

Project Debut II/RPM-4

REVIEW – WHAT HIFI August 2002

FAMILY TIES | PRO-JECT TURNTABLES



under £200

Pro-ject Debut II

Price £115 (£130 in choice of nine colours)

SOUND

★★★★★

BUILD

★★★★★

FACILITIES

★★★★★

VERDICT

★★★★★

THIS IS PRO-JECT in its purest possible form: an entry-level turntable, perfect for use with modest amplifiers and systems. If your amp doesn't have a phono stage, you can either use the £40 Pro-ject Phono Box or buy the Debut Phono, which has an onboard phono amp – for the purposes of this test we were using the new Phono Box SE, which you'll find in *First Tests* this month.

The beauty of the Debut is that everything is set up and ready to go, so there's none of the fiddly installation of the pickup cartridge or setting tracking weights. A basic Ortofon moving magnet cartridge is already in the headshell, the counterweight is locked to right setting, and all you have to do is hang the anti-skating weight on its fishing line onto the arm and over a hook. You then install the drive belt on the subplatter and motor pulley, drop the platter and felt mat in place, hook up the mains and audio connections, and you're in

business. The Debut allows speed switching between 33.3 and 45rpm by moving the belt on the drive pulley, a tool being provided to keep sweat and oil off the belt.

In use, this turntable sounds fine, and given the price it's an absolute steal. Whether with some jazz or blues from audiophile repressings such as the famous *Blues Hoot* set of Lightnin' Hopkins and others, or some vinyl heyday stuff such as Ian Dury, Elvis Costello or even a live Knebworth Festival set, the Debut presents a nicely open and organic presentation, even if the bass won't shake the room. It also makes a fine job of the tight Blockheads rhythm section on a vintage Ian Dury set.

There are fine levels of detail on offer, and voices and lead instruments have good clarity, but this is without a doubt a budget turntable. A very good one, agreed, but still an entry-level buy. Yes, the Debut sounds tight and enjoyable, but the suspicion remains that the discs have much more to give in terms of bass and power. Maybe it's time to move on up through the rest of the range...

LEADING RIVAL

Rega P2 £198 ★★★★★

A great first buy for anyone wanting to hear the pleasures of vinyl.

Perfect partners

SPEAKERS

Wharfedale
Diamond

£120 ★★★★★

A Best Buy in the Awards 2001. Work well with all types of music.



AMPLIFIER

Sony TA-F230

£100 ★★★★★

A bargain price for an amp that's built to Sony's usual impeccable standards and is well equipped.



£200 to £499

Pro-ject RPM 4

Price £325

SOUND

★★★★★

BUILD

★★★★★

FACILITIES

★★★★★

VERDICT

★★★★★

IF YOU WANT severe turntable style on a budget, you need look no further than this. The shape of the main plinth here follows the outline of the record platter and arm to give a cut-away look to the deck, and while it looks a bit like a cakestand with the dustcover in place, in use the RPM 4 looks much more the business.

It comes with an Ortofon 510MkII prefitted, but the set-up here is a little more complex than that for the Debut, as the motor mounting and arm are somewhat more sophisticated. Motor suspension transport screws and arm restraints have to be removed, then the belt and platter – this time a heavy lump of MDF, but still with a felt mat – are installed, along with the counterweight, which needs to be adjusted to balance the arm, then apply tracking force (15mN, or 1.5g) to the cartridge.

The output cables are detachable, so these and the earth connection need to be attached at both turntable

and amp end (attach the earth lead to the turntable end before you connect the phono plugs) and you're set.

The RPM4 soon impresses with the quality feel of its arm and the screw-down clamp to hold and flatten records, and as the stylus settles into the groove it's clear this is a superior player. There's much less surface noise than with the Debut, and the music has much greater scale and power, allied to closer detailing. That lovely organic feel you only seem to get from great vinyl playback is apparent, whether with the grandiose scale of the Roger Waters set or simpler studio blues Lightnin' style. The RPM 4's also more than capable of conveying the impact and drama of Britten's *Storm* interlude from *Peter Grimes*.

Better extension and control is what the RPM 4 brings to the party, keeping the Blockheads' engine-room pounding in impressive style, and just as impressive when guitars or keyboards crash out of the mix.

This is a very grown-up record player for reasonable CD player money: it's well worth exploring.

LEADING RIVAL

Rega P3 £298 ★★★★★

Offers much of the finesse of decks costing twice as much.

Perfect partners

SPEAKERS

B&W DM601 S3

£250 ★★★★★

These are stunning speakers for the money and even better than their predecessors.



AMPLIFIER

Marantz PM60100SE

£230 ★★★★★

Its mix of looks, facilities and sheer musicality give this amp star quality.

