

# Pro-ject Xtension 10 Evolution turntable

by Alan Sircom

**W**e need to get this out in the open. There's an inverted snobbery surrounding brands like Pro-Ject, Music Hall and Rega. Because these fine brands make fine inexpensive turntables by the pallet-load, there's an idea that when it comes to 'serious' vinyl spinners, the products they make are unable to compete. The Pro-Ject Xtension 10 Evolution begs to differ.

In fact, possibly the only thing getting in the way of the Pro-Ject deck being spoken of in the sort of hallowed tones reserved for the 'big names' in high-end turntablism is it is

perhaps too well put together. There's none of the random box of foam, the kit of parts that might be shy one foot or comes with three extra anti-skate weights or the 'oh just guess where it all goes' single-sheet of paper manual... this is instead a clever and sophisticated turntable design that is designed to be a consistent and reliable vinyl partner. ▶





▶ Nothing is left to chance. A 50kg crate might seem overkill for a turntable, but it makes a lot of sense when you find every part in the right place. A seasoned deck-builder might take longer to take the turntable out of the box than it takes to put it together, but short of it being dropped onto concrete from a great height, the deck is going to work and work well. However, despite the weight of the box and the high-mass platter and the glossy finish, there's not a lot of extraneous 'bling'; the power supply, for example, is just a plug-top affair, chosen because it works and because there's not much in the way of additional big-box power supply options that can improve upon the plug-top.

Instead, the 'business end' of the deck is a three-button and LED panel in the bottom right corner of the top-plate. The middle is start/stop and speed change, while the side-flanking buttons adjust the speed by +/- 0.1rpm. The 15W AC motor beneath that metal guard on the top left is powerful enough to bring the platter to speed, but not so powerful that it takes anything less than geological time to get there; fully 30 seconds from a standing start to 33.3rpm, and an additional 16 seconds to go from there to 45rpm (actually, on the review sample 45.1rpm was the default). Stopping is a lot faster, but is still measured in tens of seconds. It's possible to play the deck at 78rpm, but this involves unscrewing the three chrome

knobs that keep that metal guard in place, changing belt position on the motor guide and adjusting the built-in Speed Box to 45rpm, which is even slower than changing speeds electronically.

The slow start-up does come down to the deck having a high mass platter. And it's here where the Xtension 10 Evolution shows a spark of genius in design. High-mass platters aren't the kind of things that normally feature suspension systems, but there's advantages to both types of design that cannot quite be reconciled by simply adding more mass or making the suspension more springy. Pro-Ject neatly sidesteps the issue by making the whole shebang sit on four mag-lev feet. The four feet are magnetically repelled, each held in place with a single restraining bolt, and screwing and unscrewing the bottom section of the feet is the Xtension 10's (surprisingly effective) version of levelling. OK, so unlike most turntables, this means the suspension applies to the whole turntable chassis – even the SME design has a sub-chassis hanging off four towers from a main chassis. However, it works, and also keeps motor and platter in the same plane at all times. ▶

► It's a neat way of getting the more open soundstaging of a suspended turntable and the precision and bass depth of non-suspended designs. I'm not sure this is wholly the 'best of both worlds' but more like a compromise that doesn't behave like a compromise. Finally, the deck comes with a lid; a sadly rare occurrence in today's high-end audio – anyone who's ever discovered a sleeping pet cat curled tightly around a platter with its tail gently swishing away at what used to be an expensive cartridge will appreciate the need for a good, solid (and removable) lid.

The deck comes supplied with a 10" CC Evolution carbon fibre tonearm. This uses a conical carbon-fibre armtube (although not as marked a cone as Wilson Benesch's designs), with an inverted bearing design, sporting four ABEC7 grade ballraces. Pro-Ject uses a standard Linn arm mount, which allows VTA adjustment (although not on-the-fly adjustment), while a single armtube fix point allows some clever adjustment of cartridge azimuth. Pro-Ject also supply a quartet of counterweights to cover cartridges with a weight anywhere between 4g and 14g as standard (optional weights for cartridges weighing anything from 15-22g are also available).

Pro-Ject decks like the Xtension 10 Evolution don't do the whole fiddly obsessive-compulsive audiophile bit. Instead, 'build it, plug it, play it, love it' is the order of the day! This is a deck with excellent overall performance, starting from a powerful and well controlled bass. Bass lines are precise and deep, and even the machine-gun bass playing of someone like John Entwistle on *Who's Next* is free from too much overhang and imprecision. Not 'CD like' (which is vinyllese for 'sterile') but tight and what jazzers might call 'in the pocket'.

This is a great balance between high-mass power and lower mass boogie; not instinctually boppy, but not potentially leaden either. Instead, it seems to bring out the fluidity of a piece of music; I dug up my trusty (read: played to bits) old Decca Pirates of Penzance SXLs. While there are turntables that seem to give you more sheer resolution – where you can hear every floorboard creak, you can hear singers heads turn, and so on – this gives a fine sense of a performance that some of the hyper-analytical decks seem to miss along the way.

The overall tonality is fundamentally neutral, with just a slight hardening to the upper midrange. This comes across as slightly too much 'aaah' to breathy sounds (such as the backing to 'Because' by the Beatles, or 'Golden Age' by Beck), but really nothing too dramatic at all. In fact, it's the kind of thing that you'd struggle to notice on the kind of pretty good cartridge you'd use with a deck like this, but will just about resolve through a top-notch cartridge like the Benz SLR or beyond. Used with a good Ortofon MM or MC

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and this deck just gives you all you need. Good imagery, fine dynamics, excellent resolution... the works.

Glossy finish and carbon-fibre arm notwithstanding, this is an unpretentious turntable in a very pretentious and prissy part of hi-fi. But not all turntablists have developed symptoms of OCD. Some of us just want to play our records on a good turntable that doesn't look like a steampunk dream or that needs constant attention to play more than one track a week. And that's where the Project Xtension 10 Evolution comes in. It's a turntable that combines all of the benefits – and none of the psychoses – of the high end. Strongly recommended. +

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**Speeds:** 33/45/78 (Speed Box DS, built in)

**Maximum Speed Variance:** ± 0.08%

**Maximum Wow & Flutter:** ± 0.01%

**Rumble:** -73dB

**Effective arm length/Overhang:** 254mm/16mm

**Effective Tonearm Mass:** 8.5kg

**Tracking Force Range:** 10-30mN

**Cartridge Weight Range:** 4-14g (four counterweights supplied)

**Dimensions (WxHxD):** 48x23.5x40cm

**Weight:** 22kg

**Price:** £2,250

**Manufactured by:** Pro-Ject Audio Systems

**URL:** [www.project-audio.com](http://www.project-audio.com)

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