

Choice
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CLARO AUDIO CLARITY DUAL
DUAL TURNTABLE £3,720 (OPTIONAL EXTERNAL POWER
SUPPLY £1,920, AUDIO ORIGAMI PU7 12IN ARM £2,450)



All clear



It's big, it's black and it will set your bank balance back! Claro's new Clarity Dual turntable goes for a spin with *Jimmy Hughes...*

Two motors; two belts; two arms; massive platter – the new Claro Clarity Dual turntable is an imposing piece of kit. It has its roots in an earlier design – the fine Clarity 09 – but designer Peter Curran felt he could still do better, and offer the revised, improved ‘flagship’ model that you see here.

There are some turntable designers who've been known to utter pronouncements as if they were

some sort of mystical religious prophecies, but Peter is not one of them. Instead, he's a quiet, affable sort of fellow, and always willing to listen. Unsurprisingly then many of the revisions that grace the new Clarity Dual came about through comments made by users and reviewers. Some are fairly small (improvements to the finish, better adjustable feet, repositioned on/off switch) while others – such as the ability to take two tonearms, and the

► DETAILS

PRODUCT: Claro Audio Clarity Dual (optional external power supply, Audio Origami PU7 12in arm)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: turntable

WEIGHT: 18kg

DIMENSIONS:

(WxHxD)

445x80x305mm

FEATURES:

- 9.5cm thick Acetal platter weighing 9.2kg
 - ability to accept two arms; can be used with 9in or 12in arms
 - reverse-threaded record clamp
 - optional external power supply
 - twin motor drive
- DISTRIBUTOR:** Claro Audio Ltd
TELEPHONE: 01423 867413
WEBSITE: claro-audio.co.uk

new electronic power supply – are actually quite major.

Two AC motors are used, and these drive a small sub-platter via round belts. The massive 9.5cm thick platter is made from a plastics derivative called Acetal, and weighs around 9.2kg. The main bearing (improved over the original) is some 6cm long and 1.8cm in diameter. The plinth base is made from solid alloy, with a smart black-anodised finish. It's supported by three adjustable stainless-steel spiked feet. The Clarity Dual can be configured to work with one or two tonearms, and 9in or 12in arms can be accommodated depending on what is required.

The electronic power supply – designed by Charles Appleyard – is optional, but more or less essential if you're going to go between 33 and 45rpm on a regular basis. You can switch belt pulleys manually, but this is a bit impractical due the size and weight of the platter. While in my view not essential, the optional PSU also improves speed accuracy and thus ultimate sound quality, too.

DUAL TURNTABLE **£3,720** (OPTIONAL EXTERNAL POWER SUPPLY **£1,920**, AUDIO ORIGAMI PU7 12IN ARM **£2,450**)

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Space age hi-fi

Claro Audio is a subdivision of Claro Precision Engineering – a company that specialises in the manufacture of accurately-made parts for the aerospace, medical, and the communications industries. They recently produced parts for the Galileo Satellite, and hold AS9100 Aerospace and ISO 9001:2000 certification. Confidentiality agreements mean that Peter Curran cannot name all those who use the company's services, but clients include Johnson & Johnson (medical), and ABSL Space Products. Needless to say, the quality of manufacture of this turntable is superlative.

Our review deck came fitted with an Audio Origami PU7 tonearm – the 12 inch version in gorgeous high-gloss black finish. The design is based on the old (and much loved) Syrinx PU3, with various improvements. It retails for £2,450, but there's also a standard 9 inch arm at £1,750.

The deck proved very straightforward to assemble, and I had ours up and running in less than two hours. Everything fits together logically, and any assembly uncertainties were answered by a quick look at the beautifully illustrated instruction booklet. In no time the deck was built, ready to play.

Sound quality

After a bit of fine-tuning to the cartridge and tonearm, it was soon sounding great. My cartridge was a Koetsu Urushi Sky Blue, and this sounded detailed and crisp, with great dynamics and attack. Tonal balance was lucid and open, with a nice creamy richness that was very beguiling.

Previously, I had been using and enjoying this cartridge fitted to the superb EAT Forte-S and Ikeda tonearm – a very tough act to follow. The Forte-S has an even bigger, heavier platter, and is quite a beast, but the Claro Dual was not intimidated, and more than held its own!

Indeed, in terms of top-end cleanliness, the Claro was superior; one reason could be that the Audio Origami PU7 has fewer electrical 'breaks' in the signal chain from

cartridge pins to phono plugs – the Ikeda arm having a detachable headshell. This extra transparency was especially apparent on old bright-sounding discs.

Playing an LP of Stravinsky's *Petrushka* ballet (a rare version on the London label featuring the Israel Philharmonic conducted by Lorin Maazel), it was gratifying to hear how cleanly the Claro reproduced this somewhat brash and over-lit early stereo recording. Yet there was no loss of detail or dynamics – quite the reverse. This recording can sound a bit bright, with a thin 'spitty' sort of treble that becomes edgy and harsh during climaxes. But via the Clarity Dual, the sound was clean and well-controlled. The cartridge had no trouble tracking the grooves, and the reproduction remained clean – even at side-ends which were handled with consummate ease.

It makes you fall in love with vinyl all over again, compelling you to go through your collection

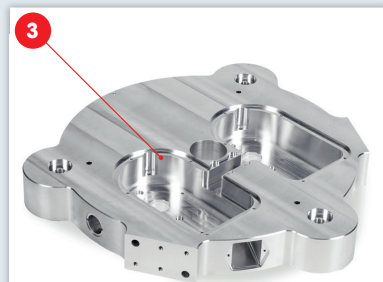
I found the Clarity Dual to have the same sort of solid unflappable weight of sound I so admired from the Forte-S; the same magnificent focus and precision. It sounded both relaxed and controlled, without lacking presence or immediacy. Regardless of the music played, the Claro combination was never once faded.

One LP that invariably gets an airing every time a new turntable arrives is Joe Sample's *Rainbow Seeker* from 1978. The Clarity Dual reproduced this album brilliantly, and fully revealed the layering of instruments in what can at times be a fairly complex mix. Bass sounded firm, deep, and powerful, while the highs were beautifully open and transparent. Once again, I noticed that effortless neutrality of the overall sound. True to its name, clarity was excellent, and Joe Sample's piano always remained audible regardless of what was happening elsewhere in the mix.

The Clarity Dual comes with a special record clamp featuring a left-handed (reversed) thread. This ensures the record is firmly held, and enhances the impression of focus and control. The use of a clamp has a strong influence on sound quality, though not everyone likes the difference such things make. Interestingly, I obtained some of my best results using the deck with a Ringmat, minus the clamp, however. Played this way, the sound had even more breadth and ease, and seemed freer still. The music was certainly a touch firmer with the clamp, but I did really take to the Ringmat without it. Either way results were always rock solid and totally assured.

Pitch stability proved excellent, and listening to critical material – solo piano, acoustic guitar – I might as well have been

DETAIL



1 optional external power supply costs £1,920

2 one of two motors driving inner platter via belt

3 the alloy plinth/base, before finishing

4 one of two detachable, bespoke arm mounts

Q&A

JIMMY HUGHES TALKS TO CLARO'S PETER CURRAN.



JH: Why did you launch your new Clarity Dual deck?

PC: Well, it's an improved version of my original turntable design – the Clarity 09. Creating the Clarity 09 taught me a lot, and I have tried to bring the fruits of the insights gained into the new model. Although well-received, not every comment on the Clarity 09 was positive. Certain aspects of its design were improvable. In creating the Clarity Dual I tried to take into account the comments and suggestions made by users of the original Clarity 09 model. As a result, the Clarity Dual is the people's choice!

What comments, specifically?

We fitted a three-pin mains socket rather than a fixed cable – so you can use a third-party mains cable. We also repositioned the mains input away from the arm mount to reduce the risk of interference. The on/off switch was repositioned on the left, rather than on the rear of the unit.

We've designed the deck to accept two tonearms. The second arm's fixing port can be capped, returning the deck to a single arm design. Both 9in and 12in arms are catered for, and we now have arm mounts made from Acetal for improved isolation. There's built-in height adjustment, allowing you to fine-tune VTA with arms that have a fixed height.

We've improved the design of the feet, and now have the spike pointing down – which sounds better. We're employing two AC motors, chosen for their quietness, to increase drive torque. Having them opposite one-another eliminates side-strain on the main bearing. Motor mounting has been improved too. The main bearing is machined to closer tolerances, and we've modified the design compared to the Clarity 09. Our new anodised plinth looks much better.

Last, but not least, the new electronic power supply improves sound quality considerably.

IN SIGHT



1 one piece aluminium alloy plinth gives solid base for platter

2 one of two tonearm mounting points; an unusual feature

3 18mm diameter main bearing supports massive 9.2kg platter

4 three adjustable feet link to the plinth to provide isolation

5 one of two drive pulleys; twin motors for speed stability



THE SONIC hallmark of the Clarity Dual is an unmistakable firmness, and unflappable solidity – an impression that has its roots in the use of a big heavy platter, a good stiff power supply, and the use of two drive motors. Employing Acetal – a low-resonance material – for the platter helps, too. I compared the Clarity to the impressive EAT Forte-S, and noted some fascinating differences.

While the Clarity combination sounded even cleaner than the Forte-S, the latter was sometimes more 'holographic' in its soundstage depth perspective. Yet, at this level, differences are small. Both decks offered excellent pitch stability, and delivered a large, full, weighty sound that was smooth, open, and detailed. The Clarity's platter starts-up more quickly, and its design permits the use of two tonearms. It takes up slightly less space, too.

playing CD, so secure was it. Surface noise and rumble were vanishingly low, and even old LPs reproduced with impressive clarity and a welcome lack of grunge.

It's important to point out that the supplied Audio Origami PU7 tonearm played an important part in all this, providing a solid platform that allowed the cartridge to perform at its best. The arm bearings feel silky-smooth, devoid of free-play; the 12 inch tube reduces tracing distortion. It's a lovely piece of work, and we hope to revisit it soon.

The power supply offers switchable speeds of 33 and 45rpm, with variable fine-tuning should the platter run slightly fast or slow. As previously mentioned, the platter is pretty massive, and a bit too heavy for easy speed change (by shifting the belts onto different pulleys), though this option is offered. If you only play the odd '45' such escapades might not be much of a chore. But having the external electronic power supply makes speed change much easier and faster. You also get even better sound quality resulting from the improved speed stability, although it's important to point out that the deck is basically as solid as a rock anyway. At £1,920, the PSU isn't cheap but justifies its price, just.

Conclusion

Clarity's Clarity Duo turntable and Audio Origami PU7 are an impressive combination, delivering a solid sound that marries excellent clarity with subtlety and finesse. The nature of the design means the deck should need little maintenance, allowing it

to deliver top results without the need for constant tweaking.

Of course, careful alignment of the tonearm and cartridge will pay dividends. But other than levelling the deck, getting cartridge/arm geometry right, and making sure the various bolts are firmly tightened, there's not an awful lot more one can do. There's no suspension to adjust, and no cables to dress. This makes it a boon for those who don't like fiddling. Indeed it's a wonderfully fuss-free design that should provide a lifetime's listening pleasure.

It's a deck that makes you fall in love with the sound of vinyl all over again; compelling you to go through your collection picking out old favourites you haven't played in years. The option of twin arms is great for those who want to run two cartridges (a high end MC and a budget MM, for example) at the same time. Build is beautiful, too – the equal of the best of the rest at the price. It demands auditioning if you're in the market for a top turntable. ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Powerful, clean, mastertape-like sound and versatile

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Not cheap!

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: Delivering superb sound quality with a luxury finish, this is one of the best high-end turntables we've heard. Expensive, but fine value nevertheless

FEATURES



OVERALL

