

Turntables just keep getting better: three of our winning quartet are new, and as always we've got something to suit all pockets. So come on, dust off that old vinyl and get into the groove

Awards '07

TURNTABLES £125 – £1670

Record players keep spinning

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Rega P3-24/Elys 2

£500

REGA OBVIOUSLY BELIEVES in the 'if it ain't broke don't fix it' school of thought: the old Planar 3 wasn't broke and they haven't fixed it. What the company has done is refine an already capable product. The changes are widespread: there's a better plinth, improved arm and revised motor too. The sonic result of all these upgrades is much the same as before, only better. Our review deck came pre-fitted with a Rega Elys 2 cartridge: a combination we feel most buyers will go for. The deck and arm are available for £100 less should you not want to go for the Elys, though we can't think why you wouldn't considering the level of performance on offer. This really is a terrific-sounding package.

Get on your dancing shoes, it's time to party

It doesn't matter what type of music you listen to, the P3-24/Elys 2 will take it all its stride. This package has the drive and rhythmic integrity to revel in the likes of Nirvana, yet lacks nothing at all in refinement, making Holst's *Planets* a joy. Dynamics and timing are class-leading, as is the overall level of transparency.

Best of all, this Rega deck makes listening to music fun, and that isn't something you can say about many rivals – even some that cost significantly more.

→ VERDICT

Rega's sensible upgrades to an already special deck has created a class champ

The Rega is no looker, but it sure sounds sweet for the money



BEST TURNTABLE UNDER £200

Pro-ject Genie

£125

ANOTHER YEAR, AND another budget Award-winner for Pro-ject. No other company manages to combine a competitive price and a fine all-round performance with such skill. The one change for this year is that the budget winner is no longer the Debut: its price has crept up over the years, leaving a sizeable gap at the entry-level.

That's where the Genie fits in. This is as basic as turntables get: there's a small, minimalist plinth, pre-fitted arm and cartridge, and very little extra assembly – you'll be up and running with your records in no time.

The only exotic flurry is the use of an outboard motor unit to isolate potentially sonic-spoiling vibration. This type of design is usually only found on far pricier devices, and brings significant benefits to sound quality.

An even balance and a lot of detail

This is a surprisingly transparent-sounding deck for the money. There's a cleanliness to the presentation that's rare even in pricier players – your next significant upgrade would be the Rega here. Add good detail and decent speed stability and you've a new vinyl star.

Pro-ject's Debut has always been great value, but the Genie is, in our opinion, an even better buy.

→ VERDICT

The Genie wins yet another budget Award for Pro-ject, and rightly so

The simple genius of the Genie: a deck that comes ready to play



KNOW HOW

Turntables can sound great, but they need a little love and care before they deliver top-class sound quality

MORE THAN JUST about any other hi-fi component, record players rely on decent set-up. Even the likes of the Clearaudio won't impress if every adjustment and detail isn't spot-on. Here's a quick guide on the things to look out for.

Location, location, location

No, we're not about to give to house-buying advice. Turntables – even the ones with elaborate suspension systems – are very sensitive to external vibrations. Make sure you use a dedicated support, and try to place it as far away from the speakers as possible. This will minimise sonic vibrations from the speakers spoiling the sound. If you have a bouncy wooden floor, try a wall

shelf, because this will reduce the effect of footfalls and such like.

Once you've picked the ideal placement, take plenty of time to get all the various adjustments right. The deck should be perfectly level before you start elsewhere. One degree might not sound much, but introduce this kind of error into the cartridge alignment, and you'll get loads of distortion and damaged records.

Take your time and get it right

Use a proper alignment gauge – most manufacturers supply them – and ensure that you get bias and cartridge weights correct. Use the suggested values as starting points, but don't be afraid to experiment.



There's plenty to adjust on an arm, but get it right, and the results will inspire

WHY THEY WON

All four of these turntables are winners, but which one is right for you?

IT'S IMPORTANT TO remember that every record player here is a great buy, so your choice should only be dictated by budget and system, and nothing else. If you've got a sub-£500 set-up the Pro-ject makes the most sense. It's a capable, easy-to-use deck that sounds great for the money. The Rega package works best in sub-£1500 systems, though it is capable enough not to be embarrassed in pricier company.

That said, in such systems we'd advise you invest in Roksan's Radius or the Clearaudio if possible: the benefit to transparency is worth the extra outlay. If you want to get the best from any of these decks, don't ignore our advice on set-up (left), and budget for a decent phono stage. This will cost between £50-£500, depending on the deck and your system.

BEST TURNTABLE £750-£1500

Roksan Radius 5

£850

THE RADIUS 5 is the only one of this quartet of decks to have won an Award last year, too. We still haven't heard anything at this price that even comes close to beating its combination of looks, build and sound quality.

The Roksan's relatively conventional appearance belies some very clever engineering. The deck's arranged in layers, each decoupled from the other via carefully tuned rubber mountings. This not only isolates the record from outside intrusions, but from motor noise, too. The motor is also compliantly mounted to reduce vibration energy transfer and minimise speed fluctuations. And the metal-and-acrylic Nima arm is a unipivot design, which feels odd at first, but sounds great.

Classy deck with a classy sound

Once up and running, the Radius sounds terrific. It has a dynamic and precise sound that gets straight to the heart of the music. Timing is crisp and bass taut, making this deck an ideal choice for all types of music. The Radius remains a top-class product.

→ VERDICT

Roksan's Radius 5 continues to deliver a terrific combination of very elegant looks and superb sound quality

Smart styling complements clever design and fine sound



BEST TURNTABLE £1500+

Clearaudio Performance

£1670

IF PRO-JECT DOMINATES the budget sector, it's arguably Clearaudio that does the same thing at the high-end. The company makes a plethora of decks, many of which are great, but we doubt there's much in the range that matches the Performance's er...performance-per-pound ratio. Yes, we know this package isn't cheap, but have a listen and we're sure you'll agree any serious rivals invariably cost more – much more, in fact.

Though the Performance looks much like its £690 Emotion sibling, it boasts plenty of superior engineering – clever, magnetic main bearing; composite plinth; highly specified arm – to fully justify the extra outlay.

Said arm is Clearaudio's superior Satisfy, complete with one-piece wiring and sapphire/ceramic bearings. Completing the package is the wooden-bodied Maestro cartridge, a delicately superb moving-magnet design.

Crystal-clear sound with bags of detail

Once listened to, we'd bet few would deny this turntable is worth every penny. It's an incredibly transparent-sounding deck that adds almost nothing to the recording: you hear your music and little else.

Factor in excellent build, smart appearance and ease-of-use into the equation, and there's no denying this Clearaudio is a worthy winner.

→ VERDICT

This is a great all-rounder. The Performance looks great, and sounds even better

The Clearaudio: easy to use, great to look at and a joy to listen to

