

GROUPTEST TURNTABLES £350-£600

WINNER:

Pro-Ject

Debut Carbon Esprit SB



Inspire Hi-Fi
Black Magic Si



Music Hall
MMF-2.2



Pro-Ject
Debut Carbon Esprit SB



Rega
RP3



SOTA
Moonbeam Series II



Stanton
STR8.150

Make/model	Inspire Hi-Fi Black Magic Si	Music Hall MMF-2.2	Pro-Ject Debut Carbon Esprit SB	Rega RP3	SOTA Moonbeam Series II	Stanton STR8.150
Price	£560	£350	£425	£550	£600	£500
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★

A fantastically revealing deck that presents plenty of detail with solid imaging

Well built and great value starter pack with a pleasant sound. Hard to beat at the price

The best all-rounder in the group marries quality components with an incredibly appealing price tag

A good-value package that's well put together. The Rega's sound will win many fans

Attractive-looking deck that feels solid. Shows plenty of promise, but really needs refining

Huge spec and built like a tank with bass grip to match. Sound lacks sophistication compared to rivals

Key features

Cartridge	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Speed change	Manual	Manual	Auto	Manual	Manual	Auto
Drive	Belt	Belt	Belt	Belt	Belt	Direct
78rpm	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
S/PDIF	No	No	No	No	No	Yes



Pro-Ject Debut Carbon Esprit SB £425



Auto speed combined with a carbon arm, acrylic platter and 2M Red cartridge, this deck has lots to offer

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Pro-Ject Debut Carbon Esprit SB

ORIGIN
Austria

TYPE
Belt drive

WEIGHT
4.9kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
415 x 118 x 320mm

FEATURES

- Auto speed 33 and 45rpm
- Carbon fibre tonearm
- Ortofon 2M Red cartridge supplied
- Acrylic platter
- Includes dustcover

DISTRIBUTOR
see website

WEBSITE
www.project-audio.com

This model sits atop the three-strong Debut range and improves on the £325 Debut Carbon by adding an acrylic platter and electronic speed change between 33 and 45rpm (78rpm is manually selected).

Even in standard guise, the Debut Carbon sports Pro-Ject's 8.6CC one-piece carbon fibre tonearm (with line and weight anti-skate) and an £85 Ortofon 2M Red MM cartridge, which are both carried over to the SB model under review.

It also features an external 15V DC wall-wart PSU to drive its AC motor, which is mounted using the same rubber band method as the Music Hall deck. Whereas the MH's motor is suspended by this rubber band, the Pro-Ject motor is also screwed to the plinth through two small rubber pads that give the motor a more rigid mounting. There's also a phono cable junction box at the rear, so you can

upgrade the supplied interconnects at a later date. Isolation is further aided by four Ortofon isolation feet that support the deck's 28mm MDF plinth.

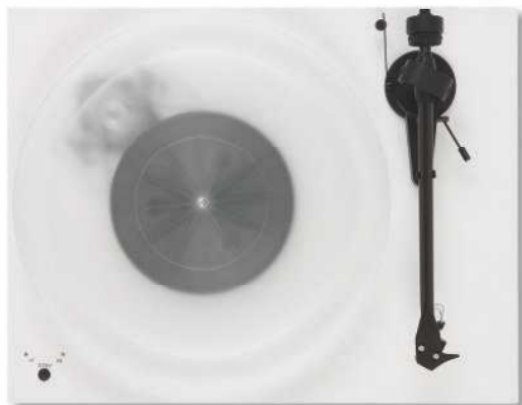
The electronic speed control lets you jump between 33 and 45rpm, indicated by corresponding blue LEDs that flash while the platter gets up to speed. A longer push on this button turns the deck on/off. For 78rpm fans there's good and bad news, as this deck does facilitate this, but you'll have to manually move the belt to a bigger cog on the pulley (when in 45rpm mode) to make it happen.

Sound quality

Like the Inspire, the Pro-Ject's acrylic platter is designed to be used without a mat and that's how it's tested. Though there's almost £100 between them, the supplied 2M Red cartridge isn't leagues behind our reference 2M Blue, and the Red offers a clean treble with well extended bass, so you should get plenty of enjoyment out of it before the upgrade bug bites.

The Blue improves on the Red by offering a more refined bass, better fine detail retrieval and a smoother midband, which can clearly be heard on the Goldfrapp song.

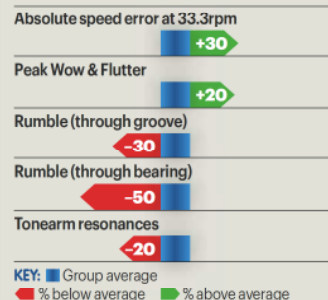
On The Doors track, Jim Morrison's performance has plenty of attitude thanks to how the SB manages to retain a degree of bite without sounding too hard edged. The SB's soundstage is almost as wide as the best in the group and while the instruments may not have all the energy that the Rega gives them, the SB has greater separation.



ON TEST

While there's no rotational servo at work here, the flashing 33/45rpm LED times out after some five seconds at which point the acrylic platter is firmly up to speed. Our sample was bang-on target, suffering a minuscule -0.01% speed error, which is not only the best of the group here but a significant improvement on the -0.35% speed error recorded for Pro-Ject's original Debut Carbon deck two years ago. Wow and flutter is very similar at 0.08% (peak-weighted), flutter being very slightly worse. The latter is linked to a series of clearly defined resonant modes at 41Hz, 82Hz, 123Hz and 164Hz that appear on the rumble spectrum, pushing the overall figure down by some 2dB to -66.8dB (or -67.7dB, DIN-B weighted, measured through the bearing itself). Nevertheless, these figures are still in keeping with a sub-£500 deck, let alone one that includes an arm and £85 MM! **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



The SB's midrange is very well balanced. It's not quite as analogue-like and rich as the Rega's, or as forward as some of the other models, but it's a very smooth and detailed affair with just the right amount of presence to ensure the music remains even across its frequencies. While sounding strong, Nick Drake's voice is carefully presented and I can hear the delicacy with which he holds the ends of each note with a little intentional reticence, hinting at his character. Guitar strings resonate with a natural beginning and end and the SB really gets to grips with the style of Drake's guitar work and not just the notes being played ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★
FEATURES
★★★★★

LIKE: Smooth sound with bags of detail; quality cartridge; top-class arm
DISLIKE: Nothing at the price
WESAY: A super bargain that's easy to use and has a well balanced class-leading sound to it

OVERALL

