

TEMPTATIONS

EXPENSIVE, YES. BUT YOU KNOW YOU WANT THEM

McIntosh MT5 | Turntable | £8200

"A full dose of excitement"

FOR Insightful, refined sound; simple to set up; nicely made

AGAINST Sonic standards are sky-high at this price level



Few high-end companies can boast a heritage like McIntosh. It's easily one of the oldest hi-fi brands around, founded in Maryland, USA, back in 1949. By comparison the likes of old-timers such as Mark Levinson, Krell, and Audio Research are just getting started.

Over the years McIntosh has made pretty much every part of the hi-fi chain, but the brand is best known for its distinctively styled amplifiers. Their identity is invariably reinforced by the company's traditional glass fronts, VU meters and less-than-subtle backlighting.

A rare breed

A new McIntosh turntable, however, is a rare thing. With the introduction of the MT5 the company now has just two in its repertoire – the other one, the MT10, was introduced back in 2008. Considering McIntosh's current expertise lies more in electronics and, to a lesser extent, speakers, we wonder whether the company can truly deliver on the record-playing front.

Given that context, it makes sense for the brand to collaborate with a company that specialises in all things vinyl, and in this respect there are few better choices than Clearaudio.

That tie-in becomes obvious when you see the MT5's magnetic main bearing (with its ceramic shaft), which mirrors the design used on our reference Clearaudio Innovation Wood turntable. In this clever engineering, there is minimal contact between

the top and lower sections of the bearing to limit noise levels.

McIntosh's main engineering input, predictably, comes in the electronics, with the company designing the power supply and reworking the motor. This collaboration between high-end audio giants results in a deck that's as close to plug-and-play as we've seen at this level.

The MT5 is a breeze to set up. It comes with both arm and cartridge attached and aligned. The cartridge is the well-regarded Sumiko Blue Point No.2 – a high-output moving-coil design – which, if bought separately, will cost you around £200. Of course, the MT5's design is capable of handling far more ambitious designs, but as a step-off point this cartridge is still talented enough to show what it can do in this context.

Once you take the deck out of the box it takes a matter of minutes before you're listening to music. You've got to add a bit of oil to the ceramic bearing-shaft, fit the two-part platter assembly, move the counterweight to the pre-designated spot on the arm, and off you go. Oh, and don't forget to fit the drive belt – not much will happen without that.

Engineering prowess

This record player is a nicely engineered unit. Its chassis is a rigid but damped combination of stainless steel and alloy, topped off by an acrylic top panel. The front controls mirror those of McIntosh's amplifiers but here they control the On/Off and Speed functions.

The acrylic platter is a relatively hefty unit, weighing in at around 2.3kg. This mass gives a flywheel effect that helps with speed stability. It's beautifully made, with a precision that makes it hard to tell whether it's spinning or not, so accurate is the manufacture.

Glow of satisfaction

Power on the MT5 and the platter lights up with the kind of light-show you get with McIntosh's amplifiers. We like the effect. It adds a visual drama most of this deck's competitors lack.

The platter is driven by a high-quality Swiss-made DC motor, which is controlled by a servo system to compensate for load and power fluctuations. Three speeds are offered: 33½, 45 and, more unusually, 78rpm. It's such a pleasure to be able to change speed electronically rather than via the back-to-basics method of moving the drive belt from one pulley step to the next that many decks still adhere to.

The tonearm is also nicely made. The bearings feel smooth and precise, and it uses Clearaudio's trademark magnetic anti-skate adjustment mechanism. As with the rest of the MT5, this arm feels as though it's built to last.

There's a lid for the deck too, something many rivals omit. It might not improve performance but it does mean your pride and joy will be protected from dust and inquisitive little fingers, which can't be a bad thing. And you can always leave it off during play.

KEY FEATURES



Supplied with arm and cartridge



Magnetic main bearing



Electronic speed change

USE IT WITH
Cyrus Pono signature/ PSX-R2
£1900

A top-class phono stage capable of getting excellent results from a wide range of cartridges

The magnetic anti-skid device is adjusted via a wheel on the side of the tonearm

TEMPTATIONS

The MT5 sounds better with the supplied felt mat on the platter – but looks better without it

"We can't think of a high-end alternative that's as easy to set up, and few that are as nice to use"

On the right of the rear panel, three recessed screws allow adjustment of platter speed



In our experience all turntables work best when placed on a rigid, low-resonance support, preferably well away from the speakers. The MT5 proves no exception, which is no surprise considering the lack of a traditional sprung suspension system. Given such a support, and a suitably talented system, this player produces some fine results.

Reference point

We use our usual reference set-up of Cyrus Signature/PSX-R2 phono stage, Gamut D3i/D200i pre/power and ATC SCM50 speakers, and find much to like in the McIntosh's performance.

We start with Bruce Springsteen's *Born To Run*. The McIntosh has a fast and agile sound, one that picks up quite a lot of detail. There's plenty of energy here, and no shortage of punch. Rhythm tracks charge along with enthusiasm, while Springsteen's passionate vocal delivery gets centre stage.

It's quite a dense album, and we feel the MT5 package doesn't separate out the instrumental strands quite as well as we'd like – but we suspect a change to a more ambitious cartridge might help that.

Tonally, there isn't much to complain about. This combination sounds even enough to avoid criticism and has the top-end refinement to stay enjoyable, even when presented with some less-than-perfect recordings.

Blue sounds in the pink

We move to *Kind Of Blue* by Miles Davis. With the right kit, this recording can still impress thanks to the sheer presence and solidity of the sound. The MT5 package doesn't disappoint.

It sounds surefooted, delivering shifts in dynamic intensity with confidence and tying the various instrumental contributions together well. Changes in pace are conveyed with skill, while the album's complex rhythmic flow comes through with clarity.

Soundstaging is pretty good for the most part, though there is a lack of expanse when things get complicated or multi-layered. The MT5 never sounds confused, but the space around

The bold platter illumination and distinctive logo backlighting help make the MT5 unmistakable



instruments tends to shrink when a piece of music becomes complex. Dynamics become less fluid and expressive too.

We notice this on Orff's *Carmina Burana*, but it isn't enough to spoil our enjoyment. Here we're impressed by the McIntosh's enthusiasm and its ability to stay composed when the music gets demanding. There's plenty of punch here along with the means to supply a full dose of the excitement on offer. We're also pleased the MT5 can couple these strengths with an ability to render low-level instrumental strands with subtlety. There are brains behind that muscle.

Easy-going but exciting

The MT5 is an impressive package. We can't think of a high-end alternative that's as easy to set up, and few that are as nice to use. The sound quality, while not outstanding, is exciting and enjoyable.

For some, the McIntosh brand name and those looks would be enough to get their credit card out, but the MT5 is more than a show-pony. This is a truly capable unit that can stand up to any class rival without embarrassment. We like it a lot.

WHAT HI-FI? says

Rating ★★★★★

SOUND	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★

VERDICT If you're looking for a hugely capable plug-and-play turntable we can think of nothing better