

Note Perfect

Adam Smith listens to EAT's E-flat turntable.



I don't think there can be any doubt in anyone's mind that the 1980s are back with a vengeance. Take a look around you in everyday life and you'll see legwarmers and those white-rimmed Ray ban sunglasses that somehow managed to look cool on the cast of Miami Vice, but looked ridiculous on everyone else.

Equally, turn on the radio and some of the latest dross riding high in the charts makes it seem as if Stock Aitken and Waterman have never been away. So why this sudden trip down memory lane you may wonder? Well, you see, I recently

unpacked the EAT E-Flat turntable and suddenly it feels like I'm back in 1983 again.

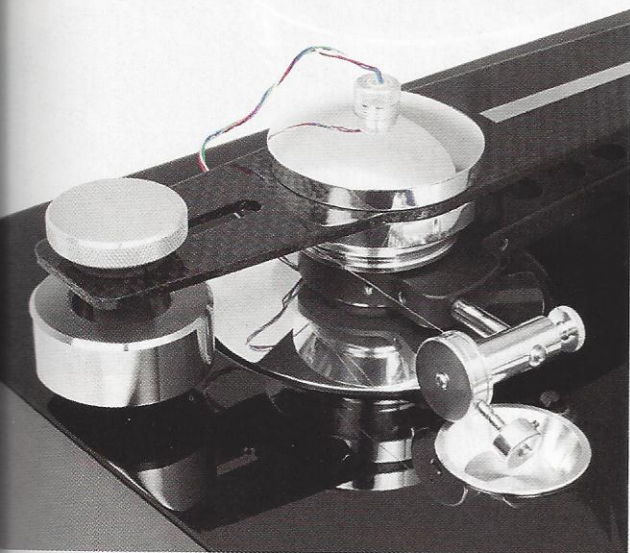
The reason for this is very simple – this was the year in which NAD launched the 5120 turntable to great surprise. It was their first in-house designed model, following various re-badged Garrard and ADC efforts and featured a very strange flat tonearm, made from the same material used as the base for PCBs. It was an interesting idea but caused as many problems as it solved and was soon dropped for a conventional tubular arm, but its spirit has been well and truly resurrected by Euro Audio Team and their new E-Flat turntable you see before you.

Of course, things have moved on greatly since the NAD's day, and the ten inch flat arm of the EAT is actually made of carbon fibre with a metal insert, and EAT can supply arms of differing masses to suit different cartridges. At the other end, the arm rests on a unipivot bearing and the lead-out wires connect into a locking plug on top of the bearing housing, thus making arm changes relatively painless. Further back, the first encounter with several instances of sorbothane appears, in this case, to decouple the counterweight from the arm itself, and two weights of different masses are supplied to, again, make cartridge fitment easier.

Like the Forte and Forte S

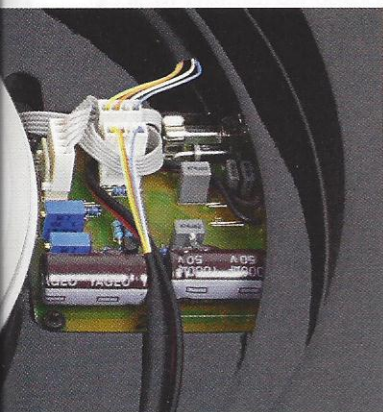
turntables, before it, the E-Flat utilises a platter of high mass, which is driven by a twin motor arrangement. However, on this occasion, those motors have been relocated to under the deck rather than being on show and just a single belt is used to wrap around the periphery of both pulleys and a sub-platter to transfer drive. The platter itself weighs in at 6.9kg and is somewhat reminiscent of that used on the Inspire Monarch, being 330mm in diameter and featuring a sloping outer edge. Internally the platter contains a layer of sorbothane and it is topped with a fixed mat made from recycled LPs to which a superbly engineered clamp bonds the record snugly.

More sorbothane is to be found around the bearing housing, arm mounting and feet in order to apply damping and the bearing and platter aperture are suspended beneath the main plinth, although in a fairly firm manner – there is nothing like the bounce of an LPI2 to be seen here. The control circuitry is built into the plinth and two buttons on the front right hand corner offer speed selection; blue LEDs flashing in the appropriate button as the platter winds itself gently up to speed and glowing steadily once there. A third button brings everything to a halt and glows green to remind you of this. Power is supplied to the deck by a plug-top transformer that supplies





"the helicopter at the beginning of this track thundered into my room"



15Vdc to a socket on the rear of the plinth which, bizarrely, is labelled '16Vdc'!

Fit and finish of the E-Flat is truly scrumptious, with the gloss back plinth having an almost liquid shimmer to it. When set up, the deck looks surprisingly neat and compact, belying its generous dimensions. Although I enjoy a fully blinged-up and colossal turntable as much as the next person, the E-Flat has an understated style and subtle sophis-

tication that makes it a much more domestically acceptable companion than one of the aforementioned oil rig lookalikes. My only tiny area of concern is with regard to the packaging – our well-travelled review sample arrived in one piece but the wooden outer box was well on the way to giving up the ghost, as was the polystyrene packaging inside. Certainly my listening room resembled the interior of a Christmas snow globe once I'd



unpacked it! I would venture to say that a deck of this calibre really deserves some properly supportive die-cut material to cradle it well.

SOUND QUALITY

The opening bars of The Eagles 'Long road out of Eden' were enough to set me thinking that this was a turntable I was going to enjoy, and so it turned out to be. The E-Flat just simply took the performance and pushed it firmly but gently out of the loudspeakers and into my lap so that it positively washed over me. Those who are familiar with the track will know that it begins with some soft orchestral notes and the sound of blowing wind – this was so vivid through the EAT I was on



the verge of getting up and checking the closure of the windows in our old Victorian house, afraid that the Hurricane Herbert blowing outside had finally breached our defences...

As the action moved into the main body of the song, the deck pulled a glorious, deep, effortless bass line from the depths and this served to beautifully underpin Don Henley's vocals. In fact, as I write this, I am going to have to be careful as I can foresee over-use of words like 'languid' and 'ease' but these words were exactly what came to mind as the EAT played – it never once seemed to be under duress or struggling to compose itself but

instead played on happily and with a rock-solid sense of composure.

This is not to say it cannot attack the hard stuff either. Moving to Pink Floyd's 'The Wall' and cranking the volume to highly unsavoury levels, I sat back to enjoy 'Another Brick in the Wall Part 1'. This then flowed into 'The Happiest Days of our lives' and I could feel my grin growing as the full fury of the helicopter at the beginning of this track thundered into my room. When the explosive drum beat followed, not only did I jump but my feline listening companion leapt skywards and disappeared from the room at high speed! Similar tracks showed that the dynamic abilities of the E-Flat are quite stupendous and its low end is commanding, fulsome and beautifully controlled. Equally, it serves up a positive swathe of detail and never once felt slow or wallowy.

The sense of insight that the deck imposes onto music carries up throughout the frequency range, resulting in a bewitchingly detailed sense of 'being there' that never once left me anywhere but at the heart of the performance. The minutiae that it resolves from instruments is little short of staggering but yet it never goes into forensic overload and dissects the performance to the point it becomes a collection of instruments rather than an all-enveloping whole. The depth perspective it offers, plus the lateral stage width and the sheer musicality with which it reproduces everything fed to it, means that each song really does come across in a new light.

At the top of the tree, the EAT once again strikes a very pure note. Its treble perspicacity means that the tiniest background detail is captured and yet it never sounds strained or harsh. The combination of mass and damping used in its design definitely

takes away unwanted mush but the balance has been struck perfectly so that the sound is never too muted, constrained or darkly veiled, but overwhelmingly pure and lucid.

REFERENCE SYSTEM BOX

Ortofon Kontrapunkt b cartridge
Anatek MC1 phono stage
Naim Supernait amplifier
Modified Ferrograph S1 loudspeakers

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt in my mind that the EAT E-Flat is one of the finest turntables at its price point. In many ways, its sonic character reminds me of the Roksan Xerxes, in that I never sat down in front of it in order to be wowed by a particular aspect of its performance, but rather by the effortless way in which it affects an air of easy competency in all aspects of its reproduction. When my Garrard 301 hasn't been used for a while I find myself reaching for the tracks with a bit of bass welly as this is what it does so well, but in the entire time the EAT was with me, my search for audition material was purely based on the music I wanted to hear, rather than any particular desire to be sated.

To accompany its sense of understated style, the E-Flat has a similarly understated brilliance to all that it does, in sonic terms. If its price is within your turntable budget then I would say it should be very high on your audition list as it is a truly addictive musical companion.

VERDICT

Beautifully built and with an effortless sense of musical ease, the E-Flat epitomises the very best of vinyl replay.

EAT E-FLAT £4,100

Absolute Sounds

☎ +44(0) 208 971 3909

www.absolutesounds.com

FOR

- styling
- effortless musicality
- glorious midband
- engaging ease

AGAINST

- longevity of packaging?

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

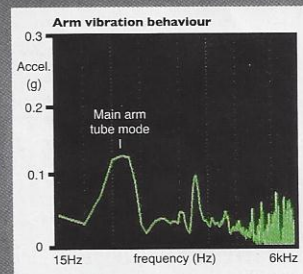
The EAT turntable was speed stable, with little wow at basic rotational rate of 0.55Hz. The highest wow component was at 1.1Hz, our analysis shows and measured just 0.05%. Further up the band there is very little in the way of either wow or flutter, making the EAT a very impressive performer.

The bendy arm is compliant in the vertical plane and so a basic beam mode resonance was inevitable, at a low frequency. Our analysis shows the main bending mode was a low 125Hz, where most tubular arms go off at 220Hz or thereabouts. This may affect bass and lower midrange image positioning. Further up the frequency band the arm is well damped and relatively 'quiet'. Its headshell doesn't suffer the myriad ringing modes of conventional metal headshells and may well give clear treble.

The E-Flat arm is flexible and this shows up under measurement. But it is no disaster and the dual-motor turntable is very speed stable, so overall the E-Flat measures well enough. NK

Speed	+0.2%
Wow	0.1%
Flutter	0.04%
Total W&F (unwtd)	0.1%
Total W&F (wtd)	0.08%

ARM VIBRATION



SPEED STABILITY

