



► DETAILS

PRODUCT
EAT Fortissimo/
F-Note
ORIGIN
Slovak Republic
TYPE
Dual-belt-drive
turntable/tonerarm
WEIGHT
68kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
710 x 250 x 440mm
FEATURES
• 33 & 45rpm
• Separate sub
chassis and mass
loaded turntable
• Optional
Fortissimo base
DISTRIBUTOR
Henley Audio
WEBSITE
euroaudioteam.com
henleyaudio.co.uk

EAT to the gourmet beat

High style meets high mass in EAT's flagship turntable, coupled here with one of the most flexible tonearm solutions ever seen – the F-Note even includes an alignment laser!

If anyone doubts we are treated to as much, if not more, novelty than back in the glory days when LPs ruled, European Audio Team's Fortissimo turntable and F-Note tonearm will put paid to that. Like TechDAS' vacuum hold-down and air bearing or the Reed deck available in idler-and belt-drive versions, this EAT combination bursts with clever features.

Before you look at the possibilities, the base Fortissimo/F-Note combo retails for £13,500, but the options are such that you can customise it any way you like. Rather like specifying a new car, you'll need to sit down with your EAT dealer and tick myriad boxes, with prices on application.

In addition to leather, wood or lacquered finishes – we've even seen it in lime green and white – there are also arm choices to ponder. You can specify chrome or black finishes, an optional platform, an aluminium S-shaped arm with fixed or detachable

headshell or the VT (Variable Tubes) with interchangeable wands including carbon, aluminium or wood. Our review sample is in black gloss with the leather upgrade and F-Note VT with wooden arm tube – it retails for £15,300 plus £700 for the Jo N°5 MC or +£1,600 with a Jo N°8 – normally £900 and £2,000, respectively.

This Fortissimo combo will impress even the most jaded of audiophiles

Our pictures only partially illustrate just how much real estate the Fortissimo will (ahem) eat up in your listening room. The total footprint, with the side-by-side chassis separated by a spacer of around 10mm, is a daunting 720 x 440mm (WxD). The weight, too, begs the need for a decent table or rack and

friend to help you lift it: the platter alone accounts for 22kg of the Fortissimo's 68kg total.

The deck is driven by two silicon 'string' belts, each with its own motor, the pair housed in a separate offboard chassis in an attempt to minimise structural-borne vibration being fed to the platter. Using two belts and two motors recalls a horological genre of clocks or watches called 'sympathiques', in which two entire balances in the same timepiece cancel out each other's errors. One thing which shouldn't seem to be an issue, then, is speed stability.

Dominating the Fortissimo's main chassis is the 400mm platter, its distinctive look created by 12 brass inserts and another under the vinyl top plate. The diameter recalls the era when broadcast decks had to handle 16in records. EAT says the inserts add extra weight and inertia to further stabilise the platter. The platter also incorporates sorbothane damping.

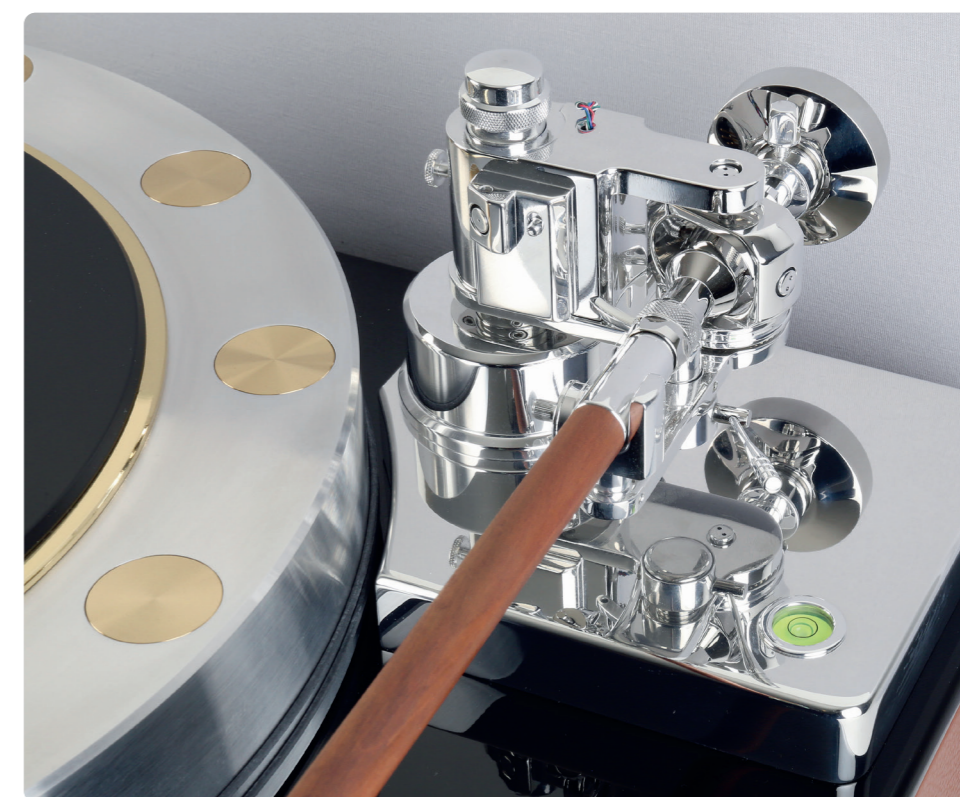
It's a two-person job to fit the platter over the bearing, one hefting it into place and the other guiding it from eye level to ensure that the inverted bearing isn't knocked. A vertical polished shaft arises from the deck, the bearing block made of a chrome alloy while the bearing spindle has what the company describes as: "a new 'Movic' coating with the lowest friction coefficient possible (six times less than previous spindle versions)". Apparently, NASA uses it for bearings in satellites. On top is a ceramic ball, against a Teflon plate.

At the front of the motor housing is the combined on/off speed control. Press the soft-touch button once and it reaches 33rpm in 25 seconds from cold. Another press takes it to 45rpm, which needs 50 seconds from cold – we told you it's a heavy platter! Speed indication is digital and flanking the Fortissimo's on/off button are fine-speed controls for those who need pitch adjustment.

Pucker up

Supplied with the deck is a puck weighing 390g. We try a couple of aftermarket clamps and pucks and – to our delight – the sound really is best with EAT's own weight. This is evident mainly in the frequency extremes, leading to slightly tighter bass control and crisper transients, while it seems quieter between tracks. Obsessives are welcome to experiment for themselves, but we thought we'd save you the effort of trying others.

As for the 12in F-Note tonearm, this is an eye-ful which dazzled when it first appeared at Munich's High End show in 2019. On its own, in its huge custom-made box, it looks like something to impress even the most jaded of audiophiles. It also helps you appreciate the size of the Fortissimo's plinth, because the F-Note's footprint is a considerable 170 x 135mm, albeit with a curved section cut out for proximity to the platter. To give you



Engineering doesn't get much more stunning than this...

an idea of scale, a standard CD jewel box is only 143 x 125mm.

Few are the arms with as much adjustability as the F-Note. In addition to a conventional counterweight and

The tremendous pride you'll have in owning this deck is utterly irresistible

adjustment for overhang, anti-skating and azimuth, the arm tower houses a laser system, which points to spots on the back of the headshell and finger lift, the targets which indicate correct settings. And as you can make adjustments 'on the fly', you get to test your hearing against a laser.

Despite those aids, this is not an arm for the faint-hearted because the complexity is such that you will find yourself tempted to make fine adjustments which otherwise would be denied to you on, say, simple counterbalance tonearms such as the Rega RB330 or Linn Krane. Frequent cartridge swappers, take note.

Sound quality

Coincidentally, in another deck we happen to have a Jo N°5 cart identical to the one fitted in the review setup, so we're able to do side-by-side comparisons, isolating the contribution of the pick-up. It's night-and-day, immediately revealing why this circa-£15k package offers £10k's worth of performance over the other. But this is not about justifying the relative value of upgrades. As a standalone, EAT's flagship turntable/tonerarm setup proves itself to be way more than a pretty face.

Perhaps it's down to the powers of suggestion, but we have convinced ourselves that a massive deck equals massive sound. Usually this means solid, deep bass, and the title track from JJ Grey & Mofro's *Olustee* reinforces our faith. This features relentless, driving, fast-plucked electric bass, what you might expect from Lemmy at Motörhead's peak, but with bluesy guitar leads over the top for contrast and a voice that doesn't sound like a deterrent against smoking. ▶



Talk about energy: the force is unremitting, reminding us why we so love using DeVore O/93s. Extension, slam, convincing attack, graduated decay and every other trait one wants to ascribe to realistic bass are present. Considering that the designer, the irrepressible Jozefina Lichtenegger, disdains rock music for a diet solely of classical, this deck kicks, er, tush.

That same LP is a fine indicator of smooth male vocals. Despite being on the Alligator label – which would normally suggest blues-y raunch – Grey’s voice possesses Jesse Colin Young-like clarity, as experienced in the ballad *Starry Night*. The treat here is the backing horns, punchy and fast and particularly revealing of soundstage, as they are located well behind the vocals.

We’ve recently been coming across a lot more mono albums, so it’s interesting to hear how the EAT package deals with the bedlam of psychedelia piled into the centre. The Tangerine Zoo’s eponymous debut on Sundazed/Mainstream provides ample fodder for testing both the solidity of central placement as well as the layering of sound. Instead of a morass of crazed instrumentation, it’s almost forensic in the way it allows you to separate massed instruments.

Obviously, a mono album such as the smooth jazz quintet of Kenny Burrell & John Coltrane on the Craft Recordings/New Jazz label doesn’t present this challenge. Instead, it tests how full the single-channel sounds. The Fortissimo/F-Note is as imposing as one would want a mono-only masterpiece to be, filling

the stage, and we’ve a hunch that this aspect is a by-product of the deck having been voiced for orchestras.

An LP which the EAT tonearm and deck handles with such grace even reminds us of open-reel tape’s transparency. Stealers Wheel’s self-named debut is one of the best-sounding reissues around at the moment – incredible when you think that the tapes are over 50 years old – but it’s as inherently smooth as a 30-year-old scotch from the same turf as the band itself.

Dominating the Fortissimo’s main chassis is the 400mm platter

If there’s anything even remotely negative one could say about this EAT front-end it’s that it might be too forgiving. Likening it to open-reel is due to the same euphony which, for some, makes valves less fatiguing than transistors. Yet what it does with the hyper-familiar *Stuck In The Middle*



HOW IT COMPARES

In the audio jungle, EAT’s massive Fortissimo is by far the biggest beast below £15k... If, however, you are hunting for something a little smaller, but with impeccable pedigree, then the recent MK2 version of SME’s Model 12 (HFC 498, with 309 tonearm for £11k or SME V for £16k) should be in your sights. This is a gloriously secure and solid-sounding deck with a warmth that underpins its insightful sound. Other great belt-drive decks include the VPI Avenger (at £13,750 upwards) and the £17,500 Acutus SP from AVID HIFI. However, by way of alternative, the height of direct-drive technology is represented by Technics’ flagship SL-1200R deck/arm combination at £19,000. Perfectly pitch stable, and able to deliver bass notes that start and stop on a pinhead, it has a thrilling, zesty sound that bristles with translucent detail. It’s arguably the apex predator of the audio jungle!

(*With You*) is entice a listener to focus on the vocal – no, make that ‘highlight’ the vocal – but not at the expense of the backing instrumentation. The ease of delivery and seamlessness of the sonic picture are marks of supreme consistency and coherence.

Might this in part be due to using a cartridge from the same maker, with uniformity of the voicing a given? Out comes a Decca Gold – a moving-coil pick-up unlike the Jo N°5 – and the overall nature remains intact. If ‘forgiving’ is a demerit, we’ll take it over ‘aggressive’ any day of the week. And while it’s outside of our remit – we only care about sound, right? – the pride of ownership is irresistible. This deck is a delight.

Conclusion

If anyone understands that high-end audio should be considered part of the ‘luxury’ universe, it’s EAT. The Fortissimo is far from being as costly as the dearest decks available, yet it ranks with the classiest. Fortunately, the sound matches this turntable’s sheer presence and the F-Note is an ideal tonearm choice for neurotic cartridge fetishists. At the price, and by today’s measures? A bargain ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Beautiful sound; F-note is an ideal match

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Nothing at the price

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WESAY:** Luxurious and classy – something of a bargain at the price

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL

★★★★★

