

AUDIO FILE

Belt-driven turntable system with electronic speed control  
 Made by: Pro-Ject Audio Systems, Austria  
 Supplied by: Henley Audio Ltd, UK  
 Telephone: 01235 511166  
 Web: www.project-audio.com; www.henleyaudio.co.uk  
 Price: £2099 (inc. arm and cartridge)



# Pro-Ject X8

**A**n LP spinner to lure buyers beyond the entry-level/midrange products that are Pro-Ject's bread and butter, the sleek-looking X8 borrows features from the company's top-tier Xtension models. It comes in at £2099 with an 9CC Evolution carbon tonearm – an upgrade on the carbon-aluminium designs of Pro-Ject's lower-range decks – plus Ortofon Quintet Blue MC cartridge.

It's also the latest Pro-Ject turntable that caters to enthusiasts switching to a balanced connection between player and phono preamp. Yet contrary to the more affordable X2 B [HFN Sep '22], which is fitted with both RCA and mini-XLR outs, the X8 offers a single connection

'Bowie floated above a complex background of sax and guitar'

only. Don't bother looking for this on the rear of the unit, as Pro-Ject is using an SME-like 5-pin DIN connection straight into the base of the tonearm. Furthermore, the X8 ships with a 'Connect it E 5P' DIN-to-RCA cable. So if you do own an amp with balanced inputs suited to a turntable, or a capable preamp, you'll have to buy another cable, such as Pro-Ject's Connect it CC.

The X8's MDF plinth and 5.1kg alloy platter contribute to the 15kg vibration-deadening 'mass loading'

that's the hallmark of Pro-Ject's £2000+ decks. Moreover, Pro-Ject says the platter is not only precision lathed, but also finely balanced and damped with a soft polymer (TPE) material ring applied on the inside.

Also inspired by those costlier Xtension decks, stress on the X8's ceramic bearing is reduced by partially supporting the platter via a magnetic ring embedded into the top surface of the plinth. This not only assists in getting the belt-driven platter up to speed swiftly, it also plays its part in reducing rumble noise through the bearing.

The single speed control button, AC motor and gloss black, gloss white and 'real wood' walnut colour options are all par for the Pro-Ject course. Do note, though, that in contrast to the integral vinyl top surface of the Xtension platters, the X8's alloy platter is 'naked'. Of course, this leaves the door open to experimentation with different mats other than the lightweight felt one that's supplied.

## A STAR IS BORN

The X8 is a strong performer out of the box, matching well with the Quintet Blue MC to deliver music in a grand and rousing manner. A silent background and clean, detailed presentation are a boon, but it's the scale of the performance that's the real eye-opener.

Philly Joe Jones' drum solo on 'Locomotion', from John Coltrane's

**ABOVE: Available in gloss black, white and walnut finishes, the plinth hosts an inverted ceramic bearing and peripheral magnet to partially 'lift' the platter. Ortofon's Quintet Blue MC completes the package while a DIN-terminated audio cable plugs into the base of the tonearm to facilitate a balanced output**

*Blue Train* [Blue Note] arrived with bundles of energy and sounded like a real kit, including a lively bass drum thudding away. Elsewhere, the remasters on this 'Complete Masters' edition of the classic album are very effective, retaining an intimate vibe while giving each instrumentalist a distinct position, and they sounded lovely via the X8, Pro-Ject's turntable doing an excellent job of showcasing these jazz legends at work.

Compared to the lower-tier X2 B, there's a more tangible stereo separation and 'micro detail' on offer here. This will partly be due to the progression from the X2 B's Quintet Red cartridge to the far more capable Quintet Blue, but the deck itself introduces a more solid, confident feeling to the music.

The dreamlike rock of Strand Of Oaks' *In Heaven* [Galactica Records] was served up with an organic touch and clear low extension, while David Bowie's vocals on *Black Star* [Sony Music/Columbia] were reproduced with considerable panache. It all follows on from the deck's combination of good clarity and separation, plus outstanding pacing. On 'Lazarus', the third track on the Bowie album, the languid saxophone and reverberant guitar formed a complex backdrop above which Bowie seemed to float. The deep background was remarkably quiet, leaving no distractions to take you out of the musical moment.

## VERDICT

Avoiding the very high price, and potential complexity, that an uber-upgrade might entail, Pro-Ject's superb X8 turntable offers you more than a glimpse of the vinyl high-end from a ready-to-enjoy package. ⬇️

## HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Turntable speed error at 33.33rpm	33.55rpm (+0.63%)
Time to audible stabilisation	5-6sec
Peak Wow/Flutter	0.07% / 0.05%
Rumble (silent groove, DIN B wtd)	-72.2dB
Rumble (through bearing, DIN B wtd)	-68.5dB
Hum & Noise (unwtd, rel. to 5cm/sec)	-61.5dB
Power Consumption	5W (1W standby)
Dimensions (WHD, with lid) / Weight	465x150x350mm / 15kg