



Needless to say, show host Ron Welborne of [Welborne Labs](#) worked the hallways to attend to his guests and all the little things that require professional and instant handling during any type of event. No wonder he was essentially MIA in his own room. So it was his trusted second-in-command there who pointed out that Welborne's new Gatekeeper X1 line conditioner without power cord sells for \$125 and thus allows budget-conscious 'philes to separate analog and digital properly and without massive financial pain.



Ron was another crafty operator who practiced the unfair advantage of master tapes. What can I say? I'm a digital-only guy for reasons of software tastes but would be the first one to confess that professional open-reel tape is king and good vinyl queen, with digital somewhere in the royal stables milking the stallions. But hey, I'm not one to kowtow to royalty. (What a perfectly horseshit explanation, ain't it?)





Remember how I missed out on the golf-ball toting budget turntable? Bro Stephaen took pity on his Editor and submitted a transcript of his [Audio Asylum coverage](#) in the spirit that this was far too good a story to be left to the inmates. Thanks to Rod Morris for allowing us to reproduce it here:

"One of the first places we visited Friday morning was Kevin Haskins's DIYCable room, chock-full of goodies for the - well, you know, the DIY crowd. The first thing that caught my eye also took me so off-guard that I failed to snap a picture in time to document the event. It was a record (no real surprise there), and it was spinning (duh!), *but* it was so seriously warped (think scalloped) that I immediately began asking around for some Dramamine.

Had my eyes been closed, however, my ears would not have noticed *anything* amiss. What kind of table/arm/cart combo does it take to track this kind of torture? Here are my notes, transcribed from a chat with the designer.



"So, whatcha got here?"

"I'm introducing a new turntable using my Well Tempered principles and the name of this model is the Well Tempered *Amadeus*. And it's going to be a package with the table, the arm, a Grado cartridge and a phono stage for under \$1,000. I'm going to make it as far under a thousand as I can get. It has revolutionary levels of performance. You know, I've stared at that flutter meter literally hundreds of hours improving the bearing, improving the damping, improving the motor drive, improving the belt. I'm tired!"

"I gotta ask about the, you *know*, about the..."

"The golf ball is a result of me sitting there drinking coffee one morning when an idea leaped into my head about the bearing. I play golf and I thought "you know, ah - a golf ball and a bearing and some silicon damping fluid" and within three hours, I had one made. I listened and said, "ya know what? This is *it*." I've made several iterations of it, but the golf ball ... well, perhaps you know that golf balls are very precisely made, and comparatively speaking, they're cheap! You can buy them at the swap meet for 25 cents. If you were to try to machine a perfect sphere like that, you know, we're *not* talking 25 cents. Furthermore, this one has - I have a smiley on this ball. Somebody marked this with a smiley and I included that. There's no extra charge."



After some chatter about the possibilities of tweaking with cryoed Titleists and other brands of balls, we managed to move on. "What's with the platter?"

"It's MDF. I experimented with lots of different materials for the platter. This is the highest grade of MDF and it works so good I'm afraid to do anything to it - you know, paint it, finish it, put a surface on the top or the bottom. No, I think we better just leave that right alone. I don't have a finger lift for the arm, although you can have one if you wish, because the finger lift is just something else to cause trouble. So I just lift it up like this."

"Yea, that's how I do mine (the Space Arm on my Space Deck is ah ... rather ... uhm ... Spartan, too)."

"Uh-huh. And, don't tell anybody, but you know what kind of mat that is right there? It makes an excellent shelf-liner. That stuff that goes in the bottom of your kitchen drawers. It makes a *fabulous* mat."

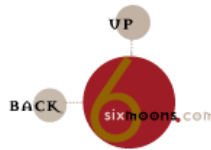
"Price, again?"

"Turntable, arm, cartridge, phono stage to which you are now listening? Under a thousand. I'm going to make it as far under a thousand as I can. I don't have a good handle about manufacturing costs yet but we're gonna make it happen."

"Thanks, Bill."

Folks, that was Bill Firebaugh, the Fireball of [Well Tempered Labs](#). Bill is indeed a fireball and even more refreshing, I got no sense of him giving me a typical sales pitch. To hear him talk, you'd think he was a kid who just built his first table. His enthusiasm and sincerity makes him one of those people you just want to be around. Note: Bill Firebaugh started designing the Well Tempered Arm during the mid 1980s in his spare time. Bill was a key member of the Ford Aerospace think tank, so finding unique solutions to complicated problems was nothing new to him. *Stephaen Harrell*

With thanks to Stephaen for so beautifully concluding my short report on a truly wonderful note; with thanks to Mark L. Schifter and Mr. Po for inviting me to visit their Chinese factory and for making it so easy for domestic makers to work with them; with thanks to Ron Welborne and Al Stiefel for a wonderful first Rocky Mountain Audio Fest (interview with both to follow shortly); and with thanks to all the retailers, manufacturers and attendees who made this show such a success that those who weren't there are mighty sorry now - cheerio. Let's do it again next year!



Stephaen Harrell

Click [here](#) for Richard Bird's RAM:EF feature on "Room Acoustics at Trade Shows"

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