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PASSION FOR SOUND

Issue No. 466

September 2020

GROUP TEST

STAR SPINNERS

Six of the best step-up turntables face off

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TURNTABLES **GROUPTEST** £1,250-£1,600



MoFi StudioDeck+ £1,550



Mobile Fidelity knows all about making vinyl re-issues sound great. Can it do the same for turntables?

DETAILS

PRODUCT
MoFi StudioDeck+

ORIGIN
USA

TYPE
Belt-drive turntable

WEIGHT
8.7kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
500 x 137 x 362mm

FEATURES
• 33/45rpm
• 10in tonearm
• StudioTracker
MM cartridge

DISTRIBUTOR
Karma-AV

TELEPHONE
01423 358846

WEBSITE
mofielelectronics.com

For anyone tempted to read something into the general appearance of a turntable, I give you the yellow drive belt of the StudioDeck+. If you're thinking maximum aesthetic impact for minimum effort given the generally understated dark livery of this generously sized deck, hold that thought – it's an attention-grabber that informs the way it sounds, too.

In effect, the StudioDeck+ is a strategically pared-down version of MoFi's flagship player – UltraDeck+ – Lite if you will. Fitted as standard with the MasterTracker MM cartridge, the UltraDeck+ costs £2,500 while the StudioDeck+ with StudioTracker MM cartridge comes in at £1,350. MoFi's £200 Super HeavyWeight record puck, recommended and supplied, pushes the total to £1,550.

Shared by the two models is an AC-synchronous Hurst Motor, 10in aluminium gimbal-bearing tonearm with (dead fiddly) anti-skate thread

and weight, Delrin platter material and dedicated anti-vibration HRS feet, recalibrated for the StudioDeck+ to suit its lighter plinth. The UltraDeck gets a thicker, heavier platter and its plinth has additional layers of constrained-layer damping. A single aluminium damping plate is used to add mass and dissipate vibration on the StudioDeck+ plinth. Apart from that, the StudioDeck+ has to make do with plain OF-copper tonearm wiring rather than the UltraDeck's fancy Cardas PSC cable while the main bearing's thrust plate is Teflon instead of the UltraDeck's harder sapphire.

The differences mean a weight drop of 1.9kg, though at 8.7kg, the StudioDeck+ is still a very substantial, well-made unit which, if not quite as clean and minimal in appearance as the Rega, still prosecutes a nice line in classy understatement, an image massaged by the yellow accent provided by the drive belt, of course.

IN SIGHT

- 1 HRS anti-vibration feet
- 2 Super HeavyWeight record puck
- 3 10in Studio tonearm and StudioTracker MM cartridge

Sound quality

There's a surprisingly satisfying micro thud as the Super HeavyWeight puck drops down the spindle and pins the vinyl. But it's what happens when the stylus hits the groove that really lifts the spirits. It doesn't matter whether it's Kate, Grace, Pat or Miles, the StudioDeck+ brings a precious quality to the party. Call it the uplifting equivalent of that yellow drive belt.

It isn't about a skillset you feel inclined to break down into individual hi-fi metrics so much as a kind of joyous, freewheeling openness, largess and colour that allows music to breathe, flow and express with unfettered energy. There's deftly framed detail and dynamic subtlety, muscular bass, speed and substance to burn. But such things seem uninteresting and unimportant as you're swept along by the hypnotic momentum of The Pat Metheny Group's *Are You Going With Me?*

The MoFi isn't unique in this. All the decks here put musical engagement ahead of forensic analysis to varying degrees, it's just that the StudioDeck+ seems to provide a shorter route to meaning. So, when Grace Jones sings *Nightclubbing*, the dark monotone doesn't immediately present a veneer of drear but an undertow of danger. Miles' coolly understated contribution to *Freddie Freeloader* is sexy rather than sedate. And Kate's journey into *The Fog* is mystical rather than murky. You get the idea. The MoFi is more about the story than the font; it understands vinyl. I guess we should expect nothing less ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Terrifically musical sound; solid build; yellow drive belt

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Fitting the fiddly anti-skate thread and weight

BUILD QUALITY



WESAY: Good looking plug-and-play with serious musical chops

FEATURES



OVERALL



Group test verdict

As **David Vivian** picks a path through the strewn LP sleeves, it's time for him to add up the scores and declare a winner from this gifted group

NO LOSERS HERE, just degrees of unfeasible talent, much as I anticipated at the start. I'm at a loss to recall conducting a *Group Test* where the contestants have knocked it so far out of the park, the very thought of having to come up with a final ranking gives me the shivers. In their very different ways – contrasting styles and methodologies as well as sonic flavours – these are all outstanding turntables.

Even so, the final order beckons and first to bow out is the Avid. In many ways it's a wonderful thing with a core quality that's almost frightening

for the money, but I can't help thinking that in basic spec it isn't firing on all cylinders. It needs Avid's optional £350 metal platter and a more sophisticated cartridge to realise its full plug-and-play potential.

Not very plug-and-play at all, the Marantz is either a bit of a pain to assemble from the box or a tweak-loving enthusiast's delight. Either way, it's a visual stunner that always sounds lovely, if lacking a full measure of excitement and bottom-end wallop. It's piped for fourth place by the Technics, which meets the plug-and-play brief perfectly and

is a joy to use, its battleship build and direct-drive motor serving up the kind of excitement and energy that will get you on your feet.

The first podium place goes to the Pro-Ject, which cannily mixes nostalgic and modern elements to create a warm, embracing analogue experience that covers all the bases and is impossible to resist. In the end, though, the fight for top spot is between MoFi and Rega and it's as close to a dead heat as it gets. On this occasion, however, the pace, precision and resolving power of the Planar 6 isn't quite enough.



From nowhere to easing past one of the greats is no mean achievement, but the StudioDeck+ package really is that good, displaying an open, lucid, style that's thoroughly addictive and an almost magical ability to make music come alive in a way only the best can.



Make/model	Avid HiFi Ingenium Plug&Play	Marantz TT-15S1	MoFi StudioDeck+	Pro-Ject The Classic Evo	Rega Planar 6/Ania	Technics SL-1200GR
Price	£1,250	£1,500	£1,550	£1,250	£1,470	£1,600
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
	When Avid makes an entry-level model it doesn't skimp on the core design	It might be part Clearaudio, but the clever thing is the way it's been voiced	Can a company known for audiophile vinyl make a decent turntable? Can it ever	A lot of well made, nicely finished, nostalgically styled deck for the money	Perhaps the closest thing there is at the price to a turntable that does everything	Masses of user appeal and an exciting, energetic, easy-to-love sound

Key features

Cartridge	MM	MM	MM	MC	MC	None supplied
Speed change	Manual	Manual	Manual	Electronic	Electronic	Electronic
Drive	Belt	Belt	Belt	Belt	Belt	Direct
78rpm	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adjustable feet	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

TRY WITH THESE

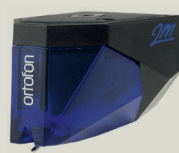
PHONO STAGE: Lindemann Limetree Phono £595 HFC 441

The Lindemann is one of the most outstanding phono stages under £1,000 we've tested of late and it took the 2018 AV Tech Media award in its category thanks to its wonderfully effortless yet engaging presentation that works with a wide selection of different cartridges.



MOVING-MAGNET CARTRIDGE: Ortofon 2M Blue £184 HFC 375

The 2M Blue enjoys features borrowed from Ortofon's more expensive models. It's well-built, easy to install – thanks to its pre-threaded mounts – and, with a healthy output, offers a clear and open presentation with plenty of bite.



STYLUS CLEANER: DS Audio ST-50 £78 HFC 437

A clean stylus performs better and will last longer than one that is dragging ingrained groove dirt and other debris with it. The ST-50 is a wonderfully simple idea, brilliantly executed and it makes keeping your stylus clean entirely straightforward.

