



Black Beauty

Adam Smith takes a listen to Claro Audio's new Clarity Dual turntable.

Turntable design can be a funny old thing at times. If you listen to some designers then it would seem to be something akin to witchcraft and, as a result, there are turntables on the market made from all sorts of exotic materials and designed from ridiculously complicated (or sometimes just plain ridiculous...) underlying principles that often feature some very basic internals and setup instructions on a badly photocopied piece of A4.

True, those decks can sometimes sound marvellous after a week of setup and tuning, at least until someone nearby happens to sneeze and throws everything off-kilter once more. No wonder some vinyl newcomers think we're all mad...

Fortunately, there are also other types of company around. These are

the people who realise that the task of rotating a lump of vinyl at a steady 33 or 45rpm without fluctuation, noise or rumble actually isn't all that difficult in the great scheme of things, as long as the inner workings are of premium quality, finely toleranced

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and well assembled. Ironically, most of these types of manufacturer actually have their backgrounds in engineering, making precision components for other industries, such as medical and aerospace. When

people like these turn their hands to turntable design, the results can often be quite spectacular; which brings me neatly to Claro Precision Engineering.

Regular readers may remember that I was bowled over by their Clarity 09 turntable a few years

back, which was a design instigated by a rotten scoundrel who promptly vanished when all the hard work was done and it was time to pay the bill. John Jeffries kindly took a quantity of completed units to market under his



Lumley brand and Claro undertook the decision to market the rest of the decks as a limited run of high quality units and thus the Clarity 09 was born. The decks all sold and designer Peter Curran breathed a sigh of relief and probably thought his days in the hi-fi industry were done. But then the emails started coming in...

You see, Peter had taken the unusual step of ending the Clarity 09's instruction manual with a request for feedback from owners, plus any ideas for improvements or additional features that they would have liked to have seen on their decks. Whilst the feedback was positively glowing, there were enough suggestions for Peter to sit down and start work on the Clarity 09's successor. This was duly presented to Claro's board members and the thumbs-up was given for initial samples to be made.

Although ostensibly visually similar to the 09, the new Clarity Dual is a very different beast. The obvious signs of change are the repositioned on/off switch, the 3 pin IEC mains inlet rather than captive lead and the superb black finish, but a great deal has gone on under the skin, too. Most notable are the twin arm mounts that give the new deck its 'Dual' moniker, which comprise an Acetal base to isolate vibration, topped with a spacer and the arm mount of your choice. Any length and mounting pattern can be catered for as they are made to order and

the price of the deck includes two mounts, plus neat covers for when one is not being used.

The platter is a 95mm thick Acetal item and, again, the spindle is simply fitted into the middle of this and not part of the bearing, unlike 99.9% of other decks – once again this

speaks volumes for the engineering involved, as concentricity must be absolutely spot on if speed variation is to be avoided. Fortunately, my ears could detect no issues in this department.

Said platter is powered again by twin motors but these are higher quality items than used in the Clarity 09 and Peter roped in colleague Charles Appleyard for a re-design of the electrical circuitry inside the plinth. This, plus re-designed motor mounts, mean that the platter spins up to speed much faster and the drive system in general has more torque. Finally, on the power front, the Dual has the option of an offboard PSU, designed by Roger Davis of RD Technology, which offers switched 33 and 45rpm speeds, plus a third variable option.

The build and construction quality of the Clarity Dual is absolutely breathtaking and it abounds with superb touches. From the PSU case milled from a solid lump of metal, to the multi-turn adjustment pot for variable speed, to the arm pod locating dowels with

their positively micrometric precision fit. My favourite part is the record clamp, however. This is a two-part collet based design with a reverse thread that cannot be over-tightened – when it's at the optimal torque, the two parts of the collet simply separate.

The final icing on the cake was a beautifully printed colour instruction manual which walks you through the turntable assembly and setup with clear text and pictures – no dodgy A4 photocopies here! These improvements have pushed up the price compared to the Clarity 09, with the deck retailing at £3,720 and the optional PSU for £1,920 but Peter informs me that a Hi-Fi World special offer is on the table for both units at £5,100; a saving of £540. So, should you be tempted?

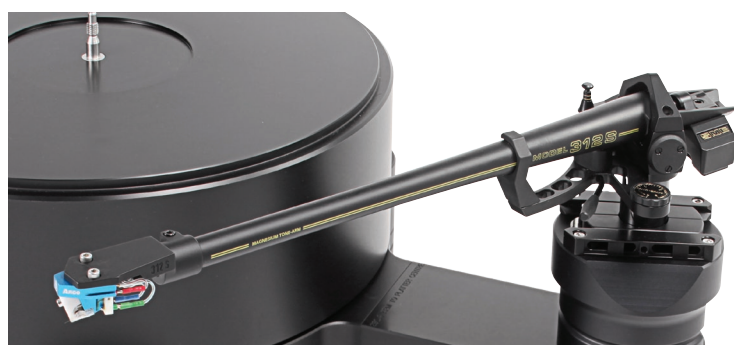
SOUND QUALITY

As I cued up the Clarity Dual I did idly wonder to myself whether I would find myself enjoying a listening experience that was very similar to that of the Clarity 09, but with a few rough edges smoothed and a general lift in performance. Consequently,



when the music started in earnest, I was quite taken aback by what I heard as, whilst the Clarity Dual does indeed share some common traits with its forebear, in many ways it is a very different beast.

We often speak in the magazine of the characteristics of certain turntables that we know well, such as the image width of a Gyrodec, the soundstage depth of an SME10A or the sheer joie de vivre of an LP12, but the Clarity Dual is the first deck in a while that has carved its own niche in this comparison and that is in terms of the truly colossal soundstage that it generates. Spinning some familiar tunes, it was as if my seat at the performance had been upgraded from the back of the stalls to the front row, with performers looming large and lifelike in front of, and above me. The





effect was a little uncanny at first but as I adjusted I realised that this was a truly immersive experience – almost surround sound with two loudspeakers.

When fitted with a twelve inch arm, the Clarity Dual combines with the innate smoothness of such an item to turn in a very composed and commanding performance. Spin a badly recorded track and the deck lets nothing escape, but with much better recorded material, it simply steps aside to let the music through; the lower tracking distortion offered by the longer arm combines with the Clarity's insight to make everything very pure, clean and immensely detailed.

Throughout the top end and midrange, the Clarity setup offers a sweetness and beautifully rendered sense of calm and unruffled ease in the way in which it serves up in front of you everything contained in the grooves. Large scale orchestral material was particularly impressive in this respect, the Clarity's scale and purity combining to ensure that the power and grandeur of such an arrangement left me positively breathless.

Typani crashed, violins soared and cellos positively leapt out of the speakers at me, whilst the Clarity remained unruffled, poised and effortlessly capable at all times. When the action calmed down, however, the deck was equally magnificent at letting every whisper through; fine action crept out of an impressively silent background, once again speaking volumes for both the stability of the drive system and the quality of all moving components.

Nothing intruded on my

listening experience; where there was supposed to be silence, I heard silence and yet the deck's dynamic range seemed to cover a wider span than I am used to. My Garrard 301 is no slouch in this respect, but even it had a hard time keeping up with the Clarity.



Talking of the Garrard, it generally re-gains much ground against competitors at the low end, thanks to its positively gargantuan yet wonderfully controlled bass. However, the Clarity once again had it looking decidedly

worried, as the Clarity Dual is most definitely no slouch when it comes to punch and sheer depth. Bass from the deck digs deep, hits hard and never outstays its welcome, and I would say it is right at the top of the tree at the low end when it comes to belt-driven turntables. Some bass notes, from double basses in particular, seemed to linger just a fraction

of a second too long when compared with the Garrard but, given that I was perched on the edge of my seat intently listening for the effect I would wager that it will not trouble most listeners!

CONCLUSION

As mentioned, I have long felt that there is no need for some of the black arts that some designers seem to think is necessary to instill into a turntable design. High quality engineering, careful design and meticulous build quality will do the job perfectly and I can think of only a few other turntables that epitomise this as well as the Clarity Dual. Peter Curran has taken his time on his new baby, and made sure to listen to the feedback of customers for his already superb Clarity 09 deck, before carefully implementing the suggestions to see what effect they had.

That resulting effect is nothing short of astounding, and the Clarity Dual shows that a truly high end turntable need not be fragile, temperamental, difficult to install or awkward to use. The deck is a breeze to set up, a pleasure to use and a truly epic performer. Its sound simply presents music with the sort of grandeur, insight and sheer emotion that I have only previously encountered with a handful of decks bearing much higher price tags. Review items come and go from the Smith listening room, but the Clarity Dual is the first item in a long time that I am truly going to miss when it is gone – it really is that good.

REFERENCE SYSTEM BOX

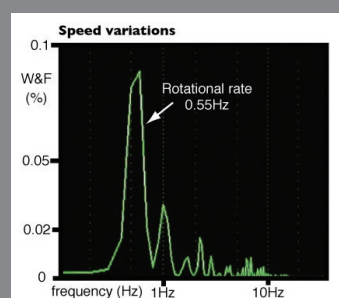
SME 312S and Audio Origami PU7 12" arms
Ortofon Kontrapunkt b and 2M Black cartridges
Sondex DE-1 and Anatek MC1 phonostages
Naim Supernait amplifier
Modified Ferrograph S1 loudspeakers

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Clarity Dual was a little erratic in speed stability. It would run stable for some time, returning an unweighted wow value of 0.1% or less, and then it would start to vary speed, wow increasing to 0.3%. The first value is very low, in Direct Drive territory, the second high and in Rega Planar P3/24 territory. Wow at this level is not obvious, but pitch is a bit 'watery' as it were – although some listeners hear 0.3% wow immediately. Our Clarity was basically rock stable but was prone to short periods of wander. Our analysis was a long term average over ten minutes and shows basic rate wow measuring a low 0.08% at 0.55Hz (one revolution at 33rpm), a good result. NK

Speed accuracy	+0.2% fast
Wow	0.3%
Flutter	0.08%
Total W&F DIN weighted	0.18%

SPEED STABILITY



VERDICT

One of the finest turntables I have reviewed, the Clarity Dual sets new standards for both engineering prowess and sound quality.

CLARO CLARITY DUAL £5,100

(SEE TEXT)

CLARO AUDIO

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www.claro-audio.co.uk

FOR

- stunning build quality
- ease of setup/use
- immense soundstaging
- mighty bass

AGAINST

- nothing