

WHAT HI★FI?

SOUND AND VISION

DECEMBER 2006 £3.99

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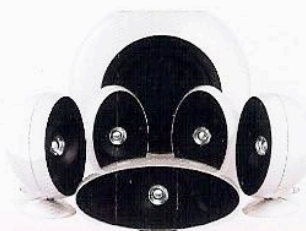
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TV REVOLUTION ANY SHOW, ANY TIME, ANYWHERE p92



Clearaudio Solution AMG, Satisfy Carbon Direct Wire tonearm, Melody cartridge £2375



Michell Gyrodec SE/SME IV tonearm £2230 Page 110



Roksan Xerxes 20, Tabriz tonearm, Corus Black cartridge £2645 Page 112



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CLEARAUDIO
SOLUTION AMG,
SATISFY CARBON
DIRECT WIRE ARM,
MELODY CARTRIDGE

★★★★★

£ 2375

FOR

Open, fast, plenty of detail, huge and focused sound stage; 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

We kick off a six-page turntables special with the pure sounds of **Clearaudio's Solution AMG** package – are you ready for a deck that digs up hidden notes?

CLEARAUDIO IS ARGUABLY the dominant force in high-end turntable manufacture. This German company makes the widest range of top-end decks, and supports them with a bewildering array of arms, cartridges and accessories. The record playing combination on test here is merely a low rung on a ladder that wouldn't leave much change from £65k in total. Don't worry – while there are more expensive Clearaudios available, the Solution package on test here is still very much a full-fat version of what the manufacturer can do.

High-end model oozes class

The Solution is a family of products, with each version easily upgradeable to the next. The £1410 AMG on test here marks the middle ground of the series, and includes most of the manufacturer's signature technologies. There's acrylic – lots of it – in the platter and chassis, outboard motor unit and inverted main bearing. Unlike junior versions of the Solution family, the AMG uses a chassis made of an acrylic and aluminium sandwich. The idea is to reduce resonance and deliver better sound.

The Satisfy tonearm is an advanced version of that found on the Award-winning Emotion deck, and in this guise features a carbon-fibre arm tube and single-piece wiring from cartridge to amplifier – in most arms, this is split for ease of manufacture, degrading sound in the process. These tonearm refinements add £170 to the £400 price.

Completing the package is the Melody moving-coil cartridge, which has a body made of ebony and uses 2.4-carat gold coils. Buy deck, arm and cartridge together, and you save £125, which is worth doing, as this is a very fine spinner.

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

ever to be put onto vinyl – Nick Cave's excellent *Babe, I'm on Fire* – and this deck separates the jumble out into neat instrumental strands and finds space between notes that many players can't.

This deck is fast, too. There's no hanging onto notes once they've faded, which produces a clipped, precise sonic presentation that'll appeal to all but those who crave the stereotypical warm, lush sound of disc-spinners of the past.

Switch the musical menu to something grander – Orff's *Carmina Burana* – and the Solution package shifts gear to produce a sound of immense scale and

“The jumbled instrumentation that is Nick Cave's excellent *Babe, I'm on Fire* is separated into neat strands”

expansive stereo-imaging. In both these areas, this turntable sounds as good as we've heard for the cash.

Flaws? Sadly, there are some. Politeness is an attractive trait in people, but less so in hi-fi. 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's *Stir It Up* with great conviction. Timing isn't particularly surefooted, either, when compared to rivals.

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

TECH SPECS	33$\frac{1}{3}$, Yes 45 Yes 78 No
	SPEED CHANGE Manual
	OPERATION Manual
	TO NEARM INCLUDED Yes
	CARTRIDGE INCLUDED Yes
	BELT DRIVE Yes SUSPENSION No
FINISH Black & clear acrylic WEIGHT 13kg	

The Clearaudio's heady mix of metal and acrylic will have you licking your lips



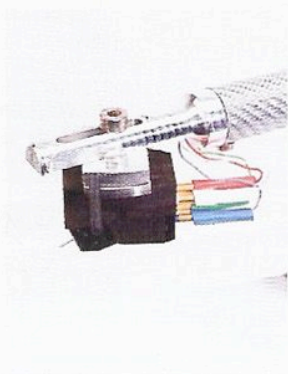
Get on track

More than any other hi-fi gizmo, decks like to be set up just right...



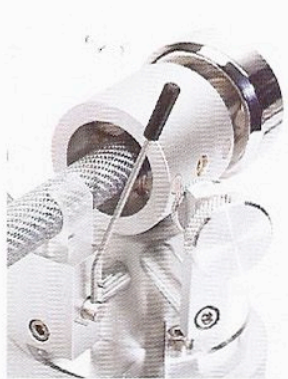
DECK PLACEMENT

Turntables are sensitive to placement and environment. Even suspension designs like the Michell and Roksan sound better when placed with care. Place them as far away from the speakers as you can to minimise external vibrations to the cartridge. Use a dedicated stand, and keep the arm wires well away from mains leads. This ups clarity and reduces hum.



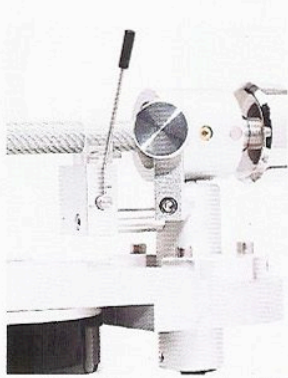
CARTRIDGE ALIGNMENT

This is so important. Get the cartridge alignment wrong by even a degree and distortion increases dramatically. Most turntable manufacturers supply an alignment gauge with their products, so you have got no excuse. Take your time, and make sure the cartridge lines up exactly with the marks. Get it right, it optimises sound and reduces vinyl wear.



TRACKING AND BIAS WEIGHTS

All cartridges come with a specified weight that should force the needle onto the record. Too high, and the sound is dull and lifeless. Too low, and it'll be insubstantial and edgy, with the cartridge even jumping the groove on occasion. Bias is the sideways force that balances the inward pull of the groove. Distortion and clarity are improved if this is correct.



TO NEARM HEIGHT

This isn't always adjustable on all arms, but where you can, it's well worth doing. The idea is to adjust the pillar height so that the arm is parallel to the record when playing. Get it right and you'll have an even tonal balance. Too high and the treble gets emphasised. Too low and the sound will become dull. As with all these adjustments experiment with the sound.