



Bolt-on brilliance

The Debut Carbon Evo is a tremendously talented turntable, but as **Ed Selley** discovers, it has so much more to give

A phrase that crops up a fair bit in turntable reviews is 'stretch' (I myself am particularly guilty of it). The idea is that, as well as judging the performance a deck offers out of the box, it is also useful to discuss how much scope it has for improvement – its stretch. This is usually a tricky thing to express within a conventional review, but Pro-Ject has provided an opportunity thanks to the upgrades available for its Debut Series.

Consequently, a Debut Carbon Evo (HFC 468) is procured along with the bulk of the available upgrades that can be attached to it. Some of these are universal fitment items, while others are specific to the Debut range. None of them alter the basics of how it operates. It remains a belt-driven,

unsuspended turntable in all cases. Despite this, the scope of the changes that can be carried out are significant. At the more affordable end of the alterations are devices intended less to boost performance as they are to improve how the Debut Carbon works in certain setups. The Cork-IT cork platter mat (£18.50) reduces susceptibility to static as much as it offers scope for a performance improvement. Likewise, the High Power IT power supply (£30) is less about boosting the performance of the motor as it is switching the turntable over to a grounded, three pin mains that makes it easier to earth in a system of two wire products. The Sweep IT brush (£60) is a suspended cleaning solution that tracks into the record centre as it

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Pro-Ject Debut Carbon Evo upgrades

ORIGIN
Austria/Czech Republic

TYPE
Turntable accessories

FEATURES
● Cork mat
● Upgraded PSU
● Cleaning brush
● Isolation platform
● Isolation feet
● Record clamp
● Metal sub-platter
● Acrylic platter
● VTA adjuster

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plays, sweeping ahead of the spot where the stylus will be. On clean records, its effectiveness is limited and I don't personally find it as easy to use as a conventional brush, but it will work on a variety of turntables so if it appeals it could be worth a look.

Isolation station

Where things start to become more performative is some of the additional isolation options that Pro-Ject offers. The Debut Carbon Evo is already one of the most effectively isolated turntables at the price, but the company offers two ways to further improve on this. The more conventional of the two is the Ground IT E Support Platform (£119). This is a solid MDF plinth mounted on spiked feet that supports the entire turntable. This works best when used on an already reasonably well-isolated surface like my Quadraspire QAVX rack (HFC 395), where it drops the noise floor and improves bass definition.

Rather more interesting is the other option. The Absorb IT feet (£140 for four) are designed to cup the existing feet of the Carbon Evo and place them inside a metal housing that contains the same material as the Damp IT feet. These have a different application and effect altogether on the performance. Used on the same Quadraspire rack, I'd hesitate to describe them as beneficial, though. The deck feels quieter in operation,

but this comes at the expense of some bass extension and a little of the rhythmic assurance it possesses. Placing the Carbon Evo on a small wooden table without the Absorb IT leaves it very vulnerable to footfall. With them in place, it's effectively impervious to it.

The real meat of the performance upgrades can be found across three devices that work individually, but do their best work cumulatively. The first of these is the Clamp IT record clamp (£75), which can be used on most turntables but has been designed to do its best work on Pro-Ject ones. I've never used a Debut with any form of clamp up to now, but a few minutes listening to the Carbon Evo with it fitted is enough to convince me that this is something that should be on any owner's to-do list.

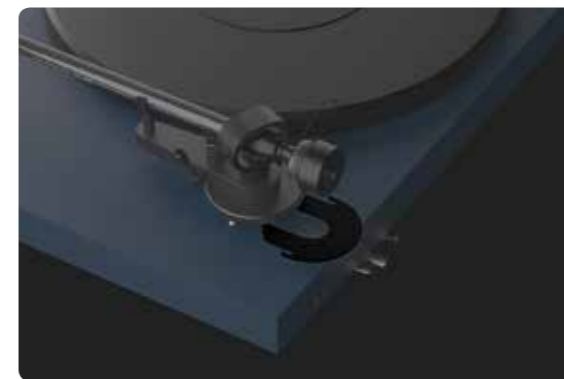
Listening to *My Own Soul's Warning* by the Killers with and without the clamp is illuminating. With it fitted, there is an appreciable and immediate improvement in fine detail and clarity. Even on a perfectly flat record, the Clamp IT demonstrates an immediate and tangible benefit.

These advantages are boosted further by the Debut Alu Sub Platter Upgrade and Acryl IT Acrylic Platter Upgrade (£110 each) that are available separately, but really do their best work as pair. The sub-platter is a one-piece metal unit that replaces the metal and plastic one that comes with the Carbon Evo. It's



Rega has been offering upgrades for many years and the similarly priced Planar 2 (HFC 413) also benefits from a range of options. Rega concentrates more on specific performance upgrades like its 24V motor and higher spec carts (that fit within the same arm VTA) than it does alterations to the convenience as Pro-Ject does to an extent. Some of the things that Pro-Ject offers have no direct equivalent with Rega and vice versa. This means what you can change on the Carbon Evo has no real parallels at the price.

The Cork IT (above right), VTA IT and Clamp IT (below)



a substantially heavier and more rigid option and the effect it has on the already good pitch stability is deeply impressive. Even with the standard metal platter it has a beneficial effect, but combining it with the acrylic upgrade unit and clamp is more effective still. The acrylic platter is lighter than the metal one, so the heavier sub-platter offsets this nicely. You can then use the clamp to ensure the notional advantage of the platter – that it has the same resonant behaviour of the record – is realised.

There's no getting away from the fact that these three components

The Alu Sub Platter and Acryl IT Acrylic Platter upgrades do their best work as pair

combined are £295 – a significant chunk of the cost of the Debut Carbon, but the improvement in performance is considerable. The way the upgraded turntable handles Bloc Party's *Silent Alarm Live* is more spacious, detailed and effortless than the stock deck is able to manage. The fundamental qualities of the Debut Carbon Evo haven't changed, but it nonetheless manages to dig so much more out of the groove.

Neither is Pro-Ject done there. When I reviewed the Carbon Evo originally, I noted that switching to the Ortofon 2M Blue (HFC 375) stylus in place of the Red it's supplied with is a quick and simple way of improving the top end and general sweetness. None of the other upgrades change this as a straightforward and viable way of boosting performance and, together with the Clamp IT, this

represents the simplest 'one stop' upgrade you can perform.

Of course, if you want to be more ambitious, you can. The Carbon Evo's arm doesn't have VTA adjustment but Pro-Ject sells the VTA It spacer, which can be inserted under the arm base (and Pro-Ject has had the presence of mind to make it a horseshoe shape that makes fitting it around the lead out cables relatively simple). This allows cartridges of most sizes and weights to be accommodated. It's worth pointing out that the sensible limit for a cartridge to use with a turntable of this nature is about the £300 point, but that still gives plenty scope for upgrade. UK distributor Henley Audio feels Ortofon's Quintet Red at £269 is a fine option.

Conclusion

Pro-Ject's Debut Series is full of great turntables that do a splendid job in their out-of-the box spec. If you are looking to eke more performance out of yours, however, this well thought out range of upgrades allows you to do so in a simple and wholly cost effective way at your own pace ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★
FEATURES ★★★★★

LIKE: Flexibility; easy to fit; performance
DISLIKE: The most effective upgrades are a significant cost applied together
WE SAY: A clever way of boosting the overall performance of your Pro-Ject Debut turntable

OVERALL ★★★★★