



EAT

B-Sharp Super Pack

EAT's B-Sharp turntable with Ortofon 2M Blue is a premium priced 'entry-level' package that's designed for everyone

European Audio Team has been going for a number of years now, initially with the manufacture of high-quality vacuum tubes, before moving on to high-end turntables such as the mighty Forte a decade or so ago. Run by Jozefína Krahulcová, it shares Pro-Ject's manufacturing facilities but has never set out to make budget turntables, unlike its sister company. Indeed, a spokesman describes the relationship as being like that of Volkswagen and Porsche – Pro-Ject being a high-quality mid-market brand delivering high sales volume, whereas EAT delivers premium-level, high-end products.

All well and good then, so why has the latter just announced a starter turntable that costs 'just' £1,298

including dustcover and EAT's 9in B-Note tonearm? There's also the option, as reviewed here, of the ready-to-play Super Pack, which includes a pre-installed Ortofon 2M Blue cartridge (HFC 375) for £1,498. The idea is to make the cost of owning an EAT turntable more affordable, says the company. It's a range expander that may grab people's attention, and then they might be drawn to higher end decks in the range further down the line. This now comprises a total of six, with the (in ascending order) C-Major, C-Sharp, E-Flat, Forte S and Forte. These are sold in the UK via Absolute Sounds, a completely different route to market from Pro-Ject, which of course has been synonymous with Henley Audio for many years.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
EAT B-Sharp
Super Pack

PRICE
£1,498

ORIGIN
EU

TYPE
Belt-drive turntable

WEIGHT
8.5kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
460 x 142 x 352mm

FEATURES
● 33/45rpm
● EAT B-Note carbon
fibre tonearm
● Ortofon 2M
Blue cartridge

DISTRIBUTOR
Absolute
Sounds Ltd

TELEPHONE
0208 9713909

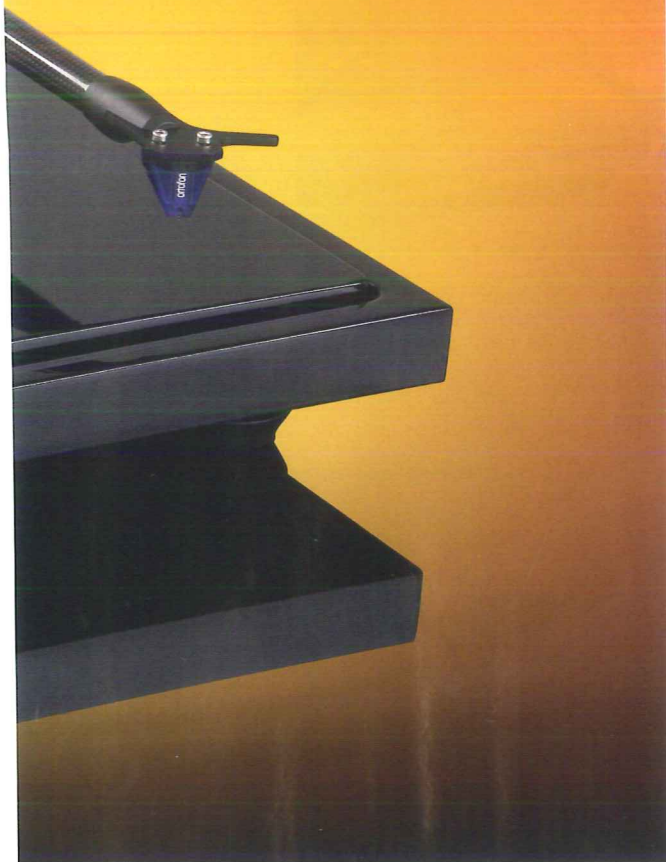
WEBSITE
absolutesounds.
com

REVIEWED
HFC 428

Think of the B-Sharp as a stripped-down C-Major turntable with the new B-Note tonearm. The deck doesn't use an independently sprung subchassis, instead employing a medium density fibreboard inner chassis, which sits on thermoplastic elastomer (TPE) isolators resting on the base. This in turn sits on adjustable levelling feet. The low-noise AC motor is mounted directly to the turntable's main chassis, and is governed by an AC frequency generator for better speed stability. Both tonearm and main bearing/platter sit on the inner section, and the latter has TPE damping and a felt mat; it sits on a separate inner platter, which connects the belt to the alloy motor pulley. The outer platter, says EAT, is made from an aluminium magnesium alloy and the main bearing is brass.

The tonearm is EAT's new B-Note, which has a conical carbon fibre tube and non-detachable aluminium headshell. It's fully adjustable, with vertical tracking angle, stylus rake angle, bias, tracking force and azimuth all variable. As usual, the slotted headshell allows the user to change the overhang and offset angle. It comes with the aforementioned 2M Blue moving-magnet cartridge pre-installed.

The deck itself is straightforward enough to get up and running; you



don't need to build it up from a kit of bits as with some. It's a case of unpacking, removing the transit screws, balancing the arm and putting the belt and outer platter on.

It's worth taking the time to level the EAT properly as this substantially improves sonics and general tracking abilities. As with pretty much every turntable I have ever used, I find that it sounds best with the dustcover removed. The B-Sharp also responds well to a good turntable platform and/or support; not having an independently sprung subchassis makes it that little bit more sensitive to where it is placed.

Sound quality

Give the cartridge a few minutes to truly warm up, and soon you find yourself in the sweet spot, so to speak. It's clear that the EAT B-Sharp is a fine performer, one that's way better than average at the price point. It has a naturally clean and smooth sound, just as you'd expect from a well-engineered turntable, and this makes listening enjoyable regardless of the type of music you choose. The bass is supple and bouncy, and the midband is open, detailed and expansive. Treble is extended and smooth, and the turntable is well balanced and relaxed in its musical presentation. None of this comes as a

surprise to me, having heard higher end EAT designs, and also observing that this particular turntable is built well with sound engineering practice.

I kick off with a limited edition pressing of Nu Era's *Oscar Styles*, a slice of retro techno from the 4hero stable. It's not an audiophile recording by any stretch of the imagination, but has infectious rhythms and the B-Sharp really gets a grip of them. The music shuffles along in an imperious way, highly detailed and controlled yet free enough to give a real sense of fun. This is the joy of vinyl; done properly it seems far less regimented and constrained than CD. Often, though, you get unwanted artefacts – colouration, wow and flutter, etc. – which spoils the party. The B-Sharp, however, proves itself good enough to avoid such issues by a good long way. It's a stable-sounding product at the price all right, although in fairness it can't quite match the rock-solid presentation of Technics' SL-1200GR price rival (p21). What the EAT turntable does do well, however, is give a really even, balanced and natural sound.

Indeed, turn to Neil Young's classic *Harvest* album and this becomes ever more apparent. On the title track, I soon appreciate that the B-Sharp has

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a fine tonality – another of the great aspects of good-quality vinyl replay. Young's voice sounds very open and immediate, as if he's right in the room with you. The natural spaciousness allied to the excellent tonearm and strong cartridge supplied with the B-Sharp, show just how open and organic things can be. Other decks can introduce quite a bit of their own sonic flavour, but the EAT is largely neutral. The piano work sounds very natural, without any artificial glare or harshness.

Time for some more powerful rock music, and Saxon's *747 (Strangers In The Night)* shows the B-Sharp to have a strong, lyrical bass. It's not quite as commanding as some at the price, but it's certainly able to mete out large amounts of low-frequency energy. The song's grumbling bass line really fills out the sound of this track, which has lots of high-intensity lead guitar work. I am also impressed by the ease with which it scythes through the rather dense and compressed mix,

pushing out large quantities of detail. The Ortofon 2M Blue cartridge is certainly blessed in this region, but there is a sense that the B-Sharp motor unit and B-Note tonearm are easily good enough to facilitate this. Interesting too that the cranked-up lead guitar solo that kicks off the song – well, it was the golden age of British heavy metal – doesn't distort or screech. Another thumbs up for the overall refinement of this package.

Spatially the EAT proves good, if not quite best in class. It can show the aforementioned Technics a clean pair of heels in this respect, but is not quite on a par with Michell's TecnoDec/TecnoArm when it comes to throwing out an expansive stereo soundstage. I cue up my favourite Deutsche Grammophon pressing of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* and the B-Sharp sound gives a real sense of being there, in front of the Berlin Philharmonic and maestro Karajan. The deck has fine depth perspective – providing a nicely immersive feel – but doesn't throw things out far left and right as I'd like. Stereo imaging is accurate, a tribute to the impressive tonearm fitted, no doubt. It gives a sweet, smooth and musical sound that is fun to listen to. Rhythmically keen, tonally neutral and bristling with low-level detail, there's much to impress here. Its handling of dynamics isn't as strong as some rivals costing a few hundred pounds more, but it's an accomplished all-rounder.

Conclusion

This is an interesting turntable – although not particularly exotic, the EAT B-Sharp nevertheless is well conceived and put together, and proves to be a fine-sounding package. Just as the manufacturer intended, it feels like a stripped-down high-end design, rather than a tarted-up budget one. In Super Pack form for a whisker under £1,500, it's great value for money and an essential audition. **DP**

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Tonal balance, midband detail and musicality; build quality and finish
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★	DISLIKE: Lacks bass power of some rivals
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WE SAY: Classy turntable package with real panache
FEATURES ★★★★★	

OVERALL

