

QUICK CHECK



All turntables are sensitive to where you locate them, whether they have suspension or not



You must get the arm adjustments spot on, otherwise the sound quality will start to suffer



A cartridge is very delicate, so don't damage it. It'll wear out, too, so replace it on a regular basis

Instant Expert

TURNTABLES NO. 14

KNOW HOW

Vinyl is the format that just refuses to lay down and die: listen for yourself and you'll understand why

IF YOU HAD asked us a decade ago whether record players would still appear regularly in our pages, we'd have said no. We would have predicted that people wouldn't want the hassle of keeping records clean, or putting up with the fussy nature of the players. How wrong we were! While it's true that vinyl will never be the mass-market force it once was, the format is still going strong.

A record player's job is simple: spin a disc at the right speed, and let the cartridge track the record groove without outside disturbance. It's simple to explain, but almost impossible to get right. The vibrations caused by someone walking into the room, traffic on the road outside, or even the sound coming out of the speakers can spoil the results. And that's before we get to the difficulties in spinning the record at exactly the right speed.

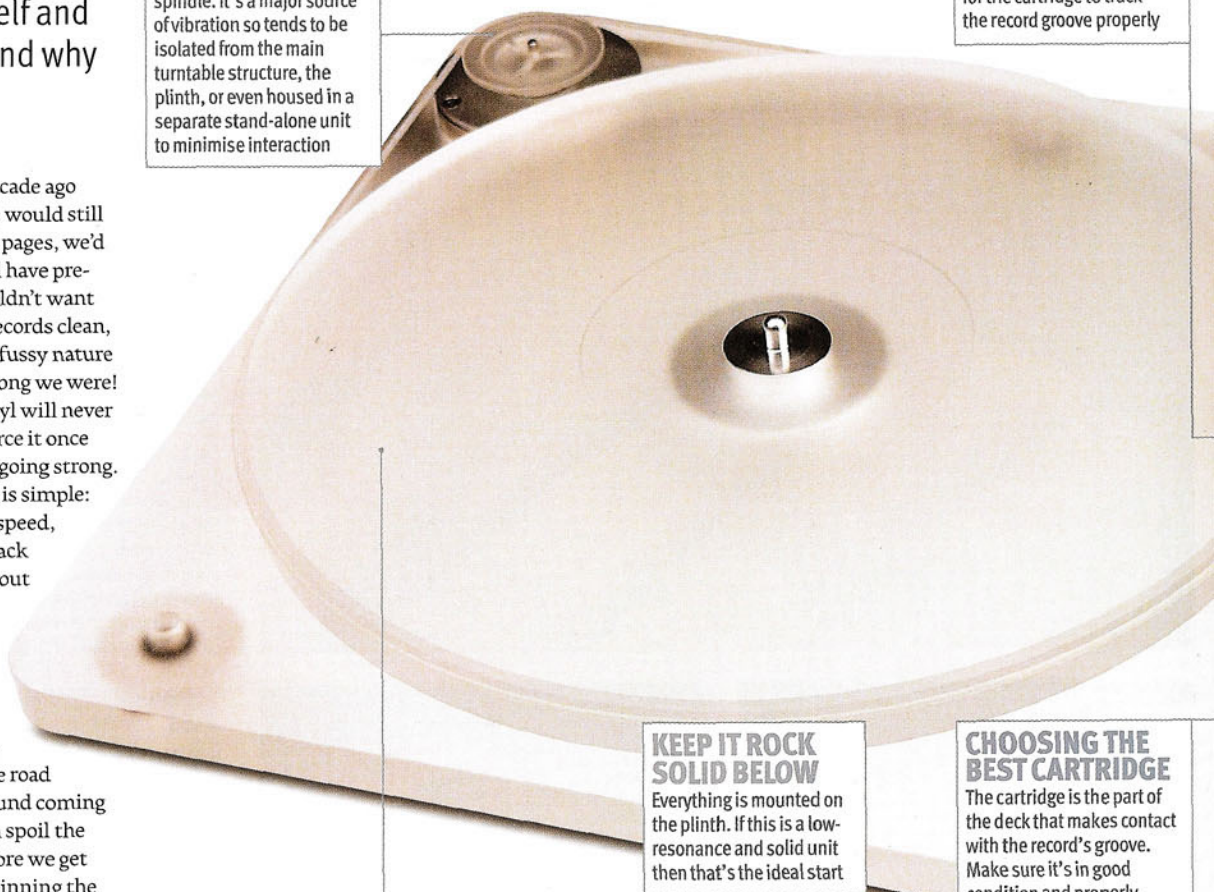
Yet, despite all this and more, records sound fabulous. At its best, vinyl has the dynamics, naturalness and timing that even the finest digital players struggle to match. That's why those black vinyl discs just keep going and going...

SAY GOODBYE TO BAD VIBES

The motor drives the platter – the bit that the record sits on – with a rubber belt or directly through the centre spindle. It's a major source of vibration so tends to be isolated from the main turntable structure, the plinth, or even housed in a separate stand-alone unit to minimise interaction

IS THE GROOVE ARM HARDER?

The tonearm (or 'arm') is the part that holds the cartridge. It has to be rigid and have minimal play in its bearing for the cartridge to track the record groove properly



KEEP IT ROCK SOLID BELOW

Everything is mounted on the plinth. If this is a low-resonance and solid unit then that's the ideal start

YOU SPIN ME RIGHT ROUND...

The platter spins and supports the record, aiming to give the cartridge the easiest ride. An inert structure is a good thing

CHOOSING THE BEST CARTRIDGE

The cartridge is the part of the deck that makes contact with the record's groove. There are two types of cartridges: moving magnet and moving coil. The latter usually cost more and have a lower output, though they tend to sound cleaner and more detailed overall than moving magnet designs

BEST BUYS

There's a turntable to suit everyone, whether you're a budding DJ, a style guru, or looking for something sensible to keep your vinyl collection alive. Here are five of our favourites – for the full selection, check out the *Buyer's Guide* starting on p91 of this issue

BEST FOR VALUE

PRO-JECT DEBUT III PHONO SB



£ 180

First-time buyers are laughing here: this latest iteration of a classic deck includes a talented built-in phono amp – so it plugs into any stereo amp – plus a switch to change speed from 33 to 45rpm (many decks are manual). And there's a fine cartridge thrown in... magic!



BEST FOR BUDGET UPGRADERS

PRO-JECT RPM5



£ 400

We only tested this model a couple of months ago, but it has already achieved near-legendary status, such is its blend of great value, stunning sound and cool looks. In action, the RPM5 excels: bass is deep and defined, mid-range open and involving, while treble has clarity and attack. Pro-ject has done it again.



BEST FOR DJs

TECHNICS SL1210 MK5G



£ 550

In clubland this deck has a bigger reputation than DJs Jules, Slim, and Tong put together. It loses stars due to our strict sound-per-pound reviewing system – you're paying a premium for tank-like build, plus DJ'ing extras – but if you want to raise the roof, rely on a Technics SL1210 (or two).



BEST FOR STYLE

WILSON BENESCH FULL CIRCLE



£ 2000

While the Clearaudio deck below bests the Wilson Benesch for 'bling', not all of us want our houses to look like Buckingham Palace. And this Wilson Benesch doesn't only ooze understated style, it also sounds awesome, offering an utterly composed yet insightful performance. The Full Circle cuts no corners.



BEST FOR MILLIONAIRES

CLEARAUDIO MASTER REFERENCE



£ 14,150

You're probably familiar with Clearaudio's Award-winning Emotion deck (opposite). Well, this is the Daddy! Fabricated using the same distinctive combination of acrylic and metal, the Master Reference has such a supreme range of abilities that it's safe to say it easily justifies the massive outlay. As long as you can find space to put the thing...



KEEPING THE PRESSURE ON

Cartridges have to track at a precise weight to deliver the optimum performance. The counterweight sets the downforce. It's important to get this right, because if it's set too high the sound will be dull and thick in the bass. If it's too low then the sound will become edgy, thin and possibly even distorted