

HIFI-STARs

Technik

Musik

Lebensart

ISSN 1867-5166

Edition 36
September 2017
November 2017



CEC Double Belt Drive CD Transport TL 2N

A true gem of a CD Transport!

“.. Thank god, companies such as CEC exist who have spent decades consequently working towards an objective of achieving the most authentic sound experiences as possible with the technical further development of CD playback and always come up with brilliant innovations. The new CEC TL 2N CD drive is undoubtedly one of them.. I can clearly understand the manufacturer’s statement for a voluminous, spatial yet very detailed sound pattern..” *Review from HIFI STARS - 2017*



CEC TL 2N - Double Belt Drive CD Transport

A true gem of a CD Transport!



What was it that Antoine de Saint-Exupéry worded so beautiful in his cult book “The Little Prince”: “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye”. This can be modified to apply it to some HiFi devices that at a first may not look very spectacular but their inner qualities make them radiate. Although it cannot be seen, it can be heard all the better. According to this, the quote should read as follows: “It is only with the ears that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye”. This is how I felt at the High End in Munich standing in front of this year’s newest CD drives by the Japanese premium manufacturer CEC. By looking at just the design and

comparing it with the other relatively new drive TL 5 by the same manufacturer, there are barely any differences. For over a year, this drive has given a very strong performance in my listening room. This is a common feature of both CD drives of the belt drive developed by CEC and we have spoken about its advantages in HiFi Stars so many times, that I will let it be this time – sorry! (*Hifi Stars publishing at Edition #03 (CEC TL 1N and CEC DA 1N), #17 (CEC TL 3N and CEC DA 3N), #19 (CEC CD 3N), #24 (CEC TL 0 3.0 and CEC DA 3N), #26 (CEC CD 5) #29 (CEC TL5 with DA 3N)*) However, according to the manufacturer, the latest CD drive by CEC - the TL 2N, which this review is about



transforms into a significantly higher sphere. And it is to make music on a level playing field with the CEC TL 1N that has been available on the market for many years, which is ranked immediately after the legendary flagship CEC TL 0 3.0 in the product range. It is a relatively high requirement that the new CEC belt drive TL 2N wants to satisfy.

CEC's completely new CD Double belt drive system raised to another level!

It goes without saying that the manufacturer was carefully prepared to satisfy this demanding objective in technical terms. In doing so, the patented double belt drive system in the TL 2N was raised to a new audiophile level. The developers installed numerous detailed solutions and the entire mechanism was meticulously centered and the aluminum chassis was enlarged. Even the technology of changing the belts was simplified. The drive mechanism used in the TL 2N uses the flywheel effect to achieve a greater level of smooth running. At the same time, the large (12 cm diameter) and heavy (380 grams)

CD stabiliser improves the accuracy while reading the music signals. The technical features of TL 0 3.0 and TL 1N and the new TL 2N, also includes the CEC Superlink connection which can be activated in combination with the in-house top converter DA 3N and the reference converter DA 0 3.0. While conventional digital connections – such as XLR according to the AES/EBU standard, cinch/coax or the optical Toslink - need to code and decode the music data and the synchronisation signals of the sampled CD, this step is omitted in the CEC Superlink. Here, four BNC-75 ohm cables transport “thoroughbred” signals so-to-speak and thus, enable optimal synchronisation with the converter.

Upsampling as an additional option

The CEC developers equipped the TL 2N drive with another new option. It makes it possible to up-sample the digital output signals from the CD from 44.1 kHz to 88.2 kHz or even 176.4 kHz. In this way, it is possible to achieve a higher-resolution and more detailed playback.



Furthermore, from an audiophile point of view the in-house hearing tests showed that an upsampling to 88.2 kHz or 176.4 kHz is superior to the predominantly 96/192 kHz in computers. It is quick and easy to explain the different function buttons and connections on the TL 2N. On the left side of the front panel is the power button, to the right the push-button for the next track, previous track, then the button for upsampling, followed by the stop button and finally, the start/pause button. The display window with the usual information on the track number, time elapsed or how much time is left, forward and reverse etc. Furthermore, it will also display an activated Superlink connection and the selected upsampling speed. The TL 2N drive – like all other CEC drives – is a top loader in terms of construction, a drawer closes the CD tray.

CEC Superlink connection included

As is usually case for CEC - neat and clearly arranged - the reverse side of the device: From left to right you have a connection for a separate word clock, followed by the digital outputs XLR-AES/

Coax, Cinch and Toslink. This is followed by the Superlink section with the 4x BNC connectors and to the very right the power supply. This obviously includes a remote control, which also controls the upsampling in addition to the standard functions.

I am now going to integrate the TL 2N into my system and for test purposes, the manufacturer also provided me with the D/A converter CEC DA 3N (*report in HiFi Stars Edition #17*) and the new CEC power cable PC-02 and a CD series with demo-material. More on that later. The four Superlink cables are connected in no time, TL 2N and DA 3N dock to the HMS Energia MkII power strip in the correct phase position.

The CEC power cable (CEC PC-02) is used for the D/A converter, the TL 2N is also supplied by a high-quality power line. My Symphonic Line RG 14 Edition acts as a full amplifier, the Triaxia Whitelink by Euphonic Architect Klaus Bensinger as the sound converter. After several hours of the import process it can finally start.

Transparency, quietness, ease and stability in the sound pattern

It all starts with the Big Band Sound: Quincy Jones “Bossa Nova” (Verve SR-60751) spins in the CD tray and I immediately notice the transparency in the sound pattern of both of these technically sound recordings from 1962 - Phil Ramone is responsible for this. In cut no. 5, the song “Se E Tarde Me Pardo (Forgive Me If I’m Late)”, I have a clearly differentiated perception of the imaginary stage with the drum kit positioned to the right than what I remember from the playback with other equipment. Furthermore, an impressive quietness and stability is felt from the recording, everything appears to be tidy and organised in a more tangible manner. A CD with recordings of the unforgettable jazz vocalist Sarah Vaughan is often an example for the playback of tightly woven structures of sound. The track “Romance” on the recording mastered by Bernie Grundman from 1987 generally shifts the

the acoustic image of the smooth sound tapestry of the strings just a little to the trumpets and drums. I apologise for the slightly old comparison in advance, but while listening to the track, it really feels as the a veil is being lifted. The musicians keep a clearer distance to one another, there is simply more air between the instruments. Cut no. 5 of this CD – “Photograph” - also appear in my recordings. However, I notice the clearly defined voice of the vocalist from the middle of the stereo even during the gentle fading out at the end of the track. I have waited a long time for my favourite recording of the 9th Symphony by Antonin Dvořák “From the New World” with Karel Ančerl and the Czech philharmonic orchestra to be released in audiophile form. This was made up for by JVC with a XRCD. Although the recording created on 6 December 1961 in Prague – compared to the contemporary, technically excellent recordings – is lacking in a little opulence, the CEC duo gives the large symphony



orchestra its very own width and depth and does not suppress the many details of the solo instruments. Would this be a good time to compare it with the upsampling option of the CEC TL 2N?

What is the point of the upsampling option?

Said and done! The upsampling option of the TL 2N however, does not work via the Superlink connection, to do so, I first need to remove the four BNC cables between the drive and the converter. I replace them with a digital XLR connection according to the AES/EBU standard - with a straight wire mega-link. A few months ago, I had good listening experiences with this cable produced by an American specialist. A first listening test without upsampling, with the usual 44.1 kHz data rate results in a 1:0 for the CEC Superlink connection. In my opinion, this introduces more sovereignty and certainty to the music scene.

Lets go a step further: In the upsampling 88.2 kHz position, I feel as though the fundamental range gained more depth. I hear the upsampling on 176.4 kHz and this position has a greater fundamental range and somehow everything appears to be rounder and softer, and even slightly more harmonious. In my opinion, while listening the aforementioned CD "Bossa Nova" by Quincy Jones, the setting 88.2 kHz does not appear to yield any noticeable improvements, whereas this Big Band recording with upsampling set to 176.4 kHz seems to be smoother and rounder overall. However, it is worth experimenting to find what your personal preferences are.

In doing so, the four demo silver discs that CEC delivered from their coop partner, the Dutch label STS Digital are undoubtedly helpful and they can be obtained via their sales partner. STS made a name

for itself with high-quality music recordings and the excellent digital editing of music. (*www.sts-digitalshop.nl*) The last track on the "Extended Dynamic Experience 3" CD is STS-own digital production - Circle Percussion named "Steam Train". It starts with tubular bell sounds that are barely audible, then the virtuous interpretation of an approaching steam train begins with the powerful beat of the drum. How are these extremely gentle sounds reproduced, how do they end? What sampling rate sounds the best? Another track on the "Extended Dynamic Experience 4" CD is also good for evaluation purposes. In "Night Train", Christian Mc Bride carries us off with his double bass to an unusual journey of sounds – this is where the strings are plucked and played and the corpus is tapped with the bow and it groans so that the speaker membrane vibrates in just this manner.

A high-quality power cable also on offer

Such examples of music can also be helpful when choosing cables (*LF cables and power cables*). Experience shows that digital components react very clearly to the quality of the power supply. At CEC, this was taken into account and the in-house PC-02 power cable is a good option for its components. The base material of the powerful cable (approx. 2 cm cross-section) is composed of high-quality 5N (99.999%) oxygen-free copper (OFC), and high-quality IEC and Schuko plugs with gold-plated contacts mounted to the ends. In terms of sound, the PC-02 is also on par with other very high-quality power cables in my chain. I can clearly understand the manufacturer's statement for a voluminous, spatial yet very detailed sound pattern.

What a coincidence! As I browsed through older trade journals, I came across an article from the year 2000. It said: Is the CD player dying?



CEC's new standard of the highly recommended CD Belt Drive System enables user replacement of Belt.

Back then the colleagues often asked whether it was being pushed to the margins by the DVD player boom because at that time numerous global companies had cancelled the production of all CD players above the 500 DM limit (*corresponds to approx. 250 €*) because they saw no future prospects.

Thank god, companies such as CEC exist who have spent decades consequently working towards an objective of achieving the most authentic sound experiences as possible with the technical further development of CD playback and always come up with brilliant innovations. The new CEC TL 2N Double Belt CD transport is undoubtedly one of them.

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In a nutshell

The newly presented CEC TL 2N drive is the admission ticket to the upper sphere of High End CD playback so-to-speak – and all this at a moderate price. If this isn't a convincing statement, what is? H.Obst | HIFI STARS | 2017

Specifications CEC TL 2N

Drive System	Double Belt Drive // Spindle & Pick-up
Power Supply	AC 100-240V / 50-60Hz
CD Stabilizer	Brass (ø 120 mm, weight: 380 g)
Digital Output	SUPERLINK: (BNC x 4) 2.5Vp-p/75Ω AES/EBU (Balanced XLR) x1: 2.5Vp-p/110Ω TOS x1: -21 ~ -15dBm EIAJ COAXIAL(SPDIF) x1: 0.5Vp-p/75Ω
Word clock	BNC x 1: 44.1kHz (digital input)
Up-sampling	24bit / 88.2kHz, 176.4kHz
Dimensions	435(W) × 335(D) × 111(H) mm
Weight	Unit 12 kg
Color	Silver or Black

CEC The Drive | since 1954

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