



UltraDeck+M

Why MoFi's turntable pack is a groove master

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PASSION FOR SOUND

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Labelled with love

A spin off from the Mobile Fidelity record label, **Adam Smith** checks out this range-topping turntable package

Back in the early days of music reproduction, it was common to see the same name on your vinyl as on your replay equipment. RCA, Decca, EMI, Philips and many others operated successfully as producers of audio components/systems as well as recording labels. Although several hardware manufacturers have made steps into recorded media with music labels such as Naim and Linn, today it's relatively uncommon for a record label to move the other way. In 2016 record label Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab announced it was to introduce a line of turntables, tonearms, cartridges and accessories under the MoFi Electronics brand.

The UltraDeck+M is the flagship turntable package. The design has considerable input from Allen Perkins of Spiral Groove and comes with a MasterTracker moving-magnet cartridge for £2,500. Also available

are the UltraDeck+ with UltraTracker moving-magnet cartridge for £2,300 and the UltraDeck without cartridge for £2,000.

The belt-drive design uses a synchronous AC motor driving the periphery of the platter via a long rubber belt. The Delrin pulley has two steps for the manually applied speed change, and the platter is also Delrin and tips the scales at 3kg. The material was chosen for its good mechanical impedance match to vinyl and so no mat is needed. The platter spins on an inverted hardened steel bearing, meaning it protrudes from the plinth and the platter is lowered over it. This puts the centre of rotation at or below the bearing point rather than above it, and theoretically offers greater rotational stability.

The simple-looking plinth is based around the principle of constrained layer damping. There are three aluminium plates inside – one each

DETAILS

PRODUCT
MoFi UltraDeck+M
ORIGIN
USA
TYPE
Belt-driven turntable package
WEIGHT
10.5kg
DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
500 x 152 x 362mm
FEATURES
• 33 & 45rpm
• Supplied with MoFi MasterTracker MM cartridge
DISTRIBUTOR
Karma-AV Ltd.
TELEPHONE
01423 358846
WEBSITE
karma-av.co.uk

for the motor, bearing and arm base – which are bonded to the main MDF body but isolated from each other. This all sits on four adjustable isolation feet, designed by Michael Latvis of Harmonic Resolution Systems.

The UltraDeck's 10in tonearm is supported in both planes by high quality ball bearings, while Cardas internal wiring terminates in a pair of phono sockets on the rear. The arm is fully adjustable for height and cartridge azimuth and has a rubber o-ring between the armtube and the headshell for additional isolation. The

The treble has a veneer of polish and sophistication that is quite remarkable

arm's effective mass is a high 30g, making it only really suitable for lower compliance cartridges.

The MasterTracker MM cartridge design is based around a V-Twin dual magnet generator assembly to mirror the design of a lathe's stereo cutter head. It has a mass of 9.7g and has a Micro Linear stylus. Unusually for an MM design, the stylus is not replaceable as MoFi feels this could compromise its alignment.

Fit and finish is superb and the yellow belt and on/off switch are fine stylistic touches. A dustcover is supplied and pivots on simple plastic hinges.

The deck is placed on an Atacama Equinox rack and connected to an Anatek MMC phono stage feeding a

Naim Supernait amplifier and Mowgan Audio Ogma loudspeaker. A 367g Super Heavy Weight record platter clamp (£200) has been supplied by MoFi and is also used.

Sound quality

If you are considering buying the UltraDeck make sure you pay out the extra £200 and invest in the clamp, and if you already own an UltraDeck and don't have a clamp, be sure to go and invest in one. This seemingly innocuous addition has an astonishing effect on performance – turning it from a merely superb player into a quite remarkable one. Without it, the vinyl slips easily on the platter and applying a cleaning brush to an LP can bring it to a halt immediately. Adding the Super Heavy Weight locks the vinyl down, and seemingly does the same to the sound. Without it, the introduction to the title track of Steve Earle's *Copperhead Road* has a pleasing punch to the kick drum, but a slight splashiness across the top end. Place the clamp on the platter, however, and that top end gains clarity and focus and the drum beats start to rattle my internal organs.

The low end of the UltraDeck is a thing of real beauty. It gives basslines a sense of rock-solid stability, while capturing every scrap of detail. As well as the aforementioned kick drums, the UltraDeck pours forth upper bass detail with a sense of ease and skill that is usually the preserve of much dearer designs. Bass guitars have real depth, form and languid tunefulness to them and hard-hitting synth bass lines are snappy, taut and rhythmically perfect. On occasion it has the timing and precision of a direct-drive deck.

At the top end, the UltraDeck is equally well detailed, but with a balance that tends to err towards



smoothness. Don't for minute think it's dull, though, as nothing could be further from the truth. With the clamp in place, the treble has a veneer of polish and sophistication that is quite remarkable and usually the preserve of MC cartridges. I briefly swap the MasterTracker for my Ortofon 2M Black cartridge and the tonal balance changes slightly, but it brings no extra advantage in clarity or frequency range.

In terms of midband clarity, the UltraDeck+M scores a full house once again. Instruments are beautifully rendered and positioned perfectly within a capacious yet well-ordered soundstage. Even better, vocals have an exceptional sense of air, space and, above all, realism. Playing Let's Eat Grandma's *Donnie Darko* gives the UltraDeck+M a real chance to shine. Rosa Walton's vocals are projected out into the room perfectly and the backing guitar work has just the right amount of edge to it. Add in a thundering synth bassline and the composure it maintains as the track



The £2,500 Pro-Ject Xtension 9 Superpack with Ortofon Quintet Black MC cartridge and £2,400 Rega Planar 8 with Apheta 2 MC cartridge (HFC 443) are about the same cost, as is Michell's Gyro SE reference turntable fitted with a Rega RB-202 arm plus Ortofon 2M Red cartridge. While the Gyro SE is an exceptional turntable and the Rega and Pro-Ject models both offer a winning formula, as an overall package the UltraDeck+M is the one to beat.

draws to its crescendo is difficult to better at this – or any – price.

Conclusion

Given its development connections, I had a feeling MoFi's UltraDeck would be good, but am astonished by just how capable it is as it delivers plenty of bang for your buck at the price. Just make sure that you factor in the extra cost of the record clamp ●

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OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★

LIKE: Clarity and insight; superb bass; build quality

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★

DISLIKE: Hinges feel a bit feeble for the weight of the lid

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★

WE SAY: An incredibly accomplished turntable package that sounds magnificent

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL

★★★★★

