

New revolution

Joining the vinyl revival, Electrocompaniet's new ECG 1 turntable and ECP 2 phono stage offer surprising value, says **David Price**



**► DETAILS**

PRODUCT
Electrocompaniet
ECG 1

ORIGIN
Norway

TYPE
Belt-drive turntable

WEIGHT
13kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
465 x 360 x 153mm

FEATURES
• Acrylic/aluminium
construction
• 24v AC
synchronous motor
• Jelco SA-750EB
tonearm fitted

DISTRIBUTOR
Electrocompaniet

TELEPHONE
+47 51 741033

WEBSITE
electrocompaniet.
no

► DETAILS

PRODUCT
Electrocompaniet
ECP 2

ORIGIN
Norway

TYPE
MM & MC phono
stage

WEIGHT
9kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
465 x 371 x 78mm

FEATURES
• Adjustable
capacitance and
resistance
• Adjustable gain
• DC-coupled
design

DISTRIBUTOR
Electrocompaniet

TELEPHONE
+47 51 74 10 33

WEBSITE
electrocompaniet.
no

With so many new turntables coming out, you'd almost think there was a vinyl revival going on at the moment. Oh hang on, there is. Having spent much time writing about the phoenix-like resurgence of black plastic – sometimes slightly wishfully – I can now confirm that it is actually finally starting to happen and we appear to have a new generation of music fans (plus a couple of old ones thrown in for good measure) getting (back) into the groove. It is to these very people that Electrocompaniet is hoping to sell its new ECG 1 turntable.

The deck comes with the much liked and respected Jelco SA-750EB tonearm pre-fitted, although you'll have to specify the cartridge yourself (any good dealer can advise on this). This Japanese-produced arm is a fine thing in its own right, and shows excellent judgement on the Norwegian company's part. Any purchaser of this package should be able to ask their dealer to fit the cartridge, and also set up the deck while they're at it. Although it's far easier to get working than some models – Michell's rival GyroDec for

I've heard few packages at this price that come close to this one

example – getting it to give its best is the job of an expert and/or enthusiast.

There's nothing new in turntable design. The stereo LP has been around for the best part of 60 years and mono records longer still. The ECG 1 is not a suspended subchassis design; for reasons of simplicity perhaps, it's a massy, non-sprung deck that attempts to damp down the vibrations inside its plinth, rather than dissipate them via a bouncy suspension system. Its feet do this to a point, then it's left to the plinth's sandwich construction, somewhat reminiscent of the Marantz TT-1000 deck of the late seventies, to sink resonance. Made from three layers – acrylic, aluminium then acrylic – the idea is that the materials resonate at different frequencies, acting as a broadband filter. To this, you add a substantial acrylic platter with no turntable mat; instead the top surface is slightly coarse in order to stop the disc from slipping. This doesn't ring like a metal platter, but the idea isn't new, first surfacing back in the eighties.

The drive system of the ECG 1 wins no prizes for innovation either, but is

well implemented. The motor unit is physically disconnected from the plinth to reduce noise, sitting in a circular recess. A substantial rubber belt drives the platter around its edge, with the help of the 24V, AC synchronous motor regulated by a two-phase low harmonic analogue sine wave controller. Unusually, it offers three speeds, 33, 45 and 78rpm. The aforementioned Jelco SA-750EB tonearm balances phono cartridges weighing between 4 and 12g. Assembling the turntable, installing

The ECP 2 phono stage makes for a crisp and engaging vinyl front end

a cartridge and adjusting the tonearm takes around an hour to do properly, and then special care should be paid to placement. Having only a rudimentary suspension system, the deck benefits from a purpose-designed hi-fi support.

The ECP 2 phono stage is a surprisingly large and hefty affair, and offers a plethora of facilities. Suitable for both moving magnet and moving coil cartridges, it offers a choice of RCA or balanced XLR inputs, and has adjustable gain between 39.8 to 71.4dB (via RCA) or 45.8 to 76.4dB (XLR). Cartridge loading is adjustable from 10 to 47kohm, and capacitance ranges from 0 to 350pF. This is wonderful for vinyl purists, but makes it difficult for less committed users who would prefer a few simple front panel selectors rather than dozens of tiny DIP switches on the back, all

of which will require some careful studying of the instruction manual to properly set up. Well built for the price, Electrocompaniet says that the highest-quality selected passive components have been used, alongside state-of-the-art amplifiers.

Sound quality

There's always a bit of a worry when companies not famed for their vinyl sources decide to enter the market, but Electrocompaniet has done it with characteristic thoroughness. The ECG 1 is a fine-sounding turntable, not quite at the very top of its crowded class in terms of sound quality – but still there or thereabouts. I have certainly heard few packages of this price that come close to the performance of this one. It is best described as a clean and open device with a strong and tuneful nature. It is a little less forensic and 'deconstructing' than price rivals like Michell's GyroDec, preferring to give a slightly warmer and more romantic feel to the proceedings. This turntable plays music in a relaxed and enjoyable way; its sound is doubtless influenced by the Jelco tonearm, which has its own unique and slightly soothing quality.

I fit a range of cartridges, from an Audio-Technica AT-95E (HFC 387) moving magnet to a Lyra Delos moving coil, but settle with an Audio-Technica AT-OC9 MC. This mid-priced device balances well in the Jelco, tracking sweetly. This feeds the ECP 2 phono stage, which – as you might expect – shares the company's house sound, making for a crisp and engaging vinyl front end. For example, Jade Warrior's A



Michell's GyroDec (fitted with the company's Rega-derived Tecno Arm) has been around since 1981. It was a breathtakingly advanced design back then – spawning a legion of copyists – and has been steadily refined ever since. This latest version is called the Spyder Edition (SE) that comes with a DC motor and sounds fractionally better than the stock version – it's cheaper too. To prove its ability, the Electrocompaniet ECG 1 mustn't be too far away from the Gyro in terms of sound quality. This it achieves, but it's not quite up there with the superb sonics the British deck offers – sounding less clear and three dimensional, with a narrower soundstage. It's still very good and is much easier to set up than the Michell.

Winter's Tale is a classic slice of progressive rock that suits this dynamic duo very well. The opening few phrases, featuring a single vocal set over classical guitar strumming and ethereal flute work, sounds sweet and spacious, yet when the chorus kicks in and the mix gets more complicated, the Electrocompaniet front end manages to hold things together beautifully. I am still able to hear the instrumental backing behind the layered vocals and powerful, cranked-up electric guitar work. This is just the sort of music that can so often sound sterile via digital, but not a bit of it here!

Tighter, harder, faster

Asked to deal with slightly less spacey programme material, it fares just as well. The 2002 *Kling Klang Mix* of Kraftwerk's *Expo 2000* is next on the platter, an altogether tighter, harder and more uptempo piece of music. Again, this combo proves most enjoyable, the Audio-Technica AT-OC9 showcasing its beautifully well resolved treble and vast wealth of midrange detail. There's a slight sense of some dynamics being softened; the last one tenth of the accents on some electronic percussion work seems to get subsumed, making things a little softer sounding than the OC9 is capable of. This is a typical Jelco trait and is one of the few things that gives away the fact that it isn't a superarm (complete with a superarm price). The music sounds powerful, three dimensional and propulsive, bouncing along nicely to this – one of Kraftwerk's most dancey tunes.

The deck possesses fine speed stability, a quiet and smooth-running main bearing and a genuine sense of

CONNECTIONS



- 1 Tonearm counterweight
- 2 Drive belt
- 3 Balanced XLR output
- 4 RCA phono input
- 5 Grounding post

IN SIGHT

- 1 Motor spindle
- 2 Tonearm bearing housing
- 3 Tonearm headshell
- 4 Speed selection

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Based in Stavanger on Norway's beautiful South West coast, the company has been run by the energetic Mikal Dreggevik for the past 11 years. He has presided over the steady growth of a brand that has been around since the seventies. He's a classic case of the customer and brand fan who bought the company. A big Pink Floyd fan, he couldn't resist the opportunity when it came up for sale, seeing huge synergies with his existing company, Westcontrol. This is an avionics defence contractor, which supplies various defence customers including Britain's own Royal Air Force with various electronics products, such as radio communications systems used in

helicopters, sensors, vision systems and servos, for example. Mikal started this company back in 1994, and describes Westcontrol and now Electrocompaniet as a "system house" – a Norwegian phrase for a company doing everything from idea to product.

Before Mikal bought Electrocompaniet, the company had a colourful history, winning much critical acclaim from the world's hi-fi press. Its glory days were the late seventies, with the '2 Channel Audio Power Amplifier' proving an international success. The company duly made a name for itself and built up its business to get the product into over 40 countries worldwide.

unflappability that makes it a pleasure to listen to. The opening piano chords from Daft Punk's *Get Lucky* sound strong and are dripping with rich harmonics, and by the time the song gets into the first chorus I find myself luxuriating in the warmth and sweetness of the production. The lyrics don't win any prizes, but Nile Rodgers' brilliant musicianship is still in full effect. This Electrocompaniet front end fits the bill perfectly, sounding powerful and stable, with a very subtle warmth and spread to bass notes that's not strictly accurate but highly enjoyable all the same.

Conclusion

Electrocompaniet's ECG 1/ECP 2 is a fine pairing. The turntable is a thoughtfully engineered and well made device with a class-leading budget tonearm already fitted, and gives excellent sound for the money. The matching phono stage is a little less glamorous perhaps, but it's no less effective a performer. Full of features, it is highly configurable and has a naturally powerful, clean and detailed sound. Overall then, we'd suggest that you consider both if you're part of – or indeed soon to be a major player in – the great vinyl revival ●

Hi-FiChoice**OUR VERDICT - ECG 1****SOUND QUALITY**

LIKE: Sweet, musical sound; tonearm; elegant appearance

VALUE FOR MONEY

DISLIKE: Lacks detail compared with the best of the rest

BUILD QUALITY

WE SAY: A well packaged and pleasing performer

FEATURES**OVERALL****Hi-FiChoice****OUR VERDICT - ECP 2****SOUND QUALITY**

LIKE: Clean, powerful, detailed sound; facilities

VALUE FOR MONEY

DISLIKE: Fiddly DIP switches will dissuade many users

BUILD QUALITY

WE SAY: Serious sounding product, but hard to use

FEATURES**OVERALL****Q&A**

Volker Hunger
Technical manager



DP: Electrocompaniet is famous for electronics, so why did you decide to design a turntable?

VH: Our customers asked for a turntable a long time ago basically because it was the only thing missing in our range of high-end products. Materials like acrylic and black and gold metal parts found in all our Classic line products are a good match for a great-looking turntable, and our 40 years of experience in audio electronics has contributed to the successful development of our very first turntable.

What type of customer would you say the ECG 1 is aimed at?

Customers who are interested in high-end audio, either because of the sound quality, or the design, or both. Customers who buy the ECG 1 very often already own other Electrocompaniet equipment and want to complete their system with a turntable and phono stage that fits with the same design and philosophy.

Do you recommend any particular type of cartridge?

Any cartridge that is a good match for the Jelco will be just fine. We had a particular good experience with the Soundsmith MMC. The Jelco is a classic S-shaped tonearm, fitted with a detachable (SME-type) headshell for easy replacement of the cartridge. It has very good (tight) bearings so it will also handle low compliance MC cartridges. The tonearm has a moving mass of 21g and will work with a large number of different cartridges. It will handle cartridges weighing between 4 and 12g and can be expanded to handle heavier counterweight supplied.