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## Project Perspective Turntable

by Peter Russell

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When RG suggested that I review the Project Perspective I actually jumped at the opportunity. Why, given the range of expensive turntables that have graced my listening room, would I be enthusiastic about reviewing a complete turntable that is significantly below the price point of most of the tonearms that I have owned or listened to in my system? Or tonearm leads come to that.



There are only a few ways you can engineer a turntable to spin a black disc, just as there are only a few ways you can design an arm to track the grooves in the record. The differences are in execution, materials and combining different philosophies to produce the desired goals. There has never been a time, certainly not in the last ten years, when the serious audiophile has had such a choice of turntables to choose from at sensible money. It is important to remember that the UK£750 Project Perspective shares the same goals as the UK£3700 Linn and a similar philosophy to a UK£6500 Oracle. If you throw enough money at designing a turntable you might do a half-reasonable job, and if you are really lucky produce a state of the art achievement. Or so the accepted wisdom goes. The road to turntable nirvana is littered with me-too products and 'nearly there' attempts, which only too often have an ephemeral existence.

This is certainly not the case with the turntable combination under review here. There is a real challenge to create a turntable that satisfies most of the sonic and musical criteria at a price that most people would consider sensible. That is exactly what the Project achieves, and more.

What you are getting here is a package; a classic three point suspended turntable, tonearm and a cartridge, record clamp and some innovative touches all for the price of UK£900. A bargain? Only if it delivers the musical goods!

For the majority of people the deck will come ready assembled by the dealer, however by putting it together oneself it is possible to explore the design and engineering philosophy, and the inevitable compromises that have to be made. First out of the box comes the chassis, a thick rectangular piece of acrylic with the motor assembly, tone arm and sub-chassis all in place. All you have to do is place it on your support by screwing in the three pointed feet. It is here that you start to notice the attention to detail. The feet are sufficiently large that you can get your hand under the base of the deck and adjust the knurled spikes, and with a felt washer between the foot and the acrylic base there is

no danger of making scratches, which would be all too visible from above. Once levelled with the aid of the bubble level in the immobilised sub-chassis you can turn your attention to the platter and belt assembly. One useful addition to the deck is the provision of a small silicon bath in the base with a threaded brass rod that you screw through the sub-chassis into the silicon bath. The idea here is that if you have the deck on a stand which in turn relies on a suspended floor, the damping well and rod will help reduce sympathetic resonance in the suspension system.



Releasing the transit screws allows the sub-chassis to float on its three springs. You then simply drop the platter gently over the spindle, and carefully run the belt around its outer edge and the drive pulley. The suspension can be adjusted from above using the large screw heads mounted through the sub-chassis, and once again, the spirit level.

Speed change is a mite unusual. Instead of moving the belt on a stepped pulley to set the speed of the platter, here you unscrew the motor unit from below the chassis and replace it with another, complete with the correct size pulley. Neat, and designed to keep the angular torsion of the belt on the suspended mass in its correct plane.

With the platter and belt in place you can turn to setting up the arm and cartridge. The arm is a familiar gimbal-bearing configuration with the usual thread and weight arrangement for anti-skating. VTA is adjusted by two grub screws set in the back of the mounting ring. Having wrestled with this awkward arrangement once I can't see you wanting to change your cartridge in a hurry. Altering the VTA demands orang-utan arms and considerable patience, especially if you only have access to the arm pillar from the front. Fortunately the arm pillar is quite a tight fit so you do not have to worry about the arm crashing to the base and thereby losing your point of reference, although it does make small adjustments difficult. Once installed, the supplied cartridge was parallel to the record surface with the arm set to its lowest setting. Anyone wanting to use the deck with a shallower cartridge will have difficulty in setting the VTA accurately. Given the wildly varying thickness of available LP's, the ability to adjust arm height easily is a real necessity these days, especially with a deck that has the potential to deliver something that little bit special.



The Perspective arrived as a complete package, including an Ortofon Kontrapunkt a moving coil cartridge, the price of UK£900 representing a saving of UK£350 over the cost if purchased separately. Similar packages are available with other cartridges (how about a Perspective Rohmann combo for UK£1250 - a saving of UK£550!), both cheaper and more expensive.

The Kontrapunkt offers a healthy 0.45 mV output, and with an internal loading of five ohms will partner most me phonostages. Like the turntable, the cartridge has some thoughtful features. The base of the body has a conductive carbon part which apart from reducing the electrostatic clicks from the record, actually protects the vinyl from accidental damage should the cartridge body be dropped onto its surface. The terminal pins are recessed into the back of the body to allow space for the headshell wiring, which can often get very cramped, but the pins are quite close together so care needs to be exercised in mounting the wires as space is at a minimum. The usual stylus guard is supplied to protect the easily visible stylus tip and cantilever.

The arm is obviously optimised for Din standard cartridges, as there is little latitude for overhang adjustment. A protractor is supplied, as is a small balance for setting the tracking weight, but I relied on an electronic stylus gauge and my own alignment protractor. There is no means for adjusting the arm for cartridge azimuth but the Ortofon solves this problem as a ridge in its top plate means that you can tilt the body by two degrees either way, a nice touch when so many modern arms overlook this important alignment parameter. With the cartridge in place and everything aligned all we have to do is guide the cantilever into the run in groove, right? Wrong. With the cueing lever in the raised position the cartridge is suspended over the record like a crane poised to deliver its load. Lowering the lever starts the cartridge in its descent, only to be interrupted a fraction above the LP and a purposeful push on the

cueing lever is needed to finally locate the stylus into the run in groove. All this on a sprung chassis sends the deck into mild oscillation. I assume that the whole assembly will loosen up through use, but I am not convinced.

Ok, so we finally get the stylus into the groove was it really worth the wait? The answer is a resounding yes! I don't know about you but whenever I see a turntable it always gives me some expectation of its sound. With the Project I was expecting a competent performance in which everything would be presented in a fairly polite manner; adequate bass, slightly emphasised highs and a somewhat recessed presentation but large soundstage. Oh dear wasn't I in for a surprise. The first thing that hits you when you hear this combination is the sheer authority and power it exercises over the music. There is real energy here, small Jazz combos are presented to you as if you are sitting at the first table on the floor of the club; with your eyes closed you are there, you can smell the cigar smoke, the cheap perfume, the stale dust and beer from last night's gig, and the bite of the saxophone as it rasps its way up the scales provides just sufficient pain to be believable. Here's the confession, I dragged out a whole load of jazz albums from the ubiquitous Jazz at the Pawnshop to a number of Dixieland albums; Ben Pollock's Pick a Rib Boys, Pee Wee Russell (no relation), and some of the early MJQ. It was a great night as I had forgotten what these albums sounded like. One of my favourite guitar players is Albert Lee, who along with Eric Clapton can do things with an electric guitar few can match; he is also a great acoustic guitarist. On his album Speechless on the MCA label, there are two tracks, 'Seventeenth Summer' and 'Salt Creek' which when played at near concert volumes can create a real physical and emotional reaction. Speed, power, soundstage and impact are all combined to create that visceral reaction so important to good amplified electric music. With the Project system it was there in spades, there was no break up anywhere along the frequency range; the cartridge tracked the grooves like a cowboy at a rodeo. This rig is a power junkie's delight.

If all this sounds too good to be true, then it is, because whilst authority, energy and power are the hallmarks of this system, small ensemble music by Corelli and Boccherini is robbed of its delicacy. The lightness of touch is lost to the forcefulness of the presentation. The pianoforte is a case in point. Originally the instrument on which Mozart and Beethoven would have composed their music, it represents both the loudness and power of the 'piano' and the subtlety of the 'forte' or soft presentation. It is a much more tonally complex instrument than the metal-framed piano we are all more familiar with, and as such requires a particular deftness of touch and an ability to render dynamic nuance. The Project is much more at home with the 'Piano' inherent in the Steinway than in the 'Forte' of its predecessor. In the area of small chamber music the presentation is initially impressive; notes are large with big middles, short decays, with rock solid imaging and a big sound stage. One notices the absence of air around notes, especially those delivered by percussive instruments. The harpsichord is deceptively beguiling, dangerously so, as it acquires a sonority at odds with its normally astringent tone. This imposition of elision where the note acquires a fullness and a richness through compression of its timbre and a liquid rendition is very seductive whilst at the same time enormously engaging. It reveals a loss of low level timbral and dynamic resolution, but that doesn't stop me enjoying it.



Nowhere does this ability to round the note become so involving as in the presentation of small scale organ works. Let me explain. We are talking here of organs which have been built on a smaller scale than the usual large Cathedral constructions. Whilst a large organ in full 'blow' is impressive, few systems are capable of capturing the sheer energy and sonority buried in such a presentation, especially given the size of the average listening room. On the other hand these small scale organs produce a delicacy and a timbral richness lost in their larger counterparts. Hates become identifiable, distinct and one can follow the melody as well as the underlying harmonics. Rhythmic undertones were presented by the Project consistently as the counterpoint weaved its way through the music. A real delight.

If I pull myself back to earth and reflect on what we have in the Project turntable I have to remind myself that we are talking here about a deck, arm and cartridge combination which costs UK£900. Admittedly it was performing in a much more expensive system than it is likely to be partnered by of, but that is not the point. We are exploring the deck's potential, pushing it to deliver its maximum performance, warts and all. Because of this potential, I decided, partway through the review to change the stock phono leads for my FM acoustic ones. How on earth you can justify using a pair of leads which cost nearly as much as the turntable and tonearm I do not know, and I am not going to try. All I do know is that the presentation was transformed. It still retained its signature of power, energy and control, but instrumental passages became more refined, micro level detail emerged to create complexity and shading previously veiled. The notes continued to demonstrate their richness and power but perhaps within a more varied context. Voices became more timbrally rich and expressive and retained their stability, but in the same plane of the music. There is no doubt that experimenting with better phono leads could produce real improvements here, although it would be difficult to justify going to the same lengths as I did.

In an attempt to explore the contribution the various parts of the turntable system made to the overall sound, I put the Ortofon Kontrapunkt a in the Audiocraft arm on the Verdier. There is no doubt that the 'sound' of the Project Perspective is largely a result of the cartridge exercising its authority over the music, The same power and energy was presented as part of a full and embodied soundstage, but with a finer portrayal of micro-dynamics and vocal inflections. Notes still retained their fullness but continued to shade off their leading and trailing edges to present a sound, both engaging and involving if not altogether tonally accurate. The Project turntable and arm combination obviously presents a transparent platform for the cartridge, clearly presenting its character to the listener, and allowing them to choose their own preferred balance. Greater speed and clarity? How about a Dynavector DV17D2.



Whilst I might quibble over some of the idiosyncrasies of the arm, in the Project Perspective we have a package which has one of the most engaging musical presentations I have come across. My intuitive reservations about the arm are mainly concerned with the way it feels and works, but do make me wonder what the deck would sound like with one of the Linn compatible alternatives. Give me time and I'll find out. Meanwhile, as delivered, this is a combination which will take on all comers at its price point, or quite a way above. The considerable saving to be had if you buy the deck arm and cartridge together makes an already excellent buy even better, assuming you like the cartridge. If you don't then Henley Designs offers a whole range of equally attractive alternatives. This turntable has an ability to draw you into the musical presentation and to create some remarkably enjoyable moments. Whilst not always faithful to the source, whatever it doesn't do it makes up for in terms of the control and authority it exercises over the musical performance. There was a real pleasure in being able to enjoy and appreciate a turntable/arm/ cartridge combination which is both excellent and genuinely affordable.

## **TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS** **Project Perspective Turntable**

### **Turntable**

Drive Type: Belt

Speed Adjustment 33 and 45 RPM via interchangeable motor units

Dimensions (w x h x d) 450 x 180 x 350mm

### **Tonearm**

Effective Mass: Medium

Effective Length: 9"

### **Cartridge**

Type: Moving-coil

Cantilever: Aluminium

Output: 0.450 mV

Internal Impedance: 5 ohms

Tracking force range: 2.2 - 2.7g

Prices - see text

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