

Vinyl Magic?

Project Debut Carbon DC Turntable with Ortofon 2M RED Cartridge \$399.00 on Amazon Prime



From Pro-Ject....

Pro-Ject Debut Carbon DC Turntable with Ortofon 2m Red Cartridge

The new DEBUT Carbon has been designed to set new standards in this category for the coming decade – perfectly timed as analogue today is again a respected source, while the demand for good turntables is growing again! The most obvious improvement is the inclusion of a CARBON TUBE for the tonearm, which increases stiffness and decreases unwanted resonance. This material normally is extensively used in high-end tonearms, but – because of cost reasons – was never used in products at lower price levels. Together with other improvements like an increase in platter size and weight to realize even smoother rotation and new design in motor suspension, the overall sound quality is greatly improved. The DEBUT CARBON will be offered in high-gloss black or shiny red, green, blue, yellow, light grey or white as no-added-cost option.

8.6" carbon tonearm

- *Sorbothane motor suspension*
- *Precision belt drive with synchronous motor*
- *Pre-Mounted Ortofon Moving Magnet RED 2M cartridge with Diamond Elliptical Stylus*

Why do it?

I finally decided to replace my aging, and ailing, AudioTechnica turntable. While I don't have a lot of vinyl (somewhere around 120 LP's) at this point I still wanted something to play those precious memories locked up in those LP's. Unwilling to pay \$120,000+ for an Air Force One and \$20K+ for a cartridge I set my sights somewhat lower.

As I found out there are still plenty of turntable/cartridge combos out there within a "reasonable" (for me anyway) window of, let's say, \$300 to \$3,000.

Now, *if* I had a massive vinyl collection numbering in the thousands I probably would have upped the turntable and cartridge budget into the thousands to match the size and value of the collection... but I don't... so I didn't ;-)

After thinking about it I set my buying criteria around;

1. Turntable must be well reviewed (Both Consumer and the Pro's) with good specs
2. Cartridge supplied must be well reviewed within its price range
3. Cartridge supplied must be "Pre-Mounted" by the factory or a reputable dealer
4. No vintage tables or cartridges, and the possible accompanying issues with buying vintage (might have been fine... but, ya never know!)
5. Must fit comfortably in my rack and on my DIY isolation platform
6. Must fit within my meager budget

So I arbitrarily set the budget at \$500 (read.... what I thought the wife would let me get away with without leaving me) and went shopping.

The Shortlist

After a bit of research and shopping I narrowed it down to three turntables that piqued my interest;

1. Audio Technica AT-LP120XUSB Direct-Drive Turntable w/AudioTechnica VM95E-\$250.00
2. Pro-Ject RPM-1 Carbon - \$499.00 w/Sumiko Pearl MM cartridge
3. Pro-Ject Debut Carbon DC - \$399.00 w/Ortofon RED MM cartridge

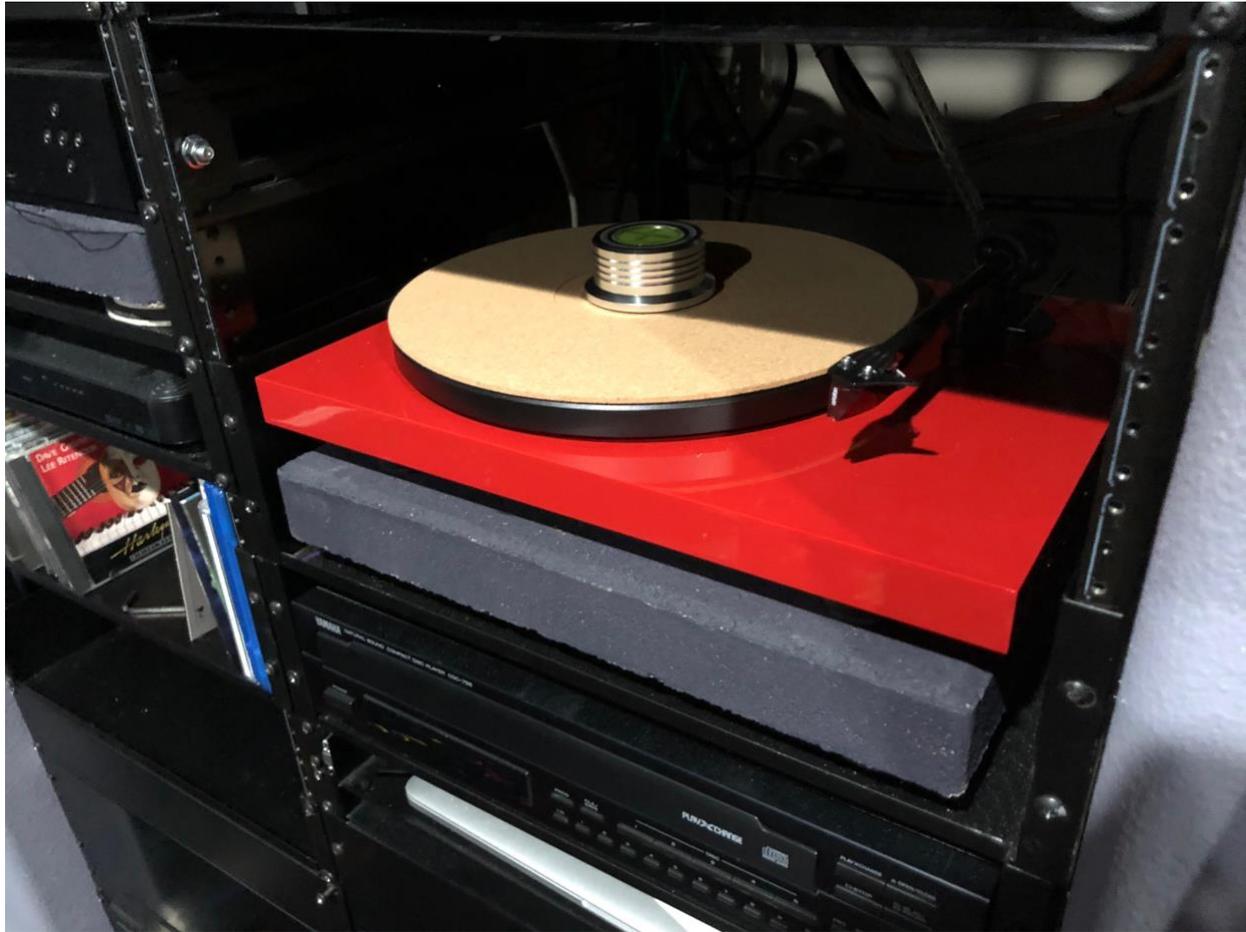
While each of these had advantages and disadvantages over each other, and there are many to choose from within my budget, this became my shortlist.

The Audio Technica would have been handy for digitizing those LP's with the built in USB interface.

And... while the Pro-Ject RPM 1 was a strong contender with the highly regarded Sumiko Pearl cartridge and a sexy form factor (I mean... I liked it... I really did) I decided to go even more old school, and simple, with the ***Pro-Ject Debut Carbon DC Turntable with Ortofon RED 2M (Moving Magnet) cartridge.***

With the \$100 saved over the RPM 1 I also purchased a Records Friend Cleaning system that I'll review a bit later.

All-in-all I considered the Debut Carbon DC a good fit for my modest vinyl collection... Not too pricy... Not too cheap.... *But just right :-)*



Pro-Ject is an interesting company that is now manufacturing a wide range of cost effective audiophile equipment. They were founded in 1991 (about the time turntables were being ousted by CD players) by Heinz Lichtenegger and are located in Mistelbach, Austria. Pro-Ject Audio Systems designs the products in Austria and then produces them at a factory in Litovel, the Czech Republic.

While they produce a large range of turntables from inexpensive to somewhat costly they are all entirely manual in operation. Most importantly they are said work well, are well reviewed (by both consumers and the audio press) and they sound good no matter the pricing!

First Impressions and Assembly

As I unboxed the well packed turntable I was struck by the solid feel and weight of the plinth and the steel platter. "Very substantial!" I thought as I compared it to the platter of my old AT Turntable. The platter on my AT turntable was a **VERY LIGHTWEIGHT** cast aluminum.

In addition to the supplied platter Pro-Ject offers an even more substantial Acrylic Platter as an upgrade for between \$99.00 and \$129.00 on Amazon or from any of their many dealers.

The plinth on the Carbon Debut is a nicely finished, milled piece of solid MDF. Mine was ordered in Red but is available in six other colors... most at the same price with a couple of them having a \$40 upcharge. It is also available in a Walnut veneer for about another \$100. I'm a modern kind of guy so I went for the nice glossy red finish.

The "Carbon" in the name refers to the 8.6" straight tonearm that is made with a Carbon fiber tube with aluminum joints and covered in a low resonance resin. It is effectively one piece and there is no separate headshell. So if you are someone who has several cartridges in their arsenal and want to swap them out on a regular basis, this is likely not the turntable for you.





The platter, belt, tonearm counterweight, and the Anti-Skating weight are all packed separately and need to be installed after unpacking.

Assembly was straight forward and easily accomplished after reading the instructions. Please be sure to read the instructions because they detail the proper placement of the Anti-Skating Weight and the stylus force for the installed cartridge. If you are installing a different cartridge the instructions will tell you how to do that as well. You would be well advised to hang onto those instructions for just that reason alone.

The tonearm has a counterweight style of anti-skating control and a fully adjustable tonearm counter weight. The supplied cartridge was already mounted and when I slid the counterweight on and adjusted to the zero mark the arm floated just as it should. From there it was a simple twist to adjust to the recommended 1.75 grams tracking down force.

The anti-skating was a simple counterweight easy to install and adjusted by placing the little loop in one of three slots in the skating counter-force arm. Simple.... but seemed to work as advertised. For the supplied Ortofon Red the second slot was the designated target. If mounting another cartridge the adjustment would be determined by the cartridge manufacturers recommended tracking down-force requirement.

The cuing lever is set back just to the front of the tonearm gimble and is a pretty good reach but works effortlessly and smoothly when engaged.

The only other control on the turntable is the on/off switch located out of view under the plinth on the left/front of the turntable.

The turntable was supplied with a chintzy, thin, felt mat for the platter which I immediately replaced with a nice, anti-static, cork mat. A plastic 45 adapter is also supplied.

The whole table is mounted and supported by four, slightly springy rubber feet to provide some vibration isolation. I then placed the table on my own Isolation Platform that consists of a 18"x18"x2" concrete paver supported by four Pen-Elcom 3" rubber isolation feet.

This is a two speed table with those speeds being 33 1/3 and 45 RPM. There is no switch to change the speed and you must lift the platter and reposition the turntable belt to the proper pulley on the motor assembly. For me that was no issue as I have no 45's in my small collection... only 33 1/3 LP's. There is also an optional pulley replacement to give the user the option of playing 78 RPM records.

The DC in the name of the turntable refers to the style of motor. It is a Direct Current (DC) motor and powered by a small "wall wart" power supply that plugs into a small DC receptacle on the underside of the plinth at the rear/center of the unit.

The only other connections are two gold-plated RCA connections on the rear underside of the unit and a ground thumbscrew in between those two connectors. Project supplies a short RCA cable (1.23 M – 4') with an integrated ground wire attached.

I looked the cable over and it appeared to be of decent quality but I opted to use my own, slightly longer, DIY cables made of Belden 1694 cable and Rean solder type RCA's. I listened to both the stock cables and my own and found the DIY cables slightly superior in terms of sound and secure connection.

Pro-Ject offers two cable upgrades as purchase options as well. The "Connect It! E" ("E" for Enhanced) and the "Connect It!" both are 1.23 Meters priced at \$69 and \$99 respectively.

Listening

I haven't listened to much in the way of vinyl lately because my ailing AT turntable made it such a poor experience.

When I first selected the phono input on my Marantz Processor I was instantly struck by the totally silent background even at volume. My AT had slowly developed a nasty ground hum that I couldn't seem to eliminate. This was a very quiet and black background.

The other thing that I noticed, or didn't notice, was the total lack of mechanical noise from the Debut Carbon DC. Even with my ear VERY close to the table it was stone cold silent.

My AT turntable and other tables I had owned in the past (Dual, Garrard, AR, Pioneer) always had their fair share of mechanical noise hovering in the background.... This one... blessed silence!

As I dropped the stylus on my first selection, The Cars, I received another small surprise. My initial impression was the sound of the table and cartridge combo had a wonderful clarity, a

solid soundstage, good separation and a lush full range sound that struck me immediately. Good, airy and well defined highs, an immediate well focused mid-range, and a substantial articulate and solid low end was presenting itself to my surprised ears. Overall I would call it slightly warm but a well-defined and balanced sound.

I liked what I heard and as I listened to a few more selections I decided to try a little experiment. I pulled a couple of LP's that I also had duplicated on CD and ran a quick back and forth, side by side, comparison. As I cycled through a few selections from each I made a few notes and logged a few impressions.

Three Dog Night – Suitable for Framing – Compared to same tracks on CD

My Suitable for Framing LP is, shall we say, *WELL USED* :-). It was very noisy with clicks and pops and surface noise but still listenable. In direct comparison to the CD (which was a straight transfer from master tapes to digital) the comparison held up very well. The extended high end on the CD emphasized the tape hiss from the tape during the quietest passages or *JUST BEFORE* the track went live. The CD seemed to be somewhat more compressed than the LP. Even with the noise factor I judged the sound of the LP more listenable than the CD.

Yes – Fragile (LP) - Compared to the same tracks on DVD Audio

This DVD Audio recording was a remastered version from _____. The disks contained several versions of the remixed LP in stereo and 5.1 surround as well as the original stereo mix from 1971.

The LP (in slightly better shape than the TDN LP) stood up well against the original mix on the DVD audio disk. The remix and the higher bit-rate offerings on the disk however really shined over the LP containing *MUCH MORE* information and fuller, more balanced sound.

Yes – Close to the Edge (LP) – Compared to the same Tracks on DVD Audio

This was another was a remastered version from _____. The disks contained several versions of the remixed LP in stereo and 5.1 surround as well as the original stereo mix from 1971.

Again, the LP stood up well against the original mix on the DVD audio disk. But again the remix and the higher bit-rate offerings on the disk really lorded it over the LP containing *MUCH MORE* information and fuller, more balanced sound.

Steely Dan – The Royal Scam LP – Compared to selected tracks on A Decade of Steely Dan on CD

Hey, I always go back to Steely Dan for that incomparable studio sound! I played Kid Charlemagne on LP and on the "A Decade of Steely Dan" compilation CD. Again I was amazed at just how listenable the LP was. Where the CD had the LP beat was again in the depth of the detail and textures that were revealed!

Aside from the inevitable vinyl surface noise the sound was remarkably good in direct comparison to the CD. Was it the same.... No!

The CD was tighter and the bass better, deeper, and more defined. The highs were more prominent and up front.

But the vinyl!.... The sound was more rounded and with a obviously more contained frequency response but was just as listenable as the CD's. And.... in some aspects and on some of the selections even more so! ***In some cases the sound was JUST MORE FUN and ENJOYABLE!***



Conclusion

My parents bought my first music machine for me in 1965. It was a Philco, fold up, record player and stereo system. How I loved that thing!



The first LP I bought was ***Meet The Beatles***, the second ***The Monkees*** and the third was ***The Animals***. From then on it was an all-out assault on the record store as first my allowance, and then the money earned from my part time job during high school allowed.

Was this purchase necessary?... **No!** Am I satisfied and happy I did it?... **YES!**

There is a good reason that there has been a resurgence of vinyl in recent years. It is more than nostalgia. It is a genuinely pleasant and involving sound choice.

Is the sound better? Is it more involving? That decision/opinion is certainly up to the individual listening and the quality of the equipment involved.

To me, the very specific act of listening and going through the physical actions necessary to enjoy a vinyl session are, without a doubt, more involving and contribute heavily to the level of enjoyment. The vinyl “*process*” actually *encourages* you to really *LISTEN* to the music in smaller bites...

Something the likes of streaming a curated Pandora, Tidal (et al) streaming session just cannot do for many of us.

As I get older I find my attention wanders, my concentration falters... Now, I don't think the “Shiny Object Syndrome” is 100% age or gender related, it's not. But I, personally, find it easier to concentrate on a “process” with defined starts, stops and clear process markers as opposed to dealing with a constant stream of unbroken information (good books and good movies might be the exception :-).

All-in-all I'm glad I made this upgrade/change. It has restored my interest in vinyl to the point where I might pursue adding a bit more to my collection by trolling the local LP bargain bins at our local second-hand book store.

Will there ever be a \$120,000.00 turntable and a \$20,000.00 cartridge in my future.... That's an absolute NO! Is there a modest upgrade path to more enjoyment of the vinyl medium to explore? Very likely!

If you have a vinyl collection literally gathering the proverbial dust look into reviving and reactivating that collection with a new turntable and cartridge!

Still enjoying the music!

Cheers and Happy Holidays!

Tom

Associated Equipment

Marantz AV7703 Pre/Processor

Parasound Amplifiers

OPPO UDP-203 Universal Disk Player

Discwasher Record Cleaner brush and distilled water cleaning solution

GoldenEar Triton One.R Speakers

Rythmik F-18 Subs (2)