

EAT Fortissimo turntable

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The Forte is one of the most popular and recognisable turntables in the EAT (European Audio Team) brand's line-up. It has been in that catalogue for more than a dozen years and for good reason; the turntable delivers the goods at a very keen price. So, when **hi-fi+** got a chance at looking at the new Fortissimo, which is effectively the already substantial Forte writ large, we jumped at the chance. Well, maybe 'jumped' isn't the right word; 'braced for impact' is closer because in its crate, the Fortissimo weighs in at a hefty 86kg or 190lbs. Put another way, this turntable weighs as much as undefeated Post War heavyweight boxing champion Rocky Marciano did throughout much of his career. The temptation to say the Fortissimo 'pulls no punches' is too great.

The Forte and Fortissimo models allow the user to opt for an EAT-designed tonearm or supply their own – 12" – arm. In the case of the Fortissimo, it came supplied with the new F-Note tonearm and the company's Jo No 8 cartridge as a complete package. Like the Forte line, there is also a smaller Fortissimo S, which moves the power supply and motor into the main chassis. You could call this a 'smaller' design, in the way Saturn is a 'smaller' planet to Jupiter; the in other words, the 'little' Fortissimo S is still bloody big!

Heavyweight similarities

The Forte connection is worth mentioning a lot, because the similarities between the two heavyweight turntables are clearly obvious. They are more than family resemblances, especially the EAT family is both relatively large and diverse. The Fortissimo is plainly 'inspired' by the Forte. But that >>



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» doesn't mean this is simply a Forte with a bulkier price tag. Similarly, EAT could have made the seemingly logical step to make the new Fortissimo either a sleek and wispy thing or a grotesquely over-muscled super-high mass box, and the fact it retains the substantial but not bloated lines of the Forte is a feather in EAT's cap. In effect, the Forte showed the audio world that high-mass turntables need not look agricultural and the Fortissimo continues that concept even though it moves the 'high-mass' needle.

The oversized (16in, 400mm) platter is perhaps the most noticeable thing on both Forte and Fortissimo models and the most striking difference between the two are 12 brass inserts around its periphery. In fact, the platter also features a central brass hub to the main platter, which ups the total mass to an impressive 22kg. The two-part platter is a mix of harder alloys in the outer part and softer alloy for the inner section, with judicious use of Sorbothane damping to keep resonance at bay.

Despite being a 'girthy' platter, it's in part magnetically suspended, with a series of neodymium magnets along the bottom half of the platter. This isn't to 'float' the platter like a suspended design, but more about offsetting the pressure of all that platter mass on the inverted bearing, which means an order of magnitude less rumble. And it's the bearing where the big changes happen between Fortissimo and Forte; this time, the shaft surface is treated with Movic low-friction coating. Movic is a graphene-based material developed by NASA and it reduces friction levels by a factor of six over the previous version. It still uses a ceramic ball tip with a Teflon plate as a bearing mirror/cup.

The rest is very much in line with the existing Forte model, with its unique stand-alone, twin AC motor power block, and two relatively short silicon string belts, designed to reduce wobble (not that wobble is much of an issue with a platter of this mass, and the substantial nature of the bearing block.



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» Not an F-bomb

You can use almost any 12" arm on the Fortissimo, but EAT's own £6,998 F-Note is a perfect partner. Like the deck, it's a high mass design, with a low-friction bearing, but EAT has redesigned the four point bearing system to overcome the need for a more 'glacial' bearing to wrangle the mass of the arm. VTF and VTA are both easily adjustable without the need for additional tools. This sits on its own massive base and the whole arm looks cool in chrome. Finally the £2,998 Jo No 8 cartridge – with its nude Shibata stylus profile and boron cantilever, it's TPE suspension and 8N pure copper wire – completes the package

There's a temptation for manufacturers to overstate the design criteria of a turntable in its sonic presentation. In particular, high-mass designs are often 'big' and 'solid' sounding, often to the detriment of the performance itself. EAT is different; it's almost understated by comparison, and that's its biggest strength. It's got all the strengths of high-mass designs (excellent speed stability, strong, clearly defined bass) without the weaknesses (hard-sounding treble, slightly constricted midrange, lack of rhythmic 'bounce') making for a turntable of great poise and honesty. The only strong character of high-mass that shines through is the sense of grace and poise it imparts on the music, which puts it more toward the traditional expansive high-end sound than the light and fast 'Pace, Rhythm and Timing' presentation that remains popular in some circles.

That's not to say the turntable can't get funky; I played 'Mr Wiggles' from *Motor Booty Affair* by Parliament [Casablanca] and that funk-meets-disco proto-rap laid down a beat as infectious as it was precise and deep. However, even this album highlighted the size and precision of the soundstage. This is a track that starts with a reverberant vocal but is then cut back to a tight rhythm section playing between the speakers almost as background music to the DJ. Here, that sound was bursting to get out from between the speaker cabinets. Having heard the Forte (admittedly some time ago), the original deck had the same expansiveness of sound, but the Fortissimo brings greater precision and snap to that staging. The Forte does not make a vague image, but the Fortissimo brings the sound to an even sharper focus.

This becomes really important when playing larger scale classical works and more complex prog-rock pieces. I haven't played 'Roundabout' *Fragile* by Yes [Atlantic] for years in part because it's so multi-layered that it can sound confused; lighter, faster sounding turntables stress the sophisticated rhythms and bigger decks just go for the clarity of instrument and voice. Few get the balance right, and it's a mark of the poise of the EAT Fortissimo that you can enjoy both the Squire/Wakeman/Bruford classic back line, and the refined noodling of Howe and Anderson, all in a cohesive, coherent whole.

'Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me' on *This One's for Blanton!* by Duke Ellington and Ray Brown [Pablo] is something of an audiophile standard, but on the EAT Fortissimo it's not simply due to the scale and imaging, but that it shows the recording's playful side beautifully. This was Ellington in his twilight years, but what his piano playing might lack in energy, it more than makes up for in sophistication and effortless fills and vamps.

That record encapsulates what the EAT Fortissimo does so well; it does all the audiophile things you expect of it, and then goes the extra mile by making the music enjoyable, unforced and unfussy. This is a very approachable sound.

The Full Package

I've described the Fortissimo as a complete package and not broken out the F-Note or Jo No 8 for a reason; there's no need to do so. Sure, you can swap out both to get the last scintilla of performance if you throw money at the front-end, but you'd be looking at a *lot* of money to substantially improve on this bundle. Especially as they dove-tail so well on the turntable; I'd struggle to think of an arm that's a better match to the Fortissimo that isn't a Graham Phantom Elite (which doubles the cost) or a cartridge that isn't something that wasn't in the £5,000-£9,000 price bracket

I don't like using the B-word in audio. Officially, there are no bargains in high-end audio by definition; high-end describes a set of products that are luxury goods, and not the kind of things you might find filed under 'Middle of Lidl'. That all being said, the EAT Fortissimo is a substantial flagship turntable in a market where similarly-specified 'flagships' can cost an order of magnitude more. Couple that with the F-Note arm and Jo No 8 cartridge and you have a package costing just over £20,000 that will easily see off many turntable systems costing twice that... possibly more. Put simply, this is a true reference grade, high-end flagship turntable without the flagship price. +

Technical specifications

Type two-box high-mass turntable

Electronic speed change 33.3/45.11rpm

Speed variance ±0.09%

Wow & Flutter ±0.008%

Signal to noise ratio -73dB

Dimensions (WxHxD) 70 × 25 × 44cm

Weight 68kg

Finish Black, Makassar, Leather Black

Price from £10,500 (depending on finish, arm, and cartridge combination)

Manufacturer EAT 🌐 europeanaudioteam.com

UK Distributor Absolute Sounds

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