



Pro-Ject Debut Carbon Esprit SB £425



Auto speed combined with a carbon arm, acrylic platter and 2M Red cartridge, this deck has lots to offer

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
Pro-Ject Debut Carbon Esprit SB
- ORIGIN**
Austria
- TYPE**
Belt drive
- WEIGHT**
4.9kg
- DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
415 x 118 x 320mm
- FEATURES**
- Auto speed 33 and 45rpm
 - Carbon fibre tonearm
 - Ortofon 2M Red cartridge supplied
 - Acrylic platter
 - Includes dustcover
- DISTRIBUTOR**
Henley Designs Ltd
- TELEPHONE**
01235 511166
- WEBSITE**
henleydesigns.co.uk

This model sits atop the three-strong Debut range and improves on the £325 Debut Carbon by adding an acrylic platter and electronic speed change between 33 and 45rpm (78rpm is manually selected).

Even in standard guise, the Debut Carbon sports Pro-Ject's 8.6CC one-piece carbon fibre tonearm (with line and weight anti-skate) and an £85 Ortofon 2M Red MM cartridge, which are both carried over to the SB model under review.

It also features an external 15V DC wall-wart PSU to drive its AC motor, which is mounted using the same rubber band method as the Music Hall deck. Whereas the MH's motor is suspended by this rubber band, the Pro-Ject motor is also screwed to the plinth through two small rubber pads that give the motor a more rigid mounting. There's also a phono cable junction box at the rear, so you can

upgrade the supplied interconnects at a later date. Isolation is further aided by four Ortofon isolation feet that support the deck's 28mm MDF plinth.

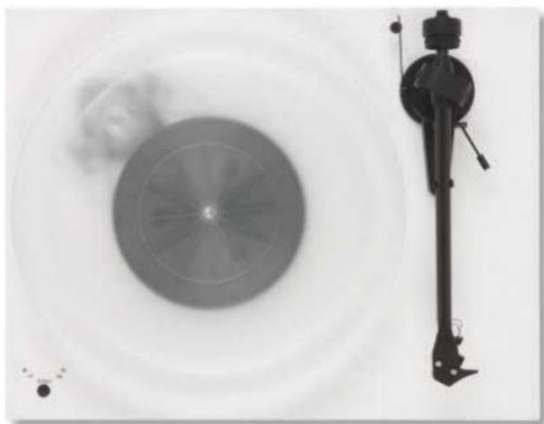
The electronic speed control lets you jump between 33 and 45rpm, indicated by corresponding blue LEDs that flash while the platter gets up to speed. A longer push on this button turns the deck on/off. For 78rpm fans there's good and bad news, as this deck does facilitate this, but you'll have to manually move the belt to a bigger cog on the pulley (when in 45rpm mode) to make it happen.

Sound quality

Like the Inspire, the Pro-Ject's acrylic platter is designed to be used without a mat and that's how it's tested. Though there's almost £100 between them, the supplied 2M Red cartridge isn't leagues behind our reference 2M Blue, and the Red offers a clean treble with well extended bass, so you should get plenty of enjoyment out of it before the upgrade bug bites.

The Blue improves on the Red by offering a more refined bass, better fine detail retrieval and a smoother midband, which can clearly be heard on the Goldfrapp song.

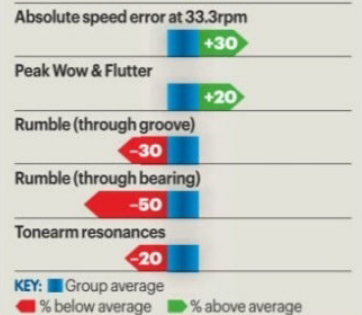
On The Doors track, Jim Morrison's performance has plenty of attitude thanks to how the SB manages to retain a degree of bite without sounding too hard edged. The SB's soundstage is almost as wide as the best in the group and while the instruments may not have all the energy that the Rega gives them, the SB has greater separation.



ON TEST

While there's no rotational servo at work here, the flashing 33/45rpm LED times out after some five seconds at which point the acrylic platter is firmly up to speed. Our sample was bang-on target, suffering a miniscule -0.01% speed error, which is not only the best of the group here but a significant improvement on the -0.35% speed error recorded for Pro-Ject's original Debut Carbon deck two years ago. Wow and flutter is very similar at 0.08% (peak-weighted), flutter being very slightly worse. The latter is linked to a series of clearly defined resonant modes at 41Hz, 82Hz, 123Hz and 164Hz that appear on the rumble spectrum, pushing the overall figure down by some 2dB to -66.8dB (or -67.7dB, DIN-B weighted, measured through the bearing itself). Nevertheless, these figures are still in keeping with a sub-£500 deck, let alone one that includes an arm and £85 MM! **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



The SB's midrange is very well balanced. It's not quite as analogue-like and rich as the Rega's, or as forward as some of the other models, but it's a very smooth and detailed affair with just the right amount of presence to ensure the music remains even across its frequencies. While sounding strong, Nick Drake's voice is carefully presented and I can hear the delicacy with which he holds the ends of each note with a little intentional reticence, hinting at his character. Guitar strings resonate with a natural beginning and end and the SB really gets to grips with the style of Drake's guitar work and not just the notes being played ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★
- FEATURES**
★★★★★
- LIKE:** Smooth sound with bags of detail; quality cartridge; top-class arm
- DISLIKE:** Nothing at the price
- WE SAY:** A super bargain that's easy to use and has a well balanced class-leading sound to it

OVERALL

