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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

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REVIEWS INSIDE

ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

HI-FI

SPEAKERS



TURNTABLES



iPOD HI-FI



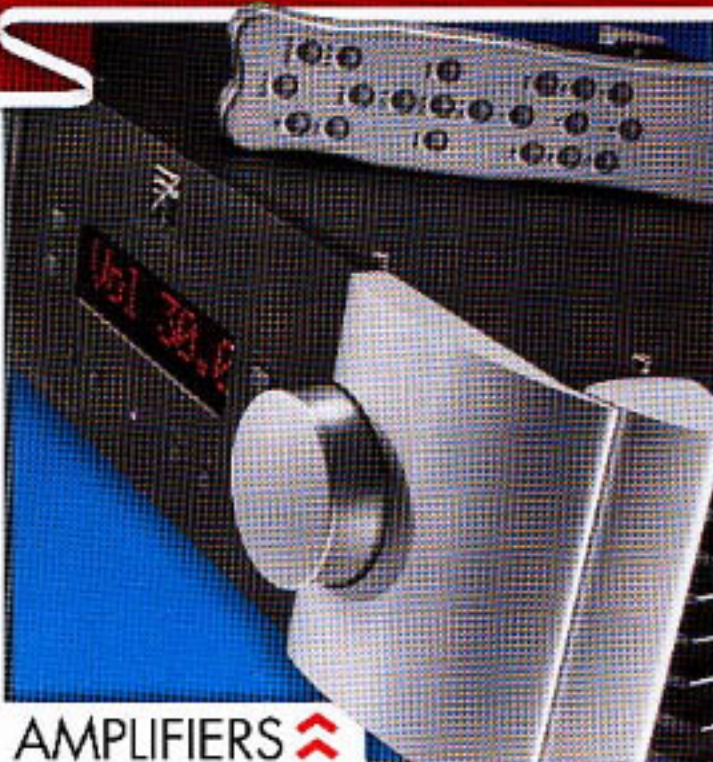
CD PLAYERS



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Packed with essential best buys – from £30 to £33,000



AMPLIFIERS



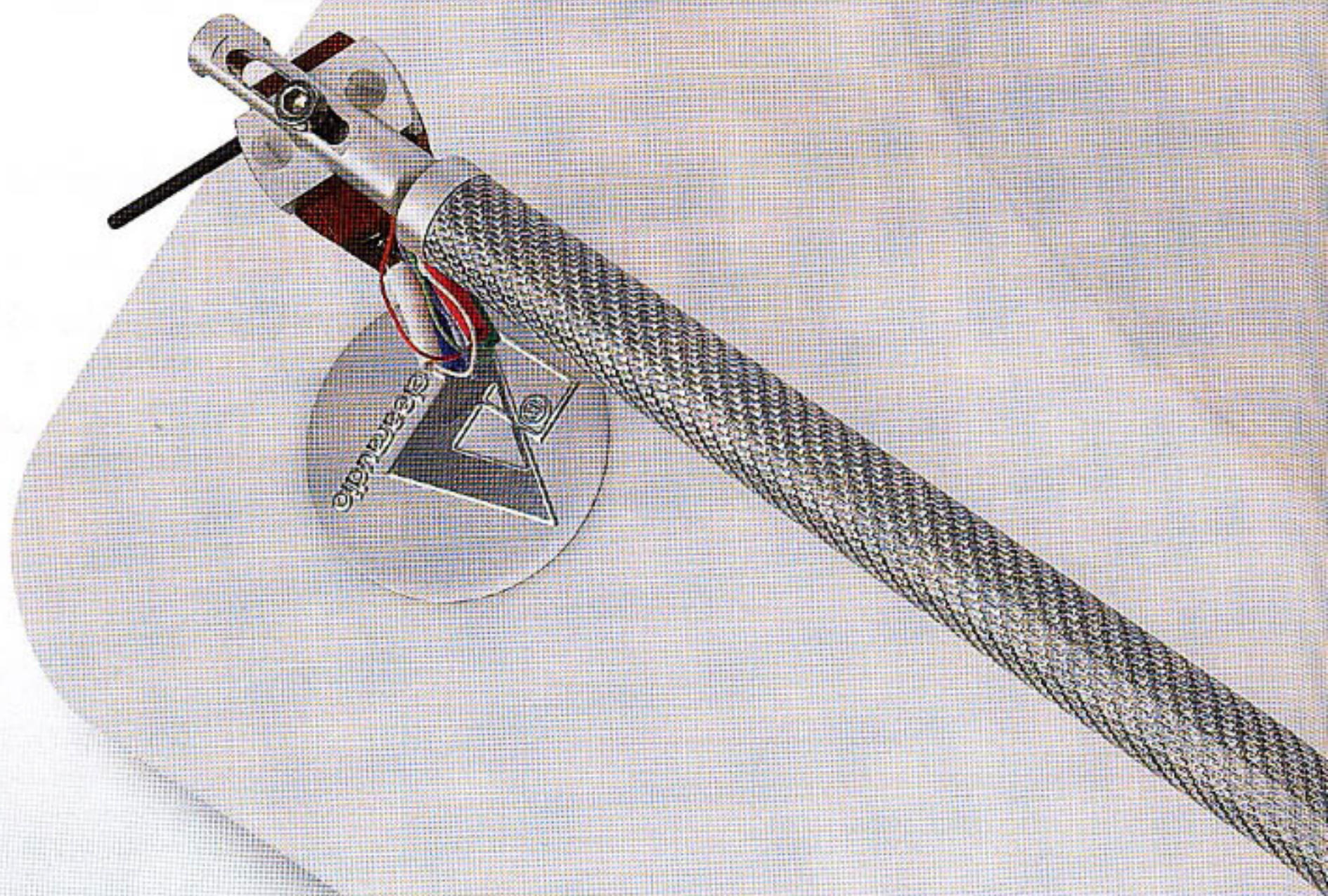
HEADPHONES



DIGITAL RADIOS

haymarket





TURNTABLES

Think vinyl is old hat? Wrong! The latest record players can get more from your music than ever. Here's what to consider before you buy

1 Check your amp

First things first: in the digital age, not every amplifier has the inputs you'll need to connect in a record player. If yours doesn't, you'll need a phono stage, costing from £60

2 Level your rack

Most things in hi-fi benefit from being positioned on a level, stable equipment rack, and that's especially true of turntables. Use a spirit level – a good one – to get it right

3 Set-up matters

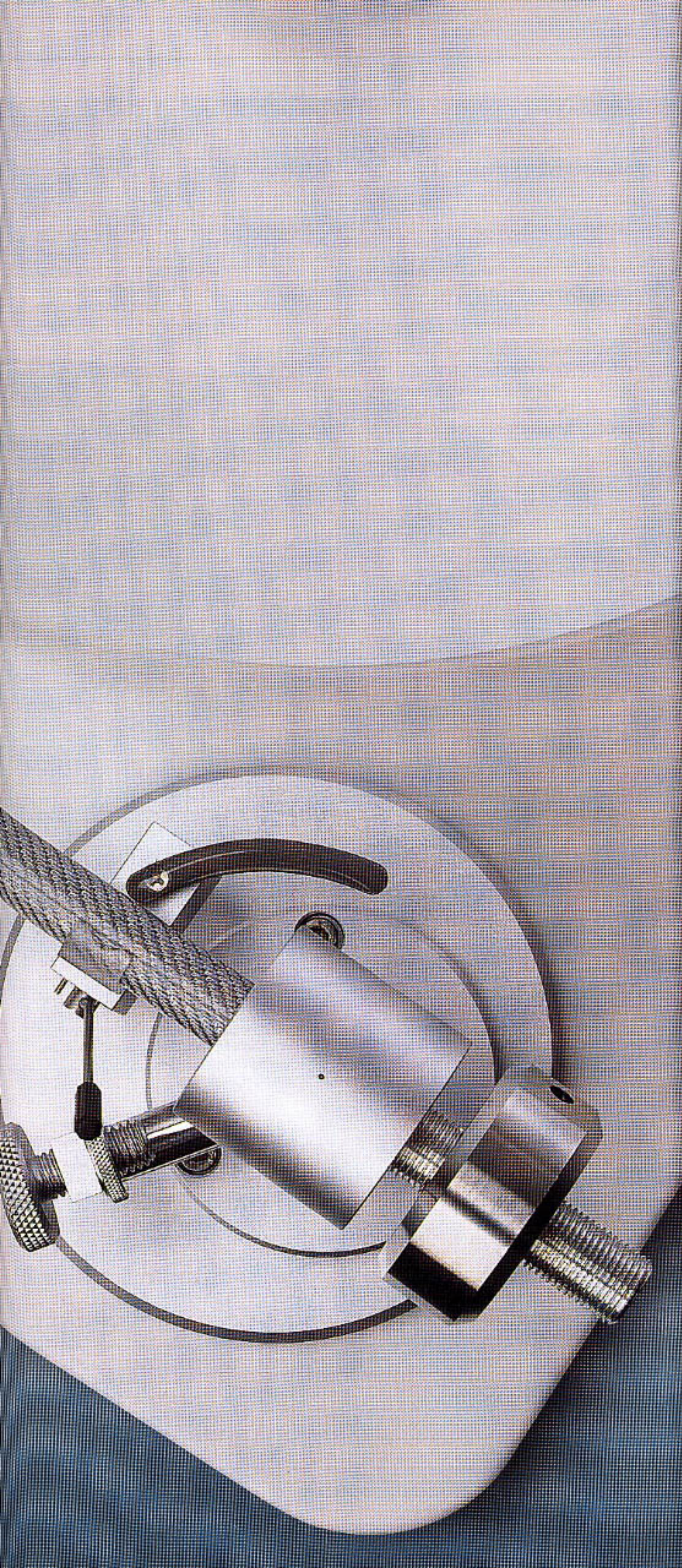
Any turntable will really benefit from proper set-up of its cartridge, tracking, bias and tonearm height. If you're not confident enough, pay your dealer to do it for you

4 Keep it all clean

Most of the decks we test are supplied without dust covers, which tends to look sexier. In practice, it's a pain: a clean turntable is a healthier one. Keep that duster handy...

5 A service helps

It's worth paying for a regular bit of TLC for your turntable. Simple things, like ensuring correct adjustment, will help keep both your records and its cartridge in the best condition



Reviewed this issue

Best buy under £350

Pro-ject RPM1 Genie **£125 | p122**

Best buy £350-£800

Rega P3-24/Elys-2 **£500 | p126**

Best buy over £800

Roksan Radius 5/Nima **£1295 | p130**

Best of the rest under £350

Ministry of Sound TT1000 **£80 | p124**

Pro-ject Debut III USB **£210 | p124**

Pro-ject Debut MkIII E **£250 | p125**

Pro-ject Debut III Phono SB **£325 | p125**

Best of the rest £350-£800

Pro-ject RPM 5.2 **£425 | p128**

Clearaudio Emotion package **£690 | p128**

Pro-ject 2 Xperience X-pack **£750 | p129**

Funk Firm Vector **£760 | p129**

Best of the rest over £800

Pro-ject RPM10 **£1500 | p132**

Clearaudio Performance **£1600 | p132**

Clearaudio Solution AMG **£2375 | p133**

Roksan Xerxes 20/Tabriz **£3145 | p133**

“It can make your music sound more natural than CD players costing twice the price”
Clearaudio, p128

Clearaudio Emotion



£690

THERE ARE ONLY so many trenchant insights to be made about a product that's been as successful as this one. The Emotion is a double Product of the Year Award-winner, which means we've lauded its virtues many a time.

It's no hardship to do it over again, mind – the thrill of this Clearaudio is undimmed by time. Your money still buys the superb Emotion table, Clearaudio's Satisfy tonearm, and an Aurum Classics Wood cartridge.

Optional dust cover

Lately, Clearaudio has introduced a dustcover (not pictured) for the more houseproud owner – though at £84, it might take a little shine off what is otherwise a value-for-money masterclass. Mind you, any lingering financial doubts will be soon soothed away from the moment the Emotion emits a well-presented note.

With EMI's excellent, heavyweight pressing of Kate Bush's *Aerial* on the platter, the Clearaudio wastes no time in reasserting its credentials. It retrieves detail by the shovelful, organising it cleanly into the broad

↑ FOR

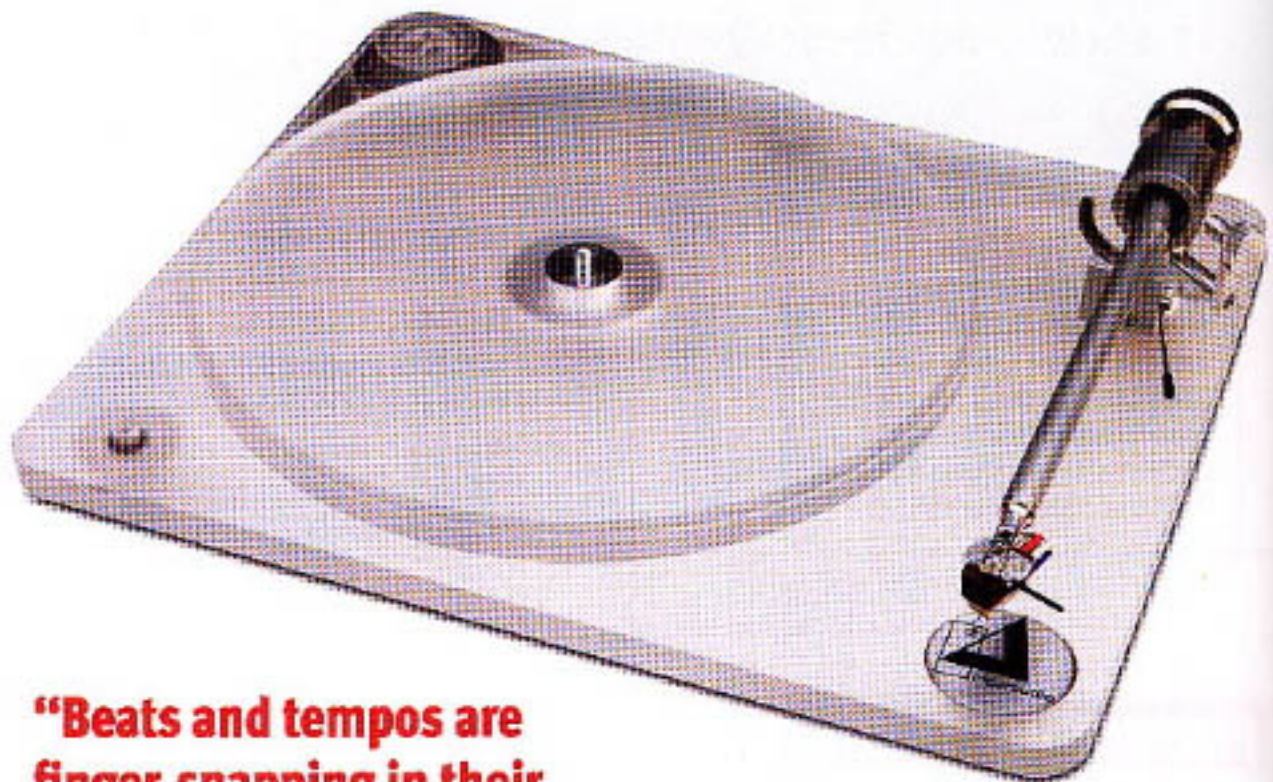
Engaging and revealing voice; good looks; it's worth every penny

↓ AGAINST

Recent price-hike

→ VERDICT

Back-to-back Awards say it all: this product looks set for the long – glittering – haul



“Beats and tempos are finger-snapping in their immediacy and purity”

strokes of the material without fuss, and establishing a beautifully coherent soundstage. Rhythms, beats and tempos are finger-snapping in their immediacy and purity. In the midrange, voices are uncluttered, communicative and freighted with emotional impact, while low frequencies bubble or bang with bags of drive, yet without overhang. Also, from bass notes up to the crisp, attacking top end, information integrates impeccably.

The Emotion is an engaging and energetic listen, with deep-breathing dynamic ability and an equally refined side to its character. No recording is too complex, too tepid, or too thrusting for it to reproduce. It's a well-sorted, stylish device that makes music sound great.

SPECIFICATION

Speeds 33 $\frac{1}{3}$, 45 **Manual/auto/semi operation** Yes/no/no **Phono amp** No **Tonearm/cartridge** Yes **Belt/direct drive** Yes/no **USB** No **Suspension** No **Finish** Acrylic **Dimensions (hwd)** 13 x 40 x 36cm

www.clearaudio.de

01252 702705

Clearaudio Solution AMG package



£2499

CLEARAUDIO IS ARGUABLY the dominant force in high-end turntables. This German company makes the widest range of top-end decks, and supports them with a bewildering array of arms, cartridges and accessories.

There are far more expensive Clearaudios than this, but this package is still very much a full-fat version of what the manufacturer can do.

Beauty more than skin deep

The Solution is a family of products, with each version upgradeable to the next. The £1460 AMG marks the middle ground of the series. The Satisfy tonearm is an advanced version of that found on the Award-winning Emotion deck (p38), and in this guise features a carbon-fibre arm tube and single-piece wiring from cartridge to amplifier. Completing the package is the Melody moving-coil cartridge, which has a body made of ebony and uses 2.4-carat gold coils.

The brand-name has it spot on: this turntable is a very clear, insightful and pure-sounding product. Take what might be the finest instrumentation

FOR

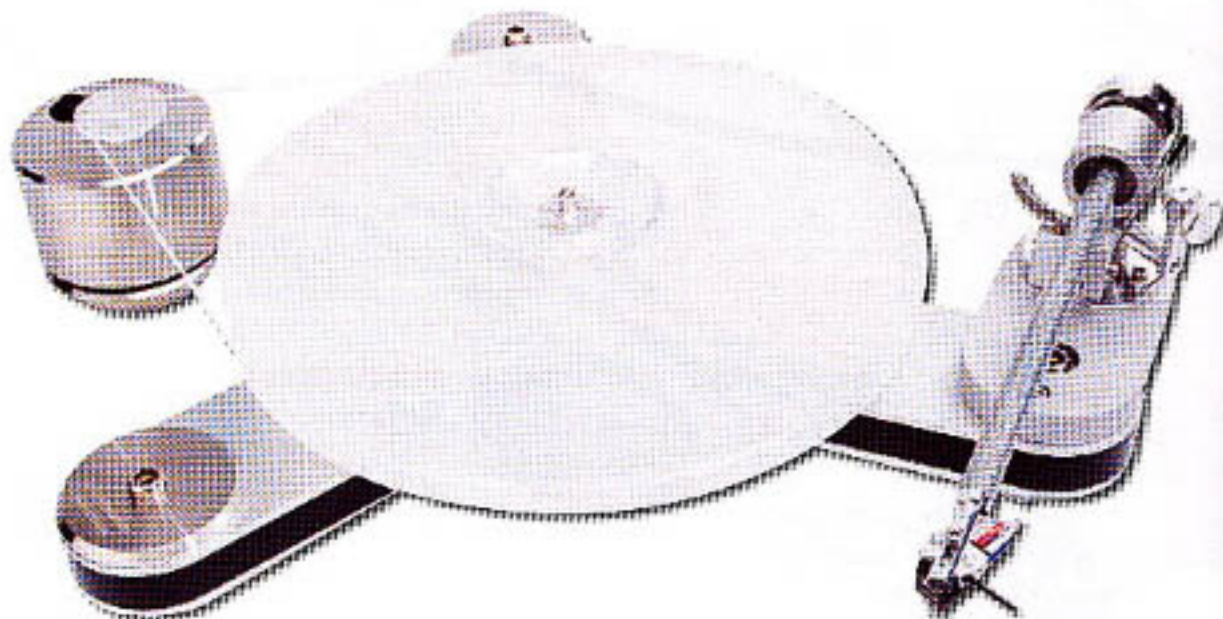
Open, fast, plenty of detail, huge and focused soundstage; cost saving with the package

AGAINST

Bass lacks punch; needs more rhythmic drive; polite sound

VERDICT

This is a very fine deck that's really easy to admire, but a little harder to love



ever put onto vinyl – Nick Cave's *Babe, I'm On Fire* – and this deck separates the instrumental jumble out deftly, finding space between notes that many can't.

This deck is fast, too. There's no sense of it hanging on to notes once they've

“This deck is fast: there's no sense of it hanging on to notes a second too long”

faded, all of which produces a clipped, precise and superbly well-timed presentation. Switch the musical menu to something grander, and the Solution package shifts gear too, producing a sound of immense depth, scale and space.

Flaws? Sadly, there are some. This Clearaudio is a little too restrained for our tastes. It hasn't got the punch to satisfy with the likes of Nirvana, or the bass power to deliver Bob Marley and The Wailers' *Stir It Up* with great conviction. Timing isn't that surefooted, either.

That said, we can see many going for the Solution's clean sonic presentation, and even more falling for the deck's striking looks. If you find yourself under its visual spell, give it a whirl.

SPECIFICATION

Speeds 33 $\frac{1}{3}$, 45 **Man/auto/semi op** Yes/no/no
Phono amp No **Tonearm/cart** Yes **Belt/direct drive** Yes/no **USB XX** **Suspension** No **Finish** Acrylic
Dimensions (hwd, cm) 14x50x40

@ www.clearaudio.de

☎ 01252 702705

Clearaudio Ambient/Satisfy/Concerto



£4500

FORGET THE AMBIENT turntable for a moment: let's talk (once again) about Mr Nicholas Edward Cave. Along with his band, the Bad Seeds, he created *Nocturama*, one of 2003's great albums. Beautifully produced, it's one of our favourite test records.

And most testing of all, as we've already mentioned in our Solution review (left) is the closing track, *Babe, I'm On Fire*. At more than 15 minutes long, it's both an exhausting and an exhilarating listen.

Ambient creates order out of chaos

So what has this all got to do with Clearaudio's Ambient turntable, you ask? Well, played on the majority of hi-fi, *Babe's* rampaging bass, crashing cymbals, lashings of feedback and frantic vocals result in a chaotic soundstage, bass that jumps around like a toddler on a Sunny D diet, and treble that cut through week-old Stilton. Not good, in other words.

But play the same track on the Ambient. Complete with the £640 Satisfy Carbon Directwire tonearm, plus a splendid £1400 (yes, £1400)

↑ FOR

Thrilling delivery; sweet, open treble; spacious, detailed soundstage; looks

↓ AGAINST

Not without rivals; width; you wouldn't want to break a £1400 cartridge

→ VERDICT

Beautifully built, and a joy to use and hear



Concerto cartridge, the Clearaudio delivers a performance as mighty as the music itself. From the mass of drums, guitar, percussion and violin, you can

“Popper sounds more banging than a child with a hammer and a tin box”

pick out each instrument, note and nuance. However, this space isn't at the expense of integration: while the soundstage is wide and deep, the Clearaudio expertly knits together lower, middle and higher frequencies.

Of course, you might not listen to Nick Cave. No matter, this Clearaudio package loves all musical genres: Orff's *Carmina Burana* gets the dynamic reach and impact it deserves, while Christopher and Raphael Just's *Popper* 12-inch sounds more banging than a child with a hammer and a tin box. It's just wonderful!

SPECIFICATION

Speeds 33 $\frac{1}{3}$, 45, elec spd change **Man/auto/semi op** Yes/no/no **Phono amp** No **Tonearm/cart** Yes **Belt/direct drive** Yes/no **USB** No **Suspension** No **Finishes** 4 **Dimensions (hwd)** 15x53x33cm

www.clearaudio.de

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