



Marantz TT-15S1

That vinyl has made a surprisingly emphatic comeback after being forced to the brink of extinction by the arrival of the hallowed compact disc in the early 1980s is now an established fact.

And yet, it still seems a little unreal that an inherently flawed and relatively basic medium like the long-playing record has been able to endure in an age dominated by an incessant quest for technology and perfection.

Anyone who's heard a record played on a half-decent turntable (not a megabuck Linn, SME or TechDas, but a basic, entry-level Rega, Pro-Ject or Music Hall) without prejudice, will concur that the experience is, well, special and different.

Special also because it exposes a layer of emotive appeal, of musical realism, that simply isn't as prevalent when listening to digital sources. And different, because that appeal is achieved despite levels of noise and distortion that would suggest sonic inferiority.

And yet it's not inferior. It's entertaining and enjoyable, imparting a sense of occasion to every listening experience.

So much for the virtues of vinyl – at least in my opinion. But the return of the

LP record has spawned an ever-increasing number of turntables, of which the Marantz TT-15S1 is one example.

The TT-15S1 is the result of a close collaboration between Marantz and turntable specialist Clearaudio. The design speaks of meticulous design and execution – a necessity if a turntable is going to sound good – with a particular emphasis on preventing resonance and mechanical interference.

The unsprung chassis is made of thick, uniformly inert acrylic resin, resting on three large, isolating feet. The chassis also hosts the ceramic bearing, which provides an ultra-low friction, non-resonant resting place for the platter assembly. The 30 mm thick platter itself is also made of the same, opaque acrylic resin, and is mated to an alloy subassembly.

The TT-15S1 comes with a gimbal tonearm fitted with an integrated headshell, which provides a home for a Clearaudio Ebony Virtuoso moving magnet cartridge. The decision to opt for a high-quality cartridge is a clever one: it makes the most of the deck's inherently sophisticated construction.

Assembling the turntable, which comes packed in a three-layered box, is a cinch,

as long as you follow the instructions carefully. It's all pretty logical, and even the usually fussy stuff is easily taken care of.

For instance, the tonearm's headshell mounting is pre-set to accept the cartridge in a position that is pre-aligned. The only real adjustment required is the vertical tracking force, and while the counterweight is calibrated with markings, it's probably better to borrow a proper VTF tracking scale to confirm that the correct tracking force has been dialled in.

One bugbear I have is the motor's location. It's a freestanding device that fits neatly through the plinth, and powers the silicon drive belt via a two-position pulley. When properly aligned, the motor doesn't touch the chassis, thus keeping it decoupled from the deck.

However, as the power on/off button is on the motor housing, it's easy to push the motor against the chassis every time you switch it on or off. It's best to hold the motor in position while switching it on or off to ensure it doesn't move, which is an unnecessary clunky arrangement. An in-line switch installed in the motor's power cable would be a more elegant solution.

The TT-15 is a class act. The Virtuoso Wood is a smooth operator with a slightly warm



tonality and a penchant for detail retrieval. The sound is smooth and clear, with loads of information and an impressive sense of transparency, emphasised by the generous soundstage and finely focused image.

Listening to surfing troubadour Jack Johnson's *Brushfire Fairytales* (Everloving Records LP), the TT-15 faithfully captured the air and space of this recording. Johnson's wistful vocals were placed centrally and dominantly on the expansive soundstage, with the acoustic guitar afforded plenty of space and stature.

There was an overriding sense of approachability, despite the density and substance of the electric bass. The percussion on 'Fortunate Fool' carried real weight and slam, too, but the turntable managed to maintain the accessibility and the clarity of the music, thanks to its ability to pay close attention to detail.

Yes, the sonic signature tended to favour a certain warmth and a richness of timbre, but that tonal generosity was never allowed to obfuscate the finer details, nor the precisely rendered imaging.

The warm and slightly bassy sound of The Eagles' *One Of These Nights* (Asylum LP) was highlighted by the Marantz, making for a slightly viscous sound that added real impact and authority to the bottom-end. The rendition still allowed the guitars and vocals to come to the fore with emphatic intensity, while the table's talent for effective detail retrieval ensured a rich, realistic sound.

On 'Too Many Hands', the expansive staging created a bold, deep and generous sound picture that invited the listener to experience the music in its full glory. But for all its intensity, the music never lost its agility and poise, and there was plenty of detail: electric and acoustic guitars duelled for attention, the percussion was spread wide across the stage, and the vocals were perfectly focussed.

The dimensionality added further credibility to the music, engaging the listener with its almost cinematic splendour. The dialogue between the electric guitars at the end of the song were a particular highlight.



Finally, on Mary Black's 'The Land Of Love', from her *Full Tide* set (3u Records LP), the TT-15 expressed the tempo and energy of the music to foot-tapping effect. The percussion was crisply rendered, the piano sounded liquid and flowing, and the guitar's gentle strains were never glossed over.

Black's vibrant vocals express the momentum and joy of the music, while the nostalgic strains of Brendan Power's harmonica provide a melodic, compelling counterpoint.

The Marantz made the most of the inviting, generous soundstage – on 'Your Love', Black's vocals sounded majestic against a vast backdrop of shimmering acoustic guitars, subtle but incisive bass and the marvellous, articulate strains of a Dobro guitar.

Best of all, the music was presented with a unity of purpose that perfectly fused the individual elements into a thoroughly engaging whole.

The Marantz TT-15S1 is by no means an entry-level turntable. Nor is it offered at a bargain basement price. But given the overall quality of execution, the scrupulous engineering, and the inclusion of a high-quality cartridge, the musical appeal and truthfulness of this turntable is exemplary, while the price/performance ratio reflects good value, too.

Deon Schoeman

VITAL STATS

Drive AC motor, silicon belt drive
Platter 30 mm acrylic
Bearing Ceramic
Speeds 33, 45 rpm,
manually selectable
Stylus Moving magnet
Output 3 mV @ 1 kHz
Frequency range 20 Hz – 20 kHz
Signal/noise ratio 80 dB
Dimensions (WxDxH) 440 x 350 x 110 mm
Weight 8,9 kg

Verdict

Simple, intelligent design and construction is both aesthetically pleasing, and sonically splendid. Reveals the essential appeal of good vinyl with a truthful elegance.

Price R 35 990

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OUR RATING: 82/100

