

REVIEW: CEC TL 0 3.0 - DOUBLE BELT CD TRANSPORT

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licensed for: Audiovertrieb Frank Koglin | Junkernstraße 5-7 | 47051 Duisburg | Telephone +49 (0) 203 9346643

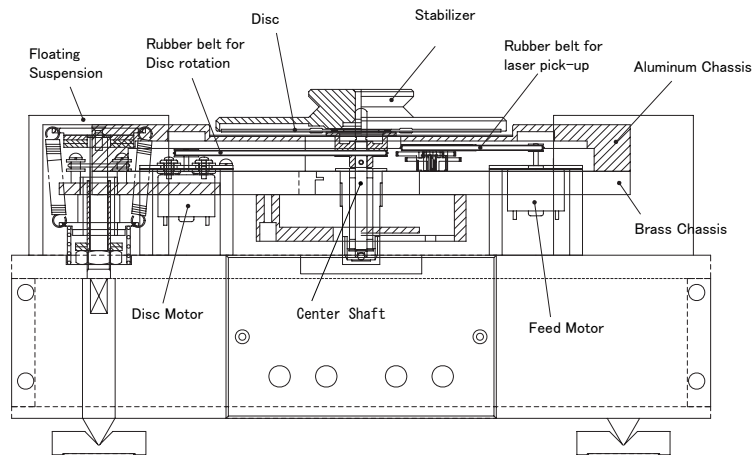


C.E.C. TL0 3.0

# THE ETER- NAL DISC SPIN- NER

By Cai Brockmann. Photos: Ingo Schulz

There are billions and billions of CDs out there. It is worth getting a standout digital device from Japan for the best, finest and most valuable ones. ▶

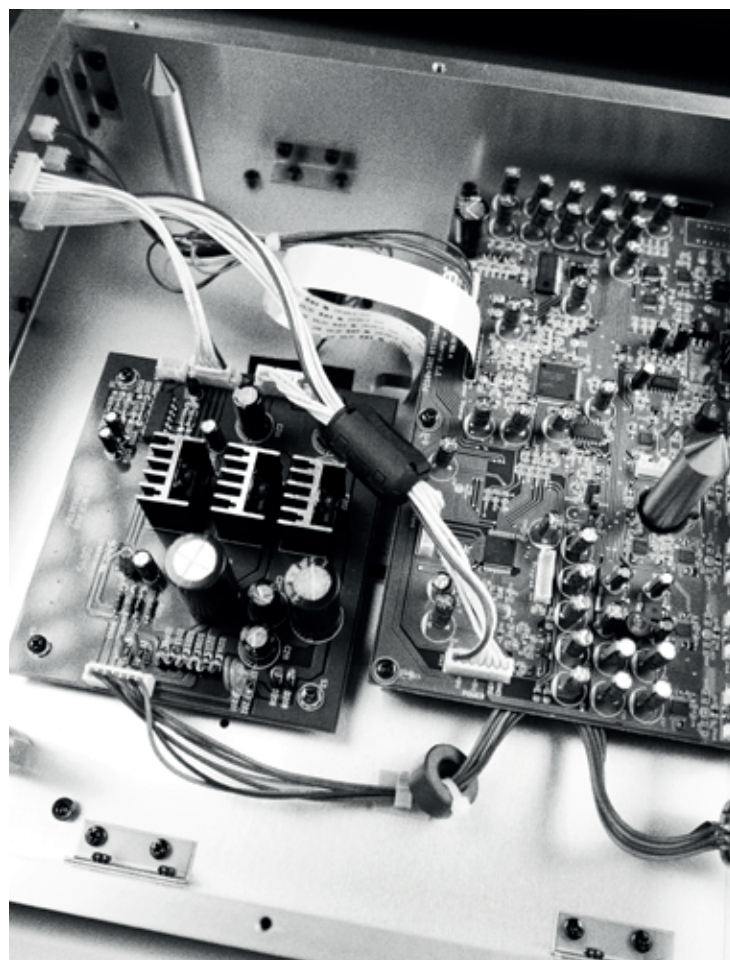



Frame made of aluminum plates, DRTS ("Double Rubbers Triple Springs") subchassis, non-magnetic brass-aluminum sandwich, massive disc clamp, two motors and double belt drive – yes, this is a high-end CD player!

— What do you want from a turntable? As stable a drive as possible, as little resonance as possible, and as uninterrupted a pick-up process as possible. Then, the resulting music will be great. What do you want from a CD player? Exactly the same things, according to C.E.C., who, for almost a quarter of a century, have been building CD players with astonishing similarities to large analog machines, even in terms of sound. C.E.C.'s top-of-the range model pushes everything to the max in analog technology terms, so much so that it completely blurs the lines with the best record players, and yes, even in terms of the sound. However, the price is up in the stratospheres where you only find analog heavyweights floating around. The TL0 3.0 weighs in at just under 20 kilograms (with the external power unit), meaning that each kilo will set you back EUR 1,500. That's a total of just under EUR 30,000 – enough to make the "sensible" amongst us despair: penny-pinchers will complain because the expensive device can only read zeros and ones of audio CDs and nothing else. Digital haters will look down their noses because it champions the technology of yesterday (CDs), which had almost replaced the beloved technology of yesteryear (vinyl). And trend scouts simply won't understand why anyone in their right mind would

**C.E.C. has announced that it will be showcasing the compatible converter for this transport at this year's HIGH END – we will be keeping our eyes peeled!**

still spend their money on a machine that plays physical recorded music media. Who listens to CDs these days anyway? Well, a hell of a lot of music lovers actually. Me, for one. Admittedly even I have to take a deep breath when I consider the price. There's no getting away from the fact that audiophile know-how and the finest engineering need to be paid for, and in this case, it all adds up. C.E.C. has been right at home in both camps (digital and analog) for decades already. Founded in Tokyo in 1954, in the same year, the company unveiled the first belt drive for record players. It experienced rapid growth with its own products but also made a name for itself as a supplier for numerous renowned audio companies. When the CD format made its debut in 1983, production of CD players was already in full flow. In 1991, C.E.C. surprised disillusioned CD listeners ("digital" was indeed not automatically "perfect") with their old-school realization that belt drives and subchassis were also good for digital players, and unveiled the TL1 model, the "world's first belt drive CD transport". Burmester also laid claim to the same title for its 916 model, unveiled at roughly the same time, but that is not of interest here. What is interesting, however, is C.E.C.'s radical approach that tonally decisive construction principles ▶




 MITSPIELER

**D/A converters:** Audio Note DAC 3 Signature, Ayon CD3sx, C.E.C. DA 3N, T+A PDP 3000 HV | **Preamplifiers:** Nagra Jazz, Valvet Soulshine | **Power amplifiers:** Audio Note P2SE, Bittner TonMeister 500, Bryston B4SST and B14SST, Musical Fidelity M8 500s, Nagra Classic Amp, Silvercore TB3/1000, Valvet A4 | **Integrated amplifiers:** Lyric Audio Ti 140 | **Loud speakers:** Bowers & Wilkins 803 D3, KEF LS50, Live Act Audio LAS312, Stereophone Dura | **Headphones:** Beyerdynamic T1, HIFIMAN HE-1000 | **Cables:** Audio Note, Axmann, HMS, MFE, Refine Audio, Silvercore, Vovox | **Power supplies:** IsoTek Aquarius EVO3 | **Accessories:** various products form Acoustic Systems, DEinformer, Steinmusic and Subbase | **Furniture:** LignoLab "Die Bank" ("The Bench"), Subbase Shambala

Music instead of technology? Music thanks to technology? It doesn't seem to matter. The ideal situation for all things high fidelity is the audible absence of technology. The music alone is what counts.



of analog and digital drives should be comparable. Even one of the most obvious differences – here constantly 33 1/3 or 45 rpm, there varying between between approx. 200 and 500 rpm – is, upon close inspection, obsolete. The rotation is adapted in such small steps that the angular velocity of the CD during a relevant time period can be seen as constant. C.E.C. developed an entirely new elaborately decoupled drive unit with a belt drive, low torque and astonishingly high mass. Patents followed. Flush CD lovers celebrated the alternative design concept: C.E.C. had provided an analog oasis of inner peace in contrast to the usual lightweight direct drives with their super fast adjustments and readjustments.

Admittedly, the double belt drive for CD drives and laser carriages entails certain steps back in terms of operation. Ramp-up times and track skips aren't at risk of setting any new records with a belt drive, but real fans are happy to accept that; every analog device with a belt drive is considerably slower. Anyway, real music lovers don't rush their music.

So, let's take a look at C.E.C.'s top-of-the-range model: compared to the TLL1, the compact yet sturdy TL0 works – without the otherwise

usual housing – even more like a record player; a “3.0” in the current device abbreviation reveals that it is the third generation of the flagship device. Visible modifications since the predecessor TLOX are “rounder” edges on the six-edged sandwich subchassis and a more elegant appearance without any visible screws. In short, the transport looks simply gorgeous and radiates much more analog flair than any other digital machine.

### C.E.C.'s great transport pushes every DAC to achieve peak performance.

On the rear, an unusually large number of connectivity options attract your attention, and a signal interconnect called Superlink requiring a quartet of interconnect cables in particular catches your eye. This four-way connection, specially designed in-house by

C.E.C., transmits the various different “clocks” and the digital audio data of the CD with separate cables. Common digital connections in accordance with S/PDIF or AES/EBU standards interlace the data read from the CD (master clock, bit clock, L/R clock and the actual audio data) with each other and transmit the coded digital signal via a common cable to the D/A converter, where it must be decoded again and processed. Superlink bypasses the encoding and decoding process required for that, transmits the digital signals more ▶



1983: the first CD player, 1991: first belt drive CD transport, 2014: C.E.C. TL0 3.0 – the CD's official swan song is no more!



CD transport

### C.E.C. TL0 3.0

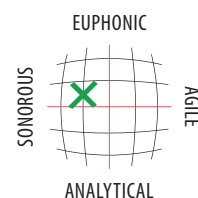
**Supported formats:** CD, CD-R, CD-RW | **Outputs digital:** balanced XLR (AES/EBU), unbalanced coaxial (cinch) and optical (Toslink), C.E.C. Superlink (4 x BNC) | **Inputs:** Word Clock external (BNC) | **Special features:** double belt drive for transport and laser carriage, subchassis, stabilizer (460 g), external power unit | **Dimensions of transport (W/H/D):** 30/32/16 cm | **Dimensions of power unit (W/H/D):** 12.5/10.5/26 cm | **Weight of transport:** 16 kg | **Weight of power unit:** 4 kg | **Warranty period:** 2 years | **Price:** €29,900

**CEC International GmbH | Wacholderweg 16 | 22335 Hamburg, Germany | [www.cec-international.com](http://www.cec-international.com) | [info@cec-international.com](mailto:info@cec-international.com)**



#### FIDELITY Navigator: C.E.C. TL0 3.0

No other CD drive sounds more analog.



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reliably and makes the converter's work easier. Of course C.E.C. recommends its Superlink to enable the transport to reach its full potential. Since C.E.C. currently (still) doesn't provide any digital-analog converters on a par with the super transport, sales manager Frank Koglin includes the conventionally designed DA 3N as an audiophile and comparatively inexpensive sidekick in the delivery (the DAC is a snip at "just" EUR 4,000). Nevertheless, the Superlink option of this converter should demonstrate just how noticeable the audible delicacy of the technology is.

So? Is the large C.E.C. transport immediately wrapping me around its digital finger with every single combination? Well, with "completely normal" DACs, it usually takes a good half a minute before the strong controlling hand of the transport can be clearly identified in the sound. But it is always clearly noticeable, and works miracles with more mundanely timbred DACs by turning comparatively plain zero-one slaves (e.g. from Ayon or T+A) into extremely enthusiastic music sources, which do their job with considerably more joy. Dynamics and attack win to some extent without becoming analytically sharp at all. Even my Audio Note DAC 3 Signature tube converter benefits from the Japanese data supplier, compared to

## C.E.C. builds turntables for CDs with astonishing similarities to analog machines.

the superior sound authority of which the tried and tested CDT 3 must take a backseat. Energy, nuance of sound, and tonal power are compelling here too. Recordings with proper groove are felt with even more emphasis, contour and depth. The data dominator from Tokyo quite clearly makes every DAC an audible top performer.

After it has imparted consistently astonishing assertiveness and stability to all kinds of "foreign converters" and unveils such a signature sound at the normal input of the C.E.C. DA 3N, the connection via Superlink once again notches up the performance. Time and space now become such a matter of course that I simply forget about them. In fact,

the somewhat price-wise imbalanced combined digital duo (7.5 : 1 for the transport) reminds me of corresponding analog configurations. Anyone who has ever assembled a reasonably priced "good" pick-up cartridge in the super tonearm of a top-notch record

player knows exactly what I mean: the result sounds stunning because the drive has its accompanying equipment totally under control. The only surprising thing might be that this realization also applies for digital machines, and in this case even an old-school digital machine. Who listens to CDs these days anyway? The TL0 3.0 will silence anyone considering asking themselves that question. ■



CEC The Drive | since 1954

CEC International GmbH  
Wacholderweg 16  
22335 Hamburg | Germany

web: [cec-international.com](http://cec-international.com)  
mail: [info@cec-international.com](mailto:info@cec-international.com)