

The Sun Rising



Albert Lee basks in the reflected glow of Origin Live's brand new Aurora Gold turntable, complete with Origin Live OL1 pick up arm...

What is a record player supposed to do? This may seem like an extremely basic question, but you will be surprised to hear that many audiophiles have been either misled or simply do not understand the subject. Therefore, we will start with this premise:

A turntable has a difficult job to do. The music is contained within a piece of vinyl with a helical groove cut into it. The equipment (cartridge and pickup arm) has to trace this groove without distorting the signal, leaving the groove (mistracking) or damaging the vinyl in any way. The record deck also has to withstand outside interference such as airborne, structure borne vibration and radio frequency interference. It also has the distinctly difficult task of using our poor mains system at any time of the day or night. (Night time is probably the best time to listen to our systems, due to the 230-volt supply being less corrupted by mains borne interference, while the ambient noise level is considerably lower.) Yet the most difficult job is to

turn at the selected speed with absolutely no fluctuation at all – a tricky task for the design engineer as there are many varying conditions. In addition, with DC motors the designer has to compensate for stylus drag, as this adversely affects the speed, in addition to back EMF from the motor. The DC power supply for the motor has to be designed to operate with a poor mains supply and a good 240-volt supply as well!

Origin Live is one of a select few manufacturers that understands this problematic mire. It is possibly one of the finest design engineering companies (for turntables and pick-up arms) in this country. Mark Baker's team is such that each engineering problem is thoroughly thought about before any action is taken. This type of design team is unusual (in the UK) for its prowess in a range of extremely fine products. Each one of Origin Lives products are extremely well built and finished. And in addition to the quality of build and finish are the very well written and well-laid out user manuals. After all, what good is

it to build the best equipment available if the customer is unable to assemble and run it?

TECHNICAL OVERVIEW

The Origin Live Aurora Gold has an innovative semi-suspended subchassis design using one spring on the right hand side of the subchassis under the levelling device. This is to obviate any form of external vibration reaching the replay platform, and is achieved by building the turntable in separate sections. The benefit of this approach is that it precludes the wow that most other belt driven suspended subchassis turntables suffer from. The DC motor is isolated from the turntable, in that it does not couple with the chassis mechanically or electrically, rather the motor stands freely on the turntable support. The whole lot weighs in at a very respectable 10 kilograms, and measures 410mm wide, 410mm deep, and 145mm high. Note that this figure includes an OLI pick up arm.

The bottom section of the turntable is fashioned from a circular, flat section piece of alloy and is fitted with three conical rubber feet. On to



this is placed the main bearing support complete with pick up arm mounting plate. This is isolated from the plinth (bottom section) by the sprung suspension components. Unusually, this component has a damping pad attached, which must not be removed, or replaced otherwise severe audio degradation will result. This pad controls the mechanical resonance of the pick up arm board and the main bearing support. At this time the motor should be placed as the, extremely well written, instruction manual suggests.

The DC motor is an "ironless" design - Mark uses this type of motor to obviate the phenomenon known as cogging and to reduce back EMF (which is difficult to control, electronically, as the type of compensation is constantly changing as the vinyl is being played). The DC motor is controlled by a load compensating power supply. The Standard PSU supplied with the Gold is the Ultra Power supply, which has a blue light emitting diode as the mains indicator and has a three way rotary switch on the front panel. First position is, turntable stop, second is 33.33RPM and the final position is 45RPM. Underneath is an access hole to enable the user to set the platter speed accurately. Speed setting must be done with a record being played, to allow for stylus drag. The standard transformer is a 9 volt 1 amp 'wall wart', although the optional £175 upgrade is a great deal larger.

Sub-platter material is fashioned from an accurately machined slab of Acrylic material. The main bearing is manufactured from extremely high-

grade steel and is machined to a very tight tolerance. Lubrication is taken care of by the (sparing use of) supplied Arctic military specified oil. The platter is profiled to enable vinyl to sit on it correctly and to make the task of removing a record very easy. Platter material is high grade acrylic and has been machined really well. Drive is taken from the motor to the platter via a ground, flat section, rubber belt.

Setting the turntable up was a relatively simple task. It is best achieved by siting the turntable on the record deck support, as it is difficult to move the turntable once the motor is put into position. However, I will add that the pick up arm should be placed on the run out of a record to level the turntable as the centre of gravity is altered with the arm in this position.

THE LISTENING

Ry Cooder's 'Bop Till You Drop' was first on the Aurora Gold, and I have to say that the sound was glorious - with a wide, extremely deep and very tall stereo image pouring out of the monitors. I was completely taken by surprise, all of the instruments were clearly etched in space and I could almost 'see' the musicians! The rhythm section was clearly driving the band along, with the perspective lucidly displayed.

James Brown's 'Get Up Offa That Thing' was next on the platter, with no less amazing results. Bass lines were clearly discernible - Bootsy Collins certainly plays like a man possessed and he puts some very subtle phrasing into his work, which I had never heard before until

trying the Aurora.

Bass from this record deck is full, without being overblown, with the bass to midrange balance being extremely smooth, and the midrange to treble transition one of the smoothest I have ever heard. Unlike Linn's LPI2, for example, it's a very even sounding device. The aural perspective is very natural, in that the musicians seem to be placed at one point in the image, but as they play they move in front of the microphones - best evinced by listening to Carmen by Bizet. The Deutsches Grammophon issue was a magnificent portrayal of opera at its finest. Again, the stereo image was one of the best displays of the mix engineer's craft.

Throughout this recording, the stylus was able to track the music with absolute security. As the soprano solo part started, the singer seemed to be floating to the left of

REFERENCE SYSTEM:

CROWN DC300A power amplifiers (three in a tri-amp configuration)
ATC SCM35 floorstanding passive loudspeakers
Custom built passive preamplifier
Ortofon MC25FL moving coil cartridge
OL RB250 pickup arm
Trichord Dino phonostage
Connectronics Musiflex cables
Custom built loudspeaker cables for the tri-amp rig
Complete isolated mains supply through its own fuse box with MK socketry

AURORA

Au-ro-ra1
n. Roman Mythology
The goddess of the dawn.
(Latin: Aurra)

centre in the image and her voice was one of the most breath-taking it has been my privilege to listen to!

At this point in the review, I introduced the larger transformer in the listening chain and this produced no small improvement. The image seemed to expand in all dimensions, with a larger punch at the upper bass to lower midrange. Kick drum was certainly felt in my chest and I could tell the difference between ride and crash cymbals! The stereo reproduction was a lot smoother, not to the point of becoming mushy - the sound seemed just right.

I then substituted another component - the OLI standard arm



VERDICT ●●●●●

Another exquisitely engineered turntable from Origin Live, with superlative sound to match.

ORIGIN LIVE AURORA GOLD/OL1 £1,594

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was replaced with a completely rewired OLI arm. The difference between this arm and a standard unit is quite impressive, and this arm and turntable combination made my jaw drop in amazement. Again the image became obviously clearer - it was very good before, but with the higher specified arm, it was exemplary. I listened for a further day until I was so tired (emotionally and physically) I had to get some sleep. I went to sleep with an enormous smile on my face with Supertramp's 'Crime of the Century' ringing in my ears.

CONCLUSION

This is one of the few turntables I could listen to for days at a time with no hint of listening fatigue. It possesses the ability to present the

THE EDITOR SAYS:

AL was obviously most beguiled by this, the latest mid-price design from Origin Live, and justifiably so. It's just a little more expensive than Michell's GyroDec, which I use as a reference, and differs quite a bit in presentation. Just as Origin Live's Illustrious tonearm is altogether warmer (or to be more accurate, less cold) and more organic than SME's Series IV, so the Aurora turntable is a less mechanical and clinical listen than the Gyro. It has a very neutral, transparent and open sound that's even and cohesive, whereas its Michell rival is more explicitly detailed, architectural and incisive. Both decks are tremendously capable, but if you're into vinyl for that sweetly musical sound that so many associate with it then this is the one. If you're more into eking out every last ounce of detail in a more obviously analytical way, then look to the likes of Michell and Clearaudio. DP

music as it was recorded. It produces an extremely wide deep stereo image into which is placed all of the musical clues. Pace is second to none along with precision and an extremely believable sound stage. Even with the least expensive pick up arm, this turntable projects an image that at times is frighteningly realistic. Acoustic guitar and solo violin are

PRICING	
Origin Live Aurora Gold turntable	£1,470
Upgrade transformer	£175
(less £15 if purchased with deck) OL1	£124
OL1 rewired	£359

reproduced precisely in the position they were recorded or mixed at. The Aurora Gold's neutrality shows the difference between pick up arms with ease. (More on this subject next month.) Disc surface noise is almost inaudible, and this combined with the turntable's neutrality strengthened the illusion that Ry Cooder was really in my living room. Even with a mid-price pickup cartridge, the strengths of this combination are easily apparent. The highest complement I can give is that I enjoyed the music. Overall, an extremely fine piece of engineering with factory support of the highest order. I can recommend this record deck with complete confidence.

