



Theresa DeFranzo Photo

A.J. CONTI with a high-end Basis Audio turntable, manufactured in Hollis. A Basis model can cost up to \$10,000.

## Hollis Platters Pack Weight

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**HOLLIS** — We might all have something like it — a hobby, a passion or a preoccupation — something we can justify to others why we spend our money and time on it and why we're willing to sacrifice other things.

For some it's traveling, for others it may be sports, or wine and stamp collecting, or cars.

For A.J. Conti, it's music, and that's not just something he loves, it's also his business. Conti is the owner of Basis Audio in Hollis, where three employees (including Conti) make a line of

are on a never-ending quest to improve their equipment."

Conti included.

While a typical day might find him answering faxes and phone calls from around the world from dealers who want to know more about his turntables, he might be working on how to improve the motor in the turntable in his quest to get the best sound possible. But \$5,000 — minimum — for a turntable? Who's buying this stuff?

"We have people that want our turntable that are making \$30,000 a year," Conti said. "They're making some kind of sacrifice to buy this. I'm not independently wealthy so I consider it a major honor when someone buys my turntable."

"We also have people buying our turntable that are very rich and just want nice things. Then

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A.J. Conti  
Basis Audio, Hollis

turntables with prices ranging from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

He's in the "high-end audio industry that makes stereo systems that reproduce as close as possible the real musical event," he said.

"I used to sell high-end audio equipment out of my house," said Conti, who holds a mechanical engineering degree. "I didn't have a great turntable. So I designed one and sold it. Then it just took off."

"There are some companies that are just making speakers. Some deal only in amplifiers. You build to what your strength is. Most people in this industry

wealthy so I consider it a major honor when someone buys my turntable."

"We also have people buying our turntable that are very rich and just want nice things. Then we have customers who are equipment nuts and don't care about the music."

"It runs the gamut," he said.

Except for nuts and bolts, every piece of the turntable is custom made. Conti said that last year he spent several hundred thousand dollars getting custom parts made, using machine shops and other outside contractors to craft the individual parts for each design.

Conti sells the Ovation model of his turntable for \$5,000 and the Debut model for \$8,200. They feature four-point hanging fluid-damped suspension; a 2-inch thick, machines acrylic subchassis; a 28-pound acrylic-brass platter; and an 8-pound, heavily damped, acrylic/brass armboard. A Basis turntable can weigh 85 pounds.

"I think a valid comparison would be comparing a Yugo to a \$120,000 Mercedes Benz. It's built beautifully, it's reliable and it's high performance."

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## Hollis Firm's Turntables Turn Heads — For \$10,000

**HOLLIS**

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"If you've never seen great car before, the Yugo would look pretty incredible," said Conti, "until you drive the Mercedes Benz."

While Conti admits he'll take a sale any way he can get it, he says, "My heart goes out to those who love the music." And listening to a record that has good sound on it on a top-of-the-line system is the closest way a music lover can get to actually being there while the musician or symphony performs, he said.

With the introduction on the

compact disc and the claim that this was the latest and greatest way to listen to music, many people think turntables are a thing of the past.

Conti begs to differ. And his sales figures back him up. Up until the last three years, his business grew each year. The following year it took a downward turn, but last year he said the company had its biggest year. He expects to exceed it this year.

That means he could sell anywhere from 250 to 300 turntables this year.

"For me, when I'm listening to a CD, the realism is missing."

Conti said. "Eight years ago, before I had a vested interest in this, I listened to CDs. I was a hobbyist and I always wanted a nice stereo."

I borrowed a CD player and was told it was newest and greatest thing. Then I listened to a few pieces of music . . . and the record sounds more real to me. The CD misses the boat on that. It's clear, but it's not real.

"Most people in the business will say that records are a pain in the neck," he said. "You have to clean them, you have to flip them over. But it gives me what I'm looking for."

"When I listen to music I'm not interested in convenience."