

High Resolution



After numerous winning tonearms, Origin Live has now come up with something serious in the turntable department. The Resolution Modern is an unashamedly high-end design, brimming with trick technology and serious tweakery. Haden Boardman reports...

O rigin Live has been crafting serious vinyl-related products for many years now, and has achieved notable success with its Rega-based arms and modifications. Latterly, the Illustrious – which shares nothing with the famed RB300 – has proved a big hit with Hi-Fi World, and we believe it to be one of the very best tonearms currently available.

The man behind the company is Mark Baker, who also does all the design work. He clearly has strong views in his engineering philosophy – he isn't a fan of the high mass approach, nor the ultra low mass! Rather, he deliberately sails straight down the middle. Mark seems to understand that there is no "true"

way to turntable design, correctly pointing out that good design should be a balance between several needs and wants, and that by championing just one area of performance, another area will undoubtedly be compromised.

This range-topping combo of Illustrious arm and Resolution turntable is the pinnacle of his work. The deck itself is superbly finished, a gloss black base complete with dinky chrome feet and contrasting nicely with the chrome and black sub chassis, and the acrylic platter. I love the shape of the thing, to me it looks very 1950s!

It comes complete with outboard power supply, to drive the Resolution's formidable DC motor, which sits through the base and

straight on to your turntable shelf or support. The sub chassis sits on the base via three springs, although the majority of the weight is supported by just one spring. Each spring sits in its own little adjustable cup, and each spring is of a different strength. Set up was pretty straight forward, but it took a couple of attempts to get the subchassis sat level and square (do not dress the arm cable until you are happy the chassis is level), but it was not as hard as this had been suggested! The subchassis itself is an interesting device, it is actually designed to "flex" ever so slightly, and is carefully adjusted at the factory, with big warnings not to further tighten any of the screws! (Linn tight anyone?)

The small sub platter fits in to a

The powerful DC motor is mounted in its own housing, decoupled from the subchassis for superior sound...



very high quality bearing - a lot of effort has gone in to this vital area of the deck's performance. The belt fits around this and the motor. In use one does have to be careful about getting the belt tension correct, but more about that later. The main acrylic platter sits decoupled from this, and is quite light in weight. Most of the underside has been precision machined away, leaving a ring of mass towards the platter's perimeter.

The illustrious tonearm again breaks from the recent "norm" of one piece design. Mark Baker rightly points out this approach can actually cause as many problems as it cures, and by "breaking up" the arm, you also can control its resonant behaviour, and therefore the amount of sound colorations, in a much better manner. One thing that strikes you immediately is the size of the over sized bearing housing in which the arm sits - it is enormous! As in the case of the deck, fit and finish are very high. A very neat trick engineered in to the Resolution's arm base is a unique VTA (vertical tracking angle) adjustment. The arm sits in a perfectly machined collar, allowing it to slide up and down the deck arm mounting; it works a treat and is very neat. Normally "shims" would be used to adjust arm height, which is frankly a pain, and a waste of time. This is a very elegant solution, and made set up of the deck, so much easier.

It took a few attempts to get the deck set up so I was completely happy, but this was not difficult, and it really took no time at all. I fitted an Ortofon Kontrapunkt A cartridge (I know the B is a lot better, but none were available!) and was delighted to note the excellent setting of the arm's geometry. It took me less than five minutes to set up the cartridge; this was down to the excellent

accuracy between arm pivot point and spindle. With the user friendly VTA adjustment, final set up was an absolute doddle.

Final details concerned the location of the motor, and checking the speed with the supplied stroboscopic "photocopy"! Adjustment is via two small presets under the power supply case, easily done. The power supply itself is small, neat, and selects between 33 and 45 rpm. Despite me leaving the deck on, the case remained stone cold. The mains transformer is located in a separate enclosure, which is best positioned as far away as you can get it. Origin Live supplies a decent length of cable, and I found it possible to locate the thing in another room; it did hum just a wee bit! The deck was supplied with comprehensive instructions, which are a total necessity to set the deck up correctly. I did feel them a little lightweight and a little under nourished; more work needed here!

Setting the belt tension is perhaps the biggest gripe I have about the entire deck. It seemed to have more than a reasonable affect upon performance, and thus could not be ignored. Very simply, the motor moving independently from the deck can easily be set too far, or too close to the platter, with some slightly strange results. This was not helped by the Resolution's slippery feet; every time I cued a record, I ended up moving the deck in relation to the motor. In the end, I cheated, and used small amounts of Blu-tak to stop the thing from sliding about.

Overall, however, I was very impressed with the level of detail and expertise contained in both the arm and deck. Precision engineered, and beautifully executed; but as they say, the proof of the pudding is in the eating; at this kind of price point there is some pretty stiff

competition, like Michell's Orbe SE to name but one. Origin Live claims the combo to be an "ultimate" so just how does the sound stack up?

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SOUND QUALITY

I still listen to around half my music on vinyl, and am a compulsive buyer of the black stuff. Popping the Origin Live combo in to my normal set up, replacing my Nottingham Analogue Hyperspace/ Space Arm (which have gone back to their maker for an update!) and Denon DL304 cartridge. The Nottingham Analogue deck offers a completely different philosophy on the turntable design; the top platter weighs more than the entire Origin Live deck, no DC motor, instead Tom Fletcher's "inertia drive" system (the motor simply tops up lost "inertia" from the platter) drives the deck, requiring the operator to literally push start it. The good thing about analogue, as was said before, there are no wrongs or rights, everything has an effect, a counter effect; it is like trying to square a circle, there are no absolutes.

From the instant it played the first track, it was clear the Origin Live was a completely different animal from the Nottingham offering. First album to hit the deck was Grace Jones' 'Island Life' - well you either love her or you hate her! 'La Vie en Rose' is one of those tracks that builds and builds, and on the wrong system, it can truly grate. It also happens to be one of my favourite tracks, and I am happy to report the Resolution/ Illustrious/ Kontrapunkt A did an amazing job. The presentation was different to what I was used to. On the positive side, it was much more laid back, the sound stage presented cleanly between the loudspeakers. A track

Origin Live Illustrious tonearm is a superb partner, both sonically and aesthetically, for this beautiful deck...



THE EDITOR SAYS:

It's become rather tiresome recommending Michell turntables of late – they've been head and shoulders above everything else, in my experience, and so I've had no option but to. It's great, then, when something like this comes along. I do not think it is better than its immediate price rival, the Orbe, but it is certainly different and not – on the whole – obviously inferior. Essentially, the Resolution has a smoother, sweeter, more beguiling and cohesive sound than the Orbe, which can justifiably be accused of sounding ever-so-slightly mechanical. By contrast, the Michell has altogether greater incision and grip, and a sense of unflappability, no matter what is thrown at it, that the OL lacks. However, the OL reminds me of a modern day LP12 without tears. It has few of that venerable deck's many weak points, and nearly all of its pluses. The Orbe pushes away by completely eliminating the LP12's bugbears, but does lose some of the Linn's innate musicality – the Resolution, however, does not. As such, it's a deliciously 'analogue' sounding tool that I'll be (happily) able to recommend to anyone striving for 'the magic of vinyl'.

DESIGN MATTERS

- piano black subchassis
- profiled acrylic platter
- platter de-coupled with an inert sub-platter
- highly specified bearing with military specification Arctic oil
- rigid sub-chassis with centre point support arrangement and damping devices
- high quality ironless DC motor with no cogging effect
- load compensating regulated power supply
- electronically switched speed control
- dimensions: 490x400x160mm
- weight: 9kg including arm

that can quite easily take your head off was almost easy listening. This was not to say there was any loss of detail, there was not, if anything the deck's ability to resolve those fine little details, was incredibly impressive. Flipping the album over to 'Private Life' on Side Two further reinforced this almost laid back character of the deck. Where on the previous track I had felt the Origin Live had bettered my Hyperspace, on this track, the NA offered the better deal. It was almost too laid back compared to what I was used to. Not by a massive margin you understand - we are talking degrees here, splitting hairs, but none the less it was 1:1 so far!

Changing beat, and another fave album, Massive Attack's 'Unfinished Sympathy' just shone on the Origin deck. Detailed, explicit, solid bass. One casual listener was simply amazed at this track. Again, comparing to the more expensive Nottingham deck, I found the bass if anything a trifle "warm" - almost caramel coated - but again I feel I am being somewhat unfair, as the deck



Offboard power supply can be kept a good distance away from the cartridge, and offers electronic speed change - no eighties-style 45RPM adaptors here!

sounded incredibly good, far better than its modest price tag would suggest. It was duly time for 'the Jimmy Smith torture track'... Plumbing straight in with 'Walk on the Wild Side', an

incredibly aggressive, almost over produced track with a massive orchestral intro before the Hammond and drums kick in, was an absolute show-stopper. On lesser designs, this track can simply take your head off, but not here. It was open, expansive and again easy listening. This deck seemed to have a way of softening aggressive tracks, without sacrificing detail. Some tracks which could grate like hell on my Notts deck, where more than listenable on here.

On the negative side, there were times when I felt the deck was too soft almost, and too warm. Lee Morgan's absolute classic 'Sidewinder' did not come across well. The double bass almost appeared smeared, and the high frequencies too repressed, almost as if held back and lacking in that last ounce of air. The deck's entire presentation was somewhat darker than what I was used to. Again, we are talking about degrees here, and not in absolute terms.

My other main criticism was background noise, which was higher than what I was used to. This was

not a major issue, but it was clearly coming from the motor and belt. I found the motor position almost hyper critical to getting the best from the deck. Too much belt tension resulted in a high level of background noise; too little resulted in smeared dynamics and a rather soft edge to the sonics.

In all fairness to the deck, I do feel like I am being somewhat over critical; this thing sells for the same kind of money as an LP12 or Michell Orbe. Frankly, it walks all over the LP12, and on balance, I much prefer the warmer presentation and outright listenability of the Origin Live deck over the Michell. Without doubt, the Resolution does have a slightly warm balance, but it is a very pleasant one. It is not bass heavy, or muddy sounding, and may even be bass light in the wrong system. The gilding of the lily is the illustrious arm. This I thought a wonderful piece of kit, detailed, smooth, and lacking in any kind of edge or drama.

As a combo the two work well. My only very minor gripes are those shiny feet, and the slightly high background noise. I was frankly surprised by the deck's performance; I truly enjoyed playing my records. It looks good, and it sounds good. Highly recommended as a first rate player of vinyl at the price point. I was impressed.

VERDICT

A beautifully crafted, superb sounding turntable that's a smoother and more beguiling alternative to the best of the rest.

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