the fragments! And with the latest release of a "greatest hits" album, you can enjoy this super band all over again. Herewith a summary of the group's history, courtesy of the Internet.



Dire Straits are certainly one of the highlights of a fifteen year or so period in the late seventies, eighties and running into the nineties. While writing this, **Communique** is spinning and takes me back to my student days when my hi-fi was the centre of attraction for my student pals. Of course the Dire Straits albums sounded good and this guaranteed plenty of happy listening hours. Dire Straits recorded and released their first, **self-titled** album in 1978 to little fanfare but five months later a single release, "Sultans of Swing" became an unlikely chart hit and album sales took off. The second album, **Communique**, followed soon afterwards; both albums are characterized by a stripped-down sound. The third album, **Making Movies** featured keyboardist Roy Bittan (from Bruce Springsteen's band) and marked a move towards more complex arrangements and production which would continue throughout the band's career. The band's 1985 release **Brothers in Arms** became an international hit and spawned several singles including the number one hit "Money for Nothing", which was the first video ever to be played on MTV in Britain. I still clearly remember the commotion caused when I bought the album and played a taped version to the guys in the bungalow in Oudtshoorn's Infantry School, my home address for 1985, much to the frustration of the more senior ranks. Hey, I made sure my two years military service provided excitement!



The commercial success of Brothers in Arms was greatly aided by being one of the first fully digitally recorded and

produced albums available in the (then) new Compact Disc format, leading early adopters of the new technology to consider it a "must buy" album in a limited landscape of available music in CD format.

Furthermore, the new format offered an excellent showcase for Knopfler's meticulous production values on the earlier albums, leading many existing fans to repurchase the whole back catalogue. Partly as a result of this — as well as a successful appearance in Live Aid — Dire Straits became the biggest selling band in the world by the mid 1980s. The popularity of the band extends beyond the UK and US: in many parts of the world including India, Southeast Asia and Africa, Dire Straits has remained one of the most well-known and admired Western bands.

While Dire Straits had enjoyed a nice fan base following the success of "Sultans of Swing", many people point to the Live Aid performance of "Money For Nothing" as the defining moment of Dire Straits' career. This was a rare time when Dire Straits performed this song with Sting [The other was during the Music for Montserrat performance. Ed]. The performance was considered one of the highlights of Live Aid and helped launch both the song and band to international stardom.

A long period of inactivity followed this success; during the next six years, the only releases were a hits-compilation and a live recording. The band's final original studio album, **On Every Street** was released in 1991 to mixed reviews and moderate success. Mark Knopfler would later concentrate on solo projects and film soundtracks. Dire Straits decided to call it quits in 1995 after the release of Live at the BBC when all nine members went on to solo careers.

The band's line-up changed over the years, with only Mark Knopfler and John Illsley as consistent members. Knopfler remained the primary force behind the band, and wrote most of the songs. The best-of album Sultans of Swing contains only two songs not credited to Knopfler alone: "Money for Nothing," which is credited as co-written with Sting, and "Tunnel of Love," which contains an instrumental section based on music from Carousel.

Following is a year by year chronicle of the band and its achievements:

#### **JUNE-NOVEMBER 1977**

It's less than a year after The Sex Pistols released Anarchy in the UK. Teacher Mark Knopfler (guitar/vocals, born 12 August 1949), his younger brother, social worker David Knopfler (guitar - they were born in Glasgow and grew up in Newcastle) and sociology student John Illsley (bass, born 24 June 1949) are sharing a flat in Deptford, South London. They start rehearsing Mark's songs and are soon joined by Pick Withers, formerly house drummer at Dave Edmund's Rockfield studios.

Under the name of Mark's previous band, Cafe Racers, the line-up debuts at a punk festival, headlined by Squeeze, on waste ground behind Farrar House. A friend of Pick observes their sorry financial condition and says they should call themselves Dire Straits, which they do for their second gig - supporting Squeeze at the locally legendary Albany Theatre.

They scrape together 120 pounds to record a demo and take it to BBC Radio London DJ Charlie Gillett, a renowned talent-spotter. He plays the tape on his Honky Tonk show. Phonogram A&R man John Stainze is listening and, in short order, Dire Straits are signed to the Vertigo label.

#### **DECEMBER 1977**

Stainze contacts Ed Bicknell, former drummer in Jess Conrad's band turned agent at NEWS, and asks him to book gigs for the band. As soon as he's seen them play, he offers to manage them. They reach "an informal agreement" and Ed gets them on Talking Heads' first British tour as support act in the following January.

#### **14 FEBRUARY - 8 MARCH 1978**

Dire Straits record their first LP at Basing Street Studios, London, produced by Muff Winwood. It includes "Sultans of Swing", "Water of Love" and "Six Blade Knife". Total budget is 12,500 pounds - including artwork.

#### **MARCH - NOVEMBER 1978**

Constant live work - Marquee residency, tours of UK, France, Holland, and Germany to rapidly increasing audiences. Despite enthusiastic reviews and responses everywhere, their first single, "Sultans of Swing" and self-titled album merely drop into the charts and drop out



again.

The group signs to Warner Brothers for the USA, but even before their album is released there, Knopfler visits Muscle Shoals studios to play on a Mavis Staples session produced by Jerry Wexler (whose tack record includes Aretha Franklin, The Drifters, Ray Charles). Wexler and Muscle Shoals keyboard player Barry Beckett agree to produce their second album.

### 27 NOVEMBER 1978 - 10 JANUARY 1979

They record "Communique" (including "Lady Writer" and "Once Upon A Time In The West") at Compass Point Studios, Nassau Bahamas. Meanwhile the Dire Straits album gives them their first Number 1 - in Australia - and climbs steadily towards the Top 10's in North America and Europe.



### 23 FEBRUARY - 3 APRIL 1979

Dire Straits first North American tour comprises 51 sold-out shows in 38 days, not to mention 300 interviews. Mark sessions for Steely Dan's "Gaucho" album. While they're on the road, "Sultans' of Swing" reaches Number 4 and the first album Number 2. When they play Los Angeles, Bob Dylan is in the audience and afterwards he asks Mark and Pick to play on his next album ("Slow Train Coming", his first born-again statement it transpires, recorded with Wexler and Beckett at Muscle Shoals May 1-12).

Back home in Britain, though a little later than in America, reissued "Sultans of Swing" takes off to Number 8, stirring the Dire Straits album to peak belatedly at Number 5 during a chart stay of 130 weeks.

### JUNE - DECEMBER 1979

"Communique" is released and becomes an instant worldwide hit (UK 5, US 11, the first album to ever enter the German chart at Number 1), usually sharing Top 10's with the extraordinarily durable first album. Tours of Britain, America and Europe sell out, but after pre-Christmas concerts in Dublin, Belfast, and London, Dire Straits announce a six-month break to rest.

### JUNE - JULY 1980

The band record "Making Movies" (including "Tunnel of Love", "Solid Rock", "Skateaway" and "Romeo And Juliet") at The Power Station, New York, with producer Jimmy Iovine. He had been engineer/mixer on Springsteen's "Born To Run" and producer on Patti Smith's "Easter". E Street Band pianist Roy Bittan plays keyboards on the album, David Knopfler leaves for a solo career.



### SEPTEMBER 1980 - JULY 1981

Auditions produce a replacement guitarist in Hal Lindes from California and a keyboard player in Alan Clark from Durham (born 5 March 1952). After the 17 October release of "Making Movies", the band tour North America, Australia and New Zealand and Europe (they draw 250,000 to their Italian concerts alone). Despite their live success "Making Movies" does less than its predecessors in the States (Number 19), but in the UK the hit single "Romeo And Juliet" lifts it to Number 4, four months after release.

### MARCH - JUNE 1982

They record "Lover Over Gold" in New York, Mark producing, backed up by engineer Neil Dorfsman. The first side (in LP-era-speak) comprises just two songs, "Telegraph Road" and "Private Investigations". ("Private Dancer", omitted from the album, was later chosen as the title track of the 1984 album which relaunched Tina Turner's career). Soon afterwards, Pick Withers leaves the band, expressing a desire to play jazz.



### JULY 1982

Mark records his first movie soundtrack for the low budget David Puttnam production "Local Hero" (in part working on the set). He got the job after Ed Bicknell punted copies of "Making Movies" round various film producers (the album reaches number 14 in the UK the following year).

Between work on "Love Over Gold" and "Local Hero", the demand for Mark's services as a guitarist reaches a new pitch as he records sessions for Van Morrison.

### AUGUST 1982 - JULY 1983

"Private Investigations" is Dire Straits' biggest UK hit to date (Number 2), despite being radio-unfriendly at seven minutes long. "Love Over Gold" is Number 1 album for a month, their first home chart-topper, and maintains the band's progress all over the world (Number 1 in 16 countries) except that in America, like "Making Movies" it stalls at 19.

Terry Williams, formerly of Man and Dave Edmund's Rockpile, takes over the drum stool in September and immediately work on Dire Straits' "Twisting By The Pool" rock 'n' roll EP (released in February). He and Mark then record with Phil Everly in London before Dire Straits hit the road.

The band's conquests include the highest-grossing tour of Australia by any band to that point, the largest public gathering ever in New Zealand (62,000 in Auckland) and their first trip to Japan.

In April - May, Mark takes time out to undertake his first production work with another artist (apart from the "Local Hero soundtrack") when he co-produces and plays on Dylan's "Infidels" album.

### AUGUST 1983 - OCTOBER 1984

Mixing the tapes for the live double album "Alchemy" recorded at the Hammersmith Odeon, 22/23 July 1983, Dire Straits eschew the usual "fairy dust" of overdubs and re-recordings and decide it should be released au naturel, mistakes and all. The album comes out in March (UK 3, US 46). Through the autumn and winter of 1983, Mark writes and records soundtracks for two more British movies, "Cal" produced by David Puttnam and "Comfort and Joy", directed by Bill Forsyth of "Gregory's Girl" and "Local Hero" fame. By this time, Mark has started working with keyboard player Guy Fletcher, who joins Alan Clark in the band. The "keyboard twins" are born. In the same period, Mark and John Illsley play on David Knopfler's first solo album "Release" while John records his solo debut, "Never Told A Soul", with assistance from Mark and Terry Williams. Also, in November at Kensington registry office, Mark marries Lourdes Salamone.



In June, Mark produces Aztec Camera's album "Knife" which goes to number 14 in Britain.

### NOVEMBER 1984 - APRIL 1985

They record "Brothers in Arms", Mark co-producing with Neil Dorsfman at Air Studios, Montserrat. It includes "So Far Away", "Walk Of Life", "Money For Nothing" and "Your Latest Trick". Guy Fletcher (born 25 May 1960) joins the band as a second keyboard player (from an early stint with Roxy Music and many sessions). Hal Lindes leaves half way through the recording and is replaced for the marathon tour to come by Jack Sonni, a friend of Mark's who came straight from a day job at Rudy's Music Stop, 48th Street, New York. An additional musician on tour is Chris White on sax, late of the National Youth Jazz Orchestra.

### APRIL 1985 - APRIL 1986

"Brothers In Arms" enters the UK chart at the top and stays there for 3 weeks, but this hardly offers a clue to the American and worldwide response which is to transform Dire Straits' status from First Division to Super League. The album launches a thousand statistics.

In the USA, it reaches Number 1 in August and stays there for nine weeks. Similarly, "Money For Nothing" with Sting as guest vocalist, is Dire Straits' first American Number 1 single. In the following months, "Brothers In Arms" also tops the charts in Canada, Brazil, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Eire, Finland, France, German, Greece, Iceland, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and Israel. Incidentally, "Brothers In Arms" becomes, perhaps, the key album in transforming CD from a new-fangled curiosity into a mass-market "music carrier".

The tour covers 23 countries, 117 cities, 248 shows and sells 3 million tickets. Legendarily, they play some astonishing unbroken runs of gigs for a major act, such as 23 straight nights in the UK in December 1985. On 13 July 1985, they perform to a billion TV viewers from the Wembley Stadium end of Live Aid. The tour ends in Sydney, Australia, the 20th

night there, on 26 April 1986.

### **JUNE 1986 - JUNE 1988**

Mark and John play the Prince's Trust concert at Wembley Arena with Paul McCartney, Elton John, and Tina Turner, Mark produces 2 tracks for her "Break Every Rule" album, including his own "Overnight Sensation".

Busman's holidaying from the band, Mark records for the soundtrack of Martin Scorsese's "The Colour Of Money" (starring Tom Cruise and Paul Newman). He joins the "host of stars" re-recording "Let It Be" to raise money for the families of the Zebrugge ferry disaster victims; he plays with Chet Atkins at The Secret Policeman's Third Ball - a benefit for Amnesty International - then again on an American TV tribute to the great Nashville guitar man; as is to become traditional, he guests with Eric Clapton's band for his annual Royal Albert Hall winter session in London and a European tour; he writes and performs the soundtrack for the Rob Reiner movie "The Princess Bride"; he produces and plays on Willy DeVille's album "Miracle" and several tracks for Randy Newman's "Land of Dreams". Meanwhile, John Illsley releases a single under the name of K Wallis B and the Dark Shades of Night, plus his second solo album, "Glass". On 9 November 1987 Lourdes gives birth to twin boys, Benji and Joseph.

In early 1988, Mark socialises with Steve Phillips and Brendan Croker, old guitar-picking friends from his Leeds days as an apprentice journalist. He offers to produce Phillips' next album. Over the ensuing months Synclavier meister Guy Fletcher becomes involved too and they very gradually record a set of some of their country blues favourites.

### **JUNE 1988**

After two fan-club-only warm-up gigs at Hammersmith Odeon, Dire Straits, with Eric Clapton on second guitar, play the Nelson Mandela 70th Birthday Party at Wembley Stadium (part of the Artists Against Apartheid campaign), closing the show.

### **JULY - OCTOBER 1988**

Mark plays on Joan Armatrading's album "The Shouting Stage", then he and Alan Clark join Eric Clapton's band for an American tour. The "Money For Nothing" hits compilation is released (a UK Number 1).

### **JANUARY - DECEMBER 1989**

Mark writes and records the soundtrack for the German director Uli Edel's movie of the once controversial novel "Last Exit To Brooklyn". During the summer, a pub conversation with Steve Phillips and Brendan Croker reaches a conclusion that they have temporarily become a band called the Notting Hillbillies, that they will go out on the road to promote their slowly gestated album and that Dire Strait's manager, Ed Bicknell - last seen on a drum stool in a ceilidh band for the "Local Hero" soundtrack - is appointed official tub-thumper forthwith.

### **JANUARY - OCTOBER 1990**

The Notting Hillbillies' album "Missing... Presumed Having A Good Time", is released by Phonogram on 5 March and goes Top 10 in the UK. They hit the road for 41 gigs in 43 days around Britain through April and May. The significant Knopfler verdict on the whole Hillbillies excursion repeated in interview after interview is, "I'm absolutely in love with music". By now, Mark has used Nashville pedal steel guitar ace, Paul Franklin and 'steals' him for Dire Straits.

Mark finishes an album of duets with Chet Atkins called "Neck and Neck", released November 1990 (UK Number 29 and Number 1 in the UK Country chart, multiplying Atkin's usual British sales by a factor of 6) and concludes other sideline recording work with Buddy Guy and Brendan Croker before - after a 5 year hiatus - he and John Illsley decide it's time to get back to Dire Straits. Mark and John play with Clapton's band at the Knebworth Festival benefit for Music Therapy, Mark spends the summer in America writing and comes up with 15 new songs from which the album will be chosen.

### **NOVEMBER 1990 - MAY 1991**

Dire Straits record their sixth album, "On Every Street" with engineers Bill Schnee and Chuck Ainlay at Air Studios in London with production credited to Mark Knopfler and Dire Straits and mixed by Neil Dorfsman. Bob Clearmountain mixes one track "Heavy Fuel".

### **23 AUGUST 1991 ..... SOMETIME IN 1997**

Dire Straits begin their world tour with five dates at The Point in Dublin, expecting 250-300



more to follow over the next 2 years, with audiences adding up to maybe 7 million.

The 1986 tour line-up is considerably changed and augmented. While Knopfler, Illsley, Fletcher and Clark are now officially designated Dire Straits, the nine-piece line-up now also features Chris White (sax), Paul Franklin (pedal steel), Danny Cummings (percussion), Phil Palmer (guitar) and Chris Whitten (drums).



In 1997 Mark Knopfler sings Money for Nothing with Sting, at the Royal Albert Hall as part of a fund raising event for the victims of Montserrat's volcanic eruption.

So what's the purpose of all this information? Simply that if you have ever wanted to replenish and ageing collection of Dire Straits albums, or purchase new copies, now is the time to watch out for new information provided by both the Vinyl SA and Audio Nut newsletters and web sites. And I have heard that Audio Nut are trying to secure distribution rights with another European record company which will ensure that you get the first pressings of all available titles as soon as they are released. And with us sharing time zones with the Europeans, turnaround times between ordering and receiving goods is way less than from the USA. Contact Mark on [earads@iafrica.com](mailto:earads@iafrica.com) for enquiries about Dire Straits and other available artists and titles.

And as I complete editing the newsletter, "Money for Nothing" is spinning away on my 15 year old, but pristine, 140 gram copy. I realise again that vinyl just has that extra something which no other medium can provide!

#### HARDWARE FOR SALE:

Up for sale is a pair of **Wilson Benesch Actor** loudspeakers. The units are in excellent condition and the owner is selling to upgrade to a pair of Act 1 loudspeakers by the same manufacturer. The cost is R35 000.00. For more information please contact Euan on +27 (0)83 960-6840 or [euan@telkomsa.net](mailto:euan@telkomsa.net).



Alf Herbert has a **collection of LP records** for sale. For more information you can contact him on [leeherbert@mweb.co.za](mailto:leeherbert@mweb.co.za).

**Yamaha A595a 5.1 AV amplifier**, DD/DTS decoding onboard in excellent condition and having served me well for some five years. It now needs a good home since I no longer have a 5.1 system and have decided to return to stereo only. Manual and remote control (also controls other items in your system) included. Can demo as unit is still being used. R2500.00. Contact Andries on +27 (0)72 235-9818 or [andrieso@iafrica.com](mailto:andrieso@iafrica.com).



**Linn Sondek LP12 with Origin Live OL1 arm and Ortofon MC Turbo MM cartridge** for sale. Valhalla board, serial number 061515 (late 1985), Afromosia plinth in perfect condition. New bearing oil and suspension kit available as well. Comes with decent platter mat made by Valve Audio and not the flimsy Linn felt mat. The arm alone is worth some R4000.00. All this will cost you only R7500.00. Contact Euan on +27 (0)83 960-6840 or [euan@telkomsa.net](mailto:euan@telkomsa.net).



**Note:** Image to the right is for illustrative purposes only!

**Linn K9 MM cartridge** for sale. Make an offer. Contact Neels Smith on [Nsmith@fnb.co.za](mailto:Nsmith@fnb.co.za) for more information.



## NEW DISCUSSION BOARD / FORUM FOR THE WEB SITE:

Most of our subscribers will remember that we had a forum / discussion board that ran perfectly for more than a year and then mysteriously disappeared. There was no way I could recover the rather exhaustive content since we made use of a free BBS and had no control over the administrative management of the forum.

Thanks to generous sponsorship provided by The Listening Room ([www.thelisteningroom.co.za](http://www.thelisteningroom.co.za)) we have been able to put up a new forum on the Vinyl South Africa domain. Not only can we now control it but it should be significantly faster than the old one. Feel free to register and join in the discussions by visiting [www.vinylsa.co.za/forum](http://www.vinylsa.co.za/forum). When registering please note the rules that apply to forums. Spammers will be blacklisted and Vinyl SA has the right to remove any post or thread that is offensive in any way. A few forums have already been created. Please make sure you start a new thread under the correct forum else things become confusing. Contact me on [andrieso@iafrica.com](mailto:andrieso@iafrica.com) for new forums you would like to see added to the board. Other than that, have fun.

Update: By this morning, Friday 27 January, quite a number of people have joined. While we may not get as many participants as for example on the excellent forum of The Vinyl Engine ([www.vinylengine.com](http://www.vinylengine.com)), we have the same issues, questions, analogue gear and so on. So let's help one another and share our experiences. In a newsletter close to the end of 2005, we placed a request for vinyl supporters to indicate which titles they would like to see re-issued. To date I have received the following feedback:

Tresspass	Genesis	Wayne Roux
Second Contribution	Phillips, Shaun	Wayne Roux
Sheer Heart Attack	Queen	Wayne Roux
Tracey Chapman	Chapman, Tracey	Neels Smith
Brothers in Arms	Dire Straits	Neels Smith
The Joshua Tree	U2	Neels Smith
Ten Summoner's Tales	Sting	Neels Smith
The Concert in Central Park	Simon and Garfunkel	Neels Smith
Love over Gold	Dire Straits	Mike Clapperton
The Trinity Sessions	Cowboy Junkies	Mike Clapperton
The Caution Horses	Cowboy Junkies	Mike Clapperton
Amused to Death	Roger Waters	Mike Clapperton
August and Everything After	Counting Crows	Mike Clapperton
Rickie Lee Jones	Rickie Lee Jones	Andries Oberholzer
Solitude Standing	Suzanne Vega	Andries Oberholzer
Wish You Were Here	Pink Floyd	Andries Oberholzer
Animals	Pink Floyd	Andries Oberholzer
A Day At The Races	Queen	Andries Oberholzer

There's no reason why we cannot be successful in a bid to have certain titles re-issued. Help us here please. The thread has already been started under the forum **Vinyl Records**.

## TECHNICAL CORNER: TRACKING WEIGHT AND VTA:

This week there are two articles related to the same topic. One is from personal experience and the other a highly technical document written by a turntable manufacturer and expert on tone arms and their behaviour.

### TRACKING WEIGHT - SETTING IT YOURSELF

I helped out a friend this week who reported that a new record he had purchased, would not play the first few seconds on either of the record and suspected a tracking problem. I drove out there to see what I could do about it. I set up this a new cartridge on this person's deck a while ago and the challenge was to set the tracking weight on an arm that does not have a tracking force dial. Many purists would immediately say that the absence of a tracking weight dial is good, since it is one less area that can vibrate or otherwise cause interference. But if you don't have an accurate gauge this can be a problem. The first time this had to be set by ear and by using general experience.

This time I had the use of a very accurate digital scale. The immediate result showed that my initial setting was a little bit too conservative and a cartridge that should track at 2.5 gram was doing so at only 2.2 gram. This immediately solved much of the tracking problem the client had before

A few interesting points arise from this: Usually we think that too high a tracking weight will damage the groove and then we set it too light. The truth is that more records are damaged because of tracking weight being too light, than too heavy. The arm needs to hold the cartridge still in relation to the stylus. If the tracking weight is too low, the arm will tend to lift the stylus off the bottom of the groove and in an effort to resettle, will move sideways, mistrack and cause groove damage in the process.

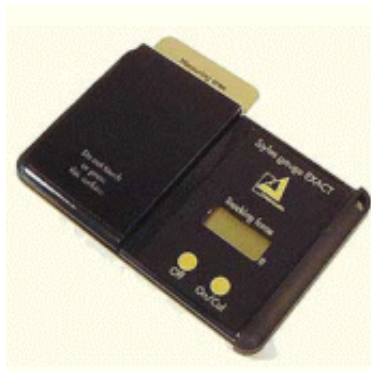
The general rule is that if the tracking weight range of a given cartridge is eg. 2.2 to 2.7 gram, going down the middle is not necessarily correct. Manufacturers will usually indicate a recommended tracking weight. This may be quite lower than the maximum that the range allows. Experiment by setting it to the lowest value in the range. Then listen to a piece of music you know well. Continue with 0.1 gram increases until the sound is what your ears are comfortable with. You will do no damage at all by setting it to the maximum that the range allows. Then, if necessary or if no improvement results, go back down the scale and use the manufacturer's recommendation.

Be careful though. If your tone arm has a spring dial to set tracking weight, set this to 0 first. Then use only the counterweight to first balance the arm and then use the digital scale to set the required downward force by moving the counterweight forwards or backwards. Leave the dial in the 0 position so that it has no effect on the measurements. There is no way that a mechanical device like this can be more accurate than a digital scale!

In the end an accurate digital scale is a must, if you tend to swop cartridges. These little things can be very expensive and you have to decide whether the investment is worth the effort. Tracking weight gauges can be obtained from a variety of sources and I consulted one with which you should be familiar - Music Direct. They supply the following devices:



Music Direct has been overwhelmed with orders for this amazingly accurate, affordable digital stylus force gauge. This Stereophile Recommend Analog Accessory is simple to use, extremely reliable and dead on accurate to a tenth of a gram from 0.1g to 120g! This is the first high quality digital scale to break the \$300 price barrier. Don't rely on the less than optimal knobs and dials on your tone arm/counterweight for setting your tracking force, this cool little digital SFG makes it so much easier to "dial in" the best possible sound from your phono cartridge. Finally, an essential analog tool priced within reach of any analog lovers' budget. Highly recommended!



Don't let the credit card-like size fool you; this gauge is among the most accurate on the market, capable of measuring a tracking force to within .05/gram! Simply place the gauge on the platter and lower your arm onto the measuring area where the easy-to-read LED displays the tracking force. Its low profile design allows it to work with any analog setup. A Stereophile Recommended Component.

This Japanese stylus force gauge is accurate to the nearest hundredth gram! The Winds Arm Load Meter is the ultra-accurate electronic stylus force gauge for the serious audiophile. Hand built in Japan and incorporating special transducer technology, this high precision measuring device allows easy, repeatable and precise setting of phono cartridge tracking force.



The Winds gauge features a large measuring area and easy to read digital display, providing the best, repeatable precision calibration of your phono cartridge's tracking force and vertical tracking angle (VTA). The result is effortless music reproduction with lifelike dynamics, natural tonality and enhanced imaging. The Winds ALM-01 gauge is accurate to 1/100th of a gram! The battery powered gauge features a renewable energy source, freedom from cumbersome cords and worldwide operation. Built-in bubble level, electronic calibration and 3 year limited warranty.

Prices POA. These units can be ordered through Audio Nut. Contact Mark on [eads@iafrica.com](mailto:eads@iafrica.com) or +27 (0)82 885-0146.

**NOTE:** Writers often use the terms tracking force and tracking weight as if it were the same. Obviously it is not but because *tracking force* (compensating for the natural tendency of the arm to move outwards due to rotational forces) and *tracking weight* (the downward force exerted by the cartridge on the record) work together. If the downward tracking weight is set to a specific value then normally the tracking force, set by a dial every arm will have, is set to the same

value.

Now tell my vinyl is not interesting when you can get maths and science involved to listen to music on your turntable. Not that my maths and science are up to scratch, but it still makes for interesting reading matter, as seen in the following article.

## VTA FACT SHEET

No, it is not because I happen to like this brand of analogue gear that I am using Roy Gandy's article here. It's just that the Rega founder has a very simple philosophy when it comes to turntable design - don't make things more complicated than they have to be. This is of course evident in the look of all the Rega products. Gandy answers some critics about what we think is critical - the dreaded VTA (Vertical Tracking Angle). The document is reproduced with no changes, except for fonts:

### Rega VTA(Vertical Tracking Angle) Fact Sheet by Roy Gandy

*Quote: "Every problem has a solution. If there is no solution, there is no problem"*

**The Tonearm:** The maximum up/down adjustment on a tone arm is about 0.5 inches (12mm). That being approximately 1 degree VTA adjustment.

[Correction: if you do the maths' a 0.5inch variation on a 9 inch arm is about a 3E° variation. You can work this out yourself once you remember that the sin() of an angle is the change in the y coordinate divided by the radius, so  $0.5/9 \approx 0.055 \approx \sin(3E)$ ]

**The Cartridge:** Each model of cartridge has its own unique design which also determines the stylus VTA. Rega has accurately measured the VTA on at least one hundred different cartridge models. The lowest VTA we have measured was 24E (even though the manufacturer claimed 20°) and the highest was 36°. Most cartridges have a VTA of between 28° to 32°. The VTA of Rega cartridge is approximately 28°.

**The Record:** The VTA of a record cutting stylus is set to give the best continuous cut of the lacquer. Records are cut with a VTA which varies between 0° and 20°. On an individual record the VTA will vary by 7° or more, depending on the type of cutting head used, the depth of cut, the musical frequency and the lacquer springback. The VTA of the groove on every individual record varies by at least 7° over the record. Every record is cut under 20°.

**Futility:** We can see that cartridge VTA is normally around 10° higher than the record cutting angle. And the record cutting angle varies by around 7° whilst it is being played.

THEREFORE A MAXIMUM ARM ADJUSTMENT OF ONLY 1E CAN BE SEEN TO BE COMPLETELY FUTILE.

To accurately match cartridge VTA to the record cutting angle the back of the arm would need to be well below the record (impossible!) and the cartridge VTA would need to vary at least 7° whilst playing the record!

**Normal advice:** Most informed advice is to keep the arm tube roughly parallel to the record surface. In fact, the VTA becomes more correct as the rear of the arm is lowered as much as possible, the limit being when the arm or cartridge touches the record.

**Worst case:** The most extreme situation is a record cutting angle of 0° and a cartridge VTA of 36°. The result is a VTA inaccuracy of 36°.

**Question: Can there be any point in playing around with 1E of VTA?**

VTA adjustment is actually a neurosis NOT a technical adjustment.

**An Alternative:** If you alter the playing weight of a normal cartridge by 0.1 of a gram the stylus VTA will alter by around 1.5°.

**Another Alternative:** If the room temperature increases by 5° F, the stylus rubber suspension will soften and decrease the VTA

by 1°.

## "but when I alter the VTA I hear a difference"

Of course you do. Any variation or change to the very important joint between the arm and turntable will alter the sound quality. Try simply tightening or loosening the main arm fixing nut, the sound will change. Try tightening or loosening the cartridge fixing nuts, the sound will also change. Almost any change or adjustment to a turntable / arm / cartridge will alter the sound quality if one listens with an acute level of perception. We hope we have explained to the reader that VTA adjustment is of little or no significance. There are many other simple structural changes that are more important, such as fixing the cartridge rigidly to the arm and fixing the arm tightly to the turntable.

### AUDIO VIDEO SOUTH AFRICA MAGAZINE, FEBRUARY 2006:



If you receive AVSA Magazine by post, then you had better hurry off to the postbox to collect it, as it was already available on 26 January. And if you don't subscribe and get it by post, shame. Then you'll have to wait until it is available in the CNA and other distribution points. Being the first edition for 2006 there is a lot of information on new products, even for the vinyl enthusiast: Ringmat support systems; two vinyl album reviews (The Who and The Rolling Stones); and the Clearaudio Weight Watcher digital stylus pressure gauge. And no, there was no prior planning to coincide my article on tracking weight and this one. It just shows how important this aspect is! The rest of the magazine is filled with goodies for all - amplifiers, loudspeakers and a review on the Tivoli Audio range of audio equipment that in appearance takes you back in time but in sound and features catapult you into the future. Grab a copy today.

That's it for this week. I am off to collect some delicious vinyl from Audio Nut now and thus wouldn't mind if it rains cats and dogs this weekend.

Best regards  
Andries O