



IN SIGHT

- 1 Acrylic plinth with fixed isolation feet
- 2 Acrylic platter with felt mat
- 3 Clearaudio tonearm and cartridge

Marantz

TT-15S1 £1,500



Surprised to see this Japanese brand here? Don't be – the Marantz packs some serious Clearaudio cred

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
Marantz TT-15S1
- ORIGIN**
Japan/Germany
- TYPE**
Belt-drive turntable
- WEIGHT**
8.9kg
- DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
440 x 110 x 350mm
- FEATURES**
 - 33/45rpm
 - Clearaudio-sourced tonearm
 - Clearaudio Virtuoso Wood MM cartridge
- DISTRIBUTOR**
D&M Audiovisual Ltd.
- TELEPHONE**
02890 279830
- WEBSITE**
marantz.com

Made from a single piece of frosted acrylic, the Marantz TT-15S1's plinth is supported by three frankly enormous isolation feet that give the impression they could cushion a landing on Mars. But it looks great nonetheless. As pulled from its packaging, it has two cut outs – one for the tonearm and the other for the separate motor.

So, as you now know, the Marantz is the least 'plug-and-play' of the decks on test. In fact, you might as well make a cup of tea and clear the kitchen table. That said, the set-up procedure is far from heinously fiddly and getting up close and personal with the arm, cartridge and motor – all rather lovely – is no hardship if you're simpatico with the whole vinyl involvement thing. You'll need a keen eye and steady hand, but the instruction manual is clearly written and walks you through the steps, so I'll leave it at that. Allow about 45 minutes to hit plug-and-play readiness.

Fully assembled with its acrylic plinth in place, the TT-15S1 has talking-point good looks, bearing a striking resemblance to turntables made by Clearaudio. To all intents and purposes, that's what it is. The elegantly engineered tonearm and Virtuoso Wood MM cartridge are the most obvious giveaways, but the turntable is actually a joint venture between Marantz and Clearaudio, which also undertakes its manufacture.

Like the Avid, the TT-15S1 comes without a dust cover and, similarly, selecting 45rpm means manually moving the belt from the small to larger drive pulley. The transparent plastic friction-fit record clamp, while surprisingly effective, looks a little weedy compared with those of the Avid and MoFi, though.

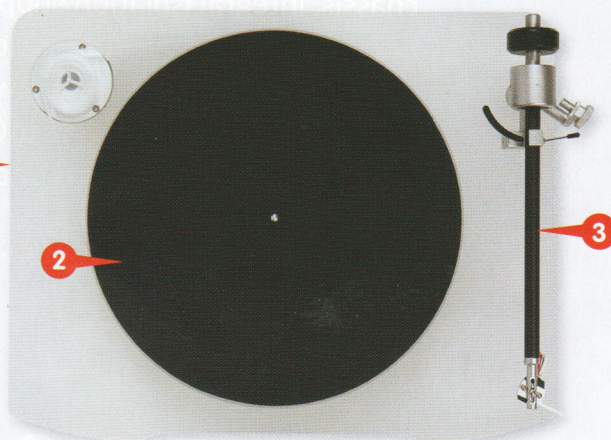
Much admired by Marantz brand ambassador, the late, great Ken Ishiwata, the TT-15S1 was used at one many of his demos where he talked about its sonic signature being "typically Marantz".

Sound quality

The TT-15S1 might be a Clearaudio by proxy, but sonically it really does seem to be blended to a Marantz recipe. There's an unmistakably couth quality to the sound, a subtle warmth and grace under pressure that never grates and presents fine detail with clarity and coherence. It's a quiet-sounding deck, pitch stable, not quite neutral but extremely smooth and easy on the ear and, I imagine, many people's idea of what analogue should sound like, though there are several decks here that would beg to differ.

Two of the test tracks sound simply sublime in the Marantz's tender care. The Pat Metheny Group's fusion classic *Are You Going With Me?* from the album *Offramp* hits just the right shade of trippy, mesmeric, samba-infected bliss, especially as Lyle Mays' gorgeous opening synth pads swell slowly, barely perceptibly, from the repeating rhythmic underbelly of the work. Kate Bush plays powerfully to the TT-15S1's strengths as well. *The Fog* from her *The Sensual World* album is aptly named as it's not just the misty harps that shape the sonic scene. Crowded, complex and lush almost to the point of obscuring Bush's fragile, wavering vocal, the Avid had some trouble with this, succumbing to a degree of muddle. Only the Rega and MoFi shade the Marantz in separating out the densely layered strands, but neither manages it quite as sweetly.

There is a downside. Bass is tuneful and agile, but there isn't much of it which detracts from both the Miles Davis and Grace Jones tracks ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Gorgeous looks; Clearaudio tech; glowing, detailed sound quality
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Lean bass; lengthy assembly; no dust cover included
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Not exactly plug-and-play, but ultimately rewarding
- FEATURES** ★★★★★

OVERALL



Group test verdict

As **David Vivian** picks a path through the strewn LP sleeves, it's time for him to add up the scores and declare a winner from this gifted group

NO LOSERS HERE, just degrees of unfeasible talent, much as I anticipated at the start. I'm at a loss to recall conducting a *Group Test* where the contestants have knocked it so far out of the park, the very thought of having to come up with a final ranking gives me the shivers. In their very different ways – contrasting styles and methodologies as well as sonic flavours – these are all outstanding turntables.

Even so, the final order beckons and first to bow out is the Avid. In many ways it's a wonderful thing with a core quality that's almost frightening

for the money, but I can't help thinking that in basic spec it isn't firing on all cylinders. It needs Avid's optional £350 metal platter and a more sophisticated cartridge to realise its full plug-and-play potential.

Not very plug-and-play at all, the Marantz is either a bit of a pain to assemble from the box or a tweak-loving enthusiast's delight. Either way, it's a visual stunner that always sounds lovely, if lacking a full measure of excitement and bottom-end wallop. It's pipped for fourth place by the Technics, which meets the plug-and-play brief perfectly and

is a joy to use, its battleship build and direct-drive motor serving up the kind of excitement and energy that will get you on your feet.

The first podium place goes to the Pro-Ject, which cannily mixes nostalgic and modern elements to create a warm, embracing analogue experience that covers all the bases and is impossible to resist. In the end, though, the fight for top spot is between MoFi and Rega and it's as close to a dead heat as it gets. On this occasion, however, the pace, precision and resolving power of the Planar 6 isn't quite enough.



WINNER

From nowhere to easing past one of the greats is no mean achievement, but the StudioDeck+ package really is that good, displaying an open, lucid, style that's thoroughly addictive and an almost magical ability to make music come alive in a way only the best can.



Make/model	Avid HiFi Ingenium Plug&Play	Marantz TT-15S1	MoFi StudioDeck+	Pro-Ject The Classic Evo	Rega Planar 6/Ania	Technics SL-1200GR
Price	£1,250	£1,500	£1,550	£1,250	£1,470	£1,600
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
	When Avid makes an entry-level model it doesn't skimp on the core design	It might be part Clearaudio, but the clever thing is the way it's been voiced	Can a company known for audiophile vinyl make a decent turntable? Can it ever	A lot of well made, nicely finished, nostalgically styled deck for the money	Perhaps the closest thing there is at the price to a turntable that does everything	Masses of user appeal and an exciting, energetic, easy-to-love sound

Key features

	Avid HiFi	Marantz	MoFi	Pro-Ject	Rega	Technics
Cartridge	MM	MM	MM	MC	MC	None supplied
Speed change	Manual	Manual	Manual	Electronic	Electronic	Electronic
Drive	Belt	Belt	Belt	Belt	Belt	Direct
78rpm	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adjustable feet	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

TRY WITH THESE

PHONO STAGE: Lindemann Limetree Phono **£595 HFC 441**

The Lindemann is one of the most outstanding phono stages under £1,000 we've tested of late and it took the 2018 AV Tech Media award in its category thanks to its wonderfully effortless yet engaging presentation that works with a wide selection of different cartridges.



MOVING-MAGNET CARTRIDGE: Ortofon 2M Blue **£184 HFC 375**

The 2M Blue enjoys features borrowed from Ortofon's more expensive models. It's well-built, easy to install – thanks to its pre-threaded mounts – and, with a healthy output, offers a clear and open presentation with plenty of bite.



STYLUS CLEANER: DS Audio ST-50 **£78 HFC 437**

A clean stylus performs better and will last longer than one that is dragging ingrained groove dirt and other debris with it. The ST-50 is a wonderfully simple idea, brilliantly executed and it makes keeping your stylus clean entirely straightforward.

