

Thorens TD206 and TD209

reviewed by **Toby McCauley-Pyke**

For Thorens, the iconic TD 309 has been a hard act to follow. But now the Swiss company has excelled itself with not one but two new models!



Outstanding finish: the TD 209 is seen here in eye-catching Red, but both models also come in Black or White lacquer finish

Every vinyl enthusiast knows that Thorens has a great pedigree, but it's an astonishing fact that the brand has been around longer than the record industry itself. It was founded in 1883, even before Emil Berliner came up with the first flat disc gramophone record.

Thorens celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2008, and shortly after that came up with one of the most innovative products in its long and illustrious history. The TD 309 turntable not only looked stunningly different, it was a radical design in many technical aspects.

Now Thorens has embodied the essentials of the TD 309 in the new TD 206 and TD 209, both available, incidentally, in glossy red, black or white finish. While the TD 209 features the same dramatic 'shield' plinth shape as TD 309, the TD 206 is conventionally rectangular and comes with a hinged clear dustcover. It's otherwise identical to the TD 209.

Both new models use the TD 309's advanced belt-drive system, with its low-noise DC motor mounted in a unique compliant

suspension system, and come with essentially the same tonearm. From a user's point of view, though, the new models might seem easier to understand and set up than the TD 309, because they do not have the 309's springs and suspended-subchassis.

Consequently, there is no need for the 309's movable balancing weight, for example. Here, instead, the precision-machined, gorgeously lacquer-finished MDF plinths are mounted more simply on



Alternate take: the TD 206 has a rectangular plinth with hinged dustcover

Plan view: here's the TD 206 in red, showing the layout of the controls and the TP 90 tonearm.



three feet, which are adjustable for levelling. This can be done conveniently from above, using the hex key provided.

As with the TD 309, the DC motor drive is electronically controlled with switch-controlled speed change from 33 to 45 rpm. Much development work, though, went into the new two-part platter, which replaces the flat glass platter of the TD 309. There is a main platter of aluminium, plus the upper flat acrylic platter on which the record is placed. Between the two is a thin but vital card disc, which provides a critical degree of decoupling to give the desired non-resonant behaviour to the whole assembly. But this disc has a double function, as it is also an easy-to-use cartridge alignment protractor.

For the TD 309, Thorens developed the almost equally innovative TP 92 tonearm, and the new TP 90 used on the TD 206 and TD 209 is virtually identical, except for its simplified mounting arrangement. While the TP 92's pillar provides instant height adjustment in situ, the TP 90 bolts directly on to the plinth, so height adjustment requires the fitting of suitable spacers.

In this design, the arm tube itself is of rolled aluminium with a special anti-resonance damping

All black: this is how the TD 209 shapes up in gloss black lacquer



ring placed at a carefully-chosen point along the arm's length. It uses high-grade precision micro ball-bearings, sourced from a leading specialist company in Japan. These have been chosen for their very low stiction, that is, they offer the least resistance to small, relatively slow movements, which is a more relevant consideration than freedom in high-speed rotation.

The vertical-movement bearing is placed below the arm tube, so that it is at the same height as the stylus tip, as is the axis of the counterweight. Stylus force or playing weight adjustment can be set with the help of the neat little Thorens stylus balance supplied, by the usual method of screwing the counterweight along its threaded mounting rod.

Bias compensation is frictionless too, being applied by magnets. Since the TD 206 and TD 209 both come with an Audio-Technica AT95 cartridge already fitted, just about all you actually need do to get up and running is to install and adjust the counterweight.

However, if you want to install your own choice of cartridge, the headshell end of the TP 90 tonearm is intended to make fitting it easy. Releasing the removable carrier, you can bolt the cartridge to it. You can then refit the carrier to the arm and adjust its alignment, all with a single bolt.

This is when you will make use of the card alignment protractor disc that's normally hidden beneath the black acrylic upper

platter. Temporarily placed on top, its markings allow accurate setting-up for any cartridge.

On audition, perhaps what's most immediately amazing about these new models is that they give away relatively little to the TD 309. Our sessions started with a TD 209 complete with the stock AT95 cartridge, listening to Jeff Beck's stunning 2010 album *Emotion & Commotion*. This certainly proved that the TD 209 deck could really rock out. Apart from all those incredible, stunning guitar sounds, we were held, er, spellbound by Joss Stone's vocal on 'I Put A Spell On You.'

But it goes without saying that the TD 206 and TD 209 can do justice to much more expensive



Speed control: The TD 206 and TD 209 both have electronic speed switching for 33 and 45rpm

cartridges than the AT95, and we tried out both moving-magnet and moving-coil types, to great effect. Perhaps the most obvious moving-magnet recommendation here is the well-known Ortofon 2M Blue or, if you want to push the boat out a bit more, the 2M Black. These cartridges show just what a great sound

it's possible to get from a high-grade moving-magnet when mounted in an excellent tonearm like the TP 90. But such is the inherent quality of this arm that you'll be tempted to upgrade further, to a moving-coil cartridge like Ortofon's Cadenza Red.

If you do, you will get fabulous results. Try Thorens' own recent classical vinyl release, Bruckner's 8th Symphony with Christian Thielemann conducting the Dresden Staatskapelle. There couldn't be a better demonstration of the vitality of vinyl sound than this mighty symphony.

Many enthusiasts looking for an ultimate turntable at a not-unreasonable price have already discovered the TD 309. This multiple award-winner

is still the answer to many a prayer, and it's really an enthusiast's delight with much scope for fine-tuning and tweaking. But now, with the TD 206 and TD 209, Thorens bring you most of the benefits in a simpler package. When it comes to sonics, there is almost no difference between TD 206 and TD 209. Golden-eared listeners might expect to hear a subtle effect from the TD 206's dustcover, but in any case this can easily be removed for critical listening if desired. While the TD 209 is designed to play 'naked', you can use a neat acrylic cover, sold as an accessory, to protect platter and arm from dust when not in use.

Some will prefer the 'conventional' format and hinged-lid convenience of the TD 206, but many will go straight for the talking-point looks of the TD 209. Whichever of these two new Thorens turntables you choose, you can be sure you've picked a winner.



Driving force: Thorens boss Heinz Rohrer has revived the fortunes of the famous brand since taking over as CEO



Platter matters: Beneath the black acrylic 'mat' is a cast aluminium main platter, with a damping layer in between

Product details:

THORENS TD 206, £850

THORENS TD 209, £850

Both models supplied complete with Audio-Technica AT95 cartridge.

Both models are available in Red, White or Black finish



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