

Green machine

Iconic American brand McIntosh has added a turntable to its range – and Noel Keywood finds it is a potent performer.

Walk into a room and you'll see this turntable straight away, your eyes drawn by an eerie green light from its platter. To achieve this effect McIntosh place green LED uplights beneath a clear acrylic platter. It's all part of this American company's bold US style – and it draws attention like little else. So if you want people to see your turntable, the MT5 has more visual oomph than most.

In keeping with this strong and distinctive house style comes ease of use and breadth of ability: where belt drives have in the past offered 33rpm and 45rpm, because a 78rpm pulley stretches the belt too much, the MT5 has a simple, switchable 78rpm option. I suspect not many people will want to use it because 78s are more of historical interest to collectors than chuck-about entertainment items for the rest of us, as you find out when you drop one and it shatters, but electronic

speed control makes this added ability easy to offer – so McIntosh have done so.

All of which is to give you some idea of where McIntosh are coming from with the MT5. They present it as a turntable package for those who want high quality but ease of use. It speaks loudly about what it does, in the form of that brightly lit green platter; friends won't walk in and miss the turntable. Happily, nowadays there are no lack of LPs to go with it, as LP pressing plants around the



world work overtime to supply demand.

Testament to ease of use are two traditional-style rotary switches on the front panel. At left is the speed selector: 33, 45 and 78rpm. You don't have to move the belt manually as required on simpler, albeit less expensive, designs.

At right is another three-position rotary switch that has Off, Standby and On positions. With the last of these all lights come on and the heavy acrylic platter slowly runs up to speed. All lights? Yes, that means fascia back-lighting so all legends and the manufacturer's name can be read in low light, as well as the lights beneath the platter that make it glow green. I'm reminded that old radios and the like commonly used similar back lighting: McIntosh are reviving an ancient practice here but with new technology - filament bulbs are gone, long life LEDs replacing them. The Standby position relates to use with a Macintosh preamp, where the turntable lights up but doesn't start, when the preamp is switched on.

Whilst the turntable employs



A large knurled-edge thumbwheel at left applies magnetic bias correction to the arm. The rear counterweight is uncalibrated so a stylus downforce gauge is needed.

better later as the handbook leaves the subject hanging.

A turntable like this is equally suited – arguably more so – to a high-quality moving magnet (MM) cartridge from the likes of Audio Technica, Nagaoka, Goldring, Ortofon and a host for others not forgetting Shure's M97XE for those too cack-

I pushed a 4mm banana plug with attached earth lead into this terminal to establish earthing to our Icon Audio PS3 phono stage. At far right, looking from rear, lies a small d.c. power input since the power supply is not on-board, being a small free

"this deck delivered dynamic contrasts seemingly greater than hi-res digital, graced by a silent background"

modern electronic control of speed, using a stainless-steel brushed d.c. motor; the arm remains firmly manual. It is a simple design with a damped manual lift and lower platform, actuated by a side lever.

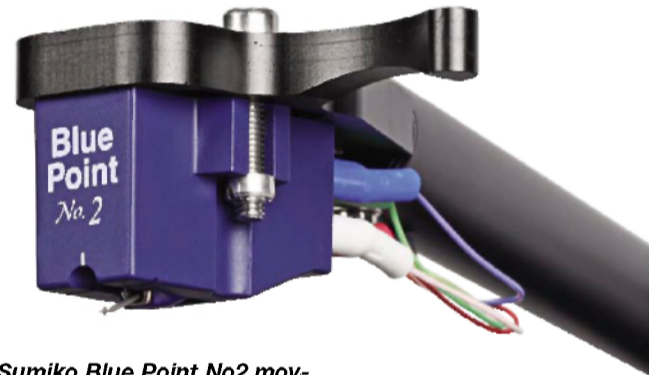
Into the arm is fitted a high output Sumiko Blue Point 2 moving coil (MC) cartridge, purposed for an MM input – I have to explain this



The motor drives a sub-platter that sits on a large magnetically cushioned bearing, employing a hard ceramic bearing shaft.

handed to feel confident about manually lifting and lowering a tone arm. I'm thinking very much here of all those souls used to bullet-proof digital devices but drawn by the lure of ancient analogue – especially when it lights up green!

McIntosh continue with their policy of glitz by using a highly polished stainless steel chassis that offers a gleaming finish all the way around. At rear it is studded by a pair of gold-plated phono output sockets, plus a gold-plated earth terminal no less – the first of its kind I ever recall seeing; these things are usually paltry little thumbwheels on a threaded shaft.



The Sumiko Blue Point No2 moving coil cartridge. It is inexpensive and can easily be bettered.

standing plastic case (not a wall wart) with 4ft of thin twin core flex that carries 12V to the turntable, and a two-pin 'calculator socket' input for a suitably terminated mains cable (not supplied). As you'd expect nowadays this is a universal power supply that works anywhere, accepting 110V/240V, at 50 or 60Hz.

The MT5 is big: it weighs 14.3kgs, and measures 43cm deep and 45cm wide. There is no suspension system so it needs a firm and level surface to stand on, one able to support its weight. Also, the dust cover is not hinged; it must be lifted off and placed to one side, so space for this is needed, together with the inevitable LPs that will lie about. This suggests a suitably strong and stable wall shelf system to me. The plinth

REVIEW



The d.c. servo motor has a single capstan step for the belt; manual speed change by moving the belt between steps is unnecessary.

feet are height adjustable.

Although the MT5 is easy to use, and comes as a convenient package, if you look at the handbook available on line you will see a prodigious set-up procedure. Ours was the only UK sample and came boxed from the factory, not set-up – but this is a Clearaudio-sourced design with protected ceramic centre bearing shaft, lubricating oil, shaft, hub and much else in the box that I have encountered before, so knew what to do – including the need for a long run in and subsequent speed re-adjustment. It is a complicated design and best set up by a dealer.

You can, however, fit any cartridge into the arm and a full range of arm adjustment is available,

including arm height; only headshell azimuth adjustment is not possible, but neither is it in most fixed-head arms (e.g. SME, Rega). The three speed adjusters sit behind a small cover; to use them a stroboscope disc is needed or, better, a test disc (Clearaudio) and frequency meter (Maplins). Also on the back panel are synch inputs for a Macintosh hi-fi system. You get a turntable mat and even a heavy puck to hold records flat.

And now to the Sumiko Blue Point 2 moving coil cartridge and what the handbook doesn't make clear. This is a high output moving coil (MC) cartridge purposed for moving magnet (MM) inputs, not MC inputs as suggested in the handbook.



The arm is lowered and lifted with a damped platform, operated by a lever. Manual cueing isn't so easy, because there's little clearance between the flat finger lift and the record surface. Finger lifts are usually curved upward to avoid this difficulty.

It needs a 1000 Ohm (minimum) load Sumiko say, where most MC inputs are 100 Ohms. If you plug it into an MC input it will work OK, as output will drop substantially into 100 Ohms and being a resistive generator treble is maintained (I tried it). But I felt MM sounded better, a tad more dynamic. The Blue Point 2, although an MC with non-removable stylus, costs just £200 or so; it is a super budget design – and sounds it. It tracks well at 2gms, but gives a dynamically lacklustre sound with overly strong high treble; I soon changed it for something better – then the MT5 showed its mettle.

SOUND QUALITY

The MT5 was run for a week, during which time it slowly speeded up from 3120Hz to 3215Hz before its speed settled. It was then adjusted back to 3150Hz – the correct value – and connected to our Icon Audio PS3 valve phono stage MM input, fed direct to a pair of Quad QMP monoblock power amplifiers driving Martin Logan Renaissance loudspeakers.

I know the Sumiko Blue Point well and received the same clear sound I have heard in the past. The MT5 had a gratifyingly stable sense of tone to piano in the Scissor Sisters 'Mary'. This track was grounded in its timing, firm and assured in progress, with cleanly delineated intervals between notes, free from time domain blur.

I heard exactly the same clean, assured sound with sustained synth chords on Alison Goldfrapp's 'Ooh La La' – and if you are wondering why I do not mention piano it is because synthesiser sustains are electronically timed, free of vibrato or other influence and commonly not subject to analogue tape recorder wow either.

It was obvious that the MT5 holds time well, underpinning instruments by removing subliminally disconcerting lack of stable pitch, that often affects belt drives.

However, by the time I had played a wide range of LPs and reached the Zuton's slightly bright, hard sounding 'Tired of Hanging Around', the limitations of Sumiko's Blue Point 2 – those I have balked at in the past – were beginning to play on me.

Treble emphasis gave the track 'Valerie' a thin, sharp top end and there wasn't the subtlety and insight I am used to from other cartridges,

REVIEW



The polished stainless steel rear carries gold plated phono socket audio outputs, as well as speed adjusters at right and a d.c. power input at far right. There are also actuator outputs for a McIntosh system.

most with better stylus profiles than the simple elliptical of the Blue Point 2.

So I reached for our Ortofon 2M Black with its superb Shibata stylus and this transformed the sound, adding in stronger insight and better delineation of high frequency sounds, plus a better sense of coherence.

Now the MT5 started to sing, sounding open and sophisticated in its delivery. With a top recording and pressing like Mark Knopfler's 'True Love Will Never Fade' from the LP 'Kill to Get Crimson', this deck delivered dynamic contrasts seemingly greater than hi-res digital, graced by a silent background, embellished by firm transients from his guitar and underpinned by a clean bass line, if not one that is overly heavy from the 2M Black; a Goldring 1012GX that I reviewed last month has a tad more bass and would also suit.

Once I had sorted this cartridge issue out, the qualities of the MT5 began to shine through in our now desperately revealing system terminated by the fabulous Martin Logan Renaissance hybrid electrostatic loudspeakers. Their deep revelation made changes in sound quality when reviewing the MT5 starkly obvious.

For some reason the Renaissance loudspeakers work with vinyl better than most, revealing recording quality and pressing quality through ruthless insight. This told me the MT5 offers a solid and clear sound with great temporal grip and fluency, whilst dynamic contrasts were conveyed with conviction. This is a fine turntable once run in and

fettled – and equipped with a pickup cartridge more deserving of its abilities.

CONCLUSION

The MT5-6 is, beneath its glitzy illuminated exterior, a complex design. I found it easy to use and yet both good and flexible enough to accept very high quality pick-up

cartridges, which reveal its sonic strengths.

It's ideal for those wanting a high-quality, easy to use package, one able to get the best from the new, high quality re-issues hitting the market today. From them it delivers spectacular sound I found, when played through one of the most revealing hi-fi systems available today.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The MT5 ran slow in initial tests but after run in settled at +1.6% fast. However, speed is adjustable so this was corrected before use.

Over a long period wow (speed variation below 10Hz) consistently

measured 0.15% (DIN peak) and when weighted dropped to 0.08% – good and typical of high quality belt drive. Our spectral analysis of demodulated Wow & Flutter from a wow & flutter meter shows basic rate wow at 33rpm (0.55Hz) was responsible, usually caused by hub or bearing eccentricity. There was no flutter, the analysis shows.

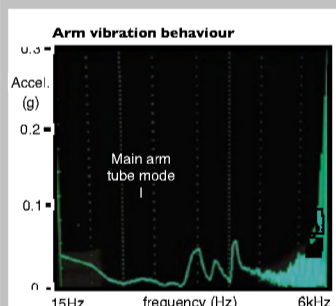
In conjunction with the Sumiko Blue Point cartridge fitted, our arm vibration analysis shows a stiff and well damped arm tube and headshell, free from the usual tube arm bending (ringing) modes, the main one being around 200Hz with aluminium – very well suppressed in this analysis.

The Sumiko Blue Point moving coil cartridge had strongly rising treble, sufficient for there to be a little obvious brightness in use, likely heard as top end 'sting'. Tracking was very good, so the sound will be stable and confident.

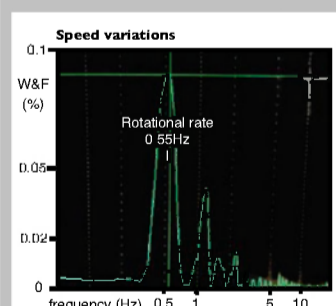
The MT5 worked well in all areas. It offers a good basic performance, with easily selected, adjustable speed. **NK**

Speed	+1.6%
Wow	0.15%
Flutter	0.04%
Total	0.08%

ARM VIBRATION



WOW & FLUTTER



MACINTOSH MT5 TURNTABLE

£7,495



OUTSTANDING · amongst the best.

VERDICT

A high-quality turntable, very specialised under the hood, yet up with the best in sound quality. Spectacular sound when fitted with a good pick-up cartridge – and visually entertaining too.

FOR

- ease of use
- sound quality
- appearance

AGAINST

- unhinged dust cover
- needs adjustment after run in

Jordan Acoustics
+44 (0)1592 744779
www.jordanacoustics.co.uk