



Harder, better, faster, stronger

The original Debut EVO took the Debut to new heights and the EVO 2 promises more of the same. **Ed Selley** gets himself in a spin...

Pro-Ject's Debut series of turntables has done a huge amount to shape the affordable turntable market and its positioning has shifted over time to best reflect this. The Debut EVO took the basic pattern that makes a Debut – a belt-driven unsuspended design with an 8.6in tonearm – and beefed up the constituent parts to compete at a higher price point, and very successfully it was too. The EVO 2 is intended to continue the theme.

The wrinkle to this is that, when the EVO was launched, it was the top of the Debut tree. Since then, the PRO has appeared (HFC 487, recently updated to the PRO B with hardware to allow it to run balanced), which takes on that role, making the EVO 2 the second tier of the range. This means there is a whole new level of Debut parts and the EVO 2 borrows from the outgoing PRO to beef up the spec.

One key area where this has happened is the platter. The EVO 2 gains the TPE damped aluminium platter that first appeared in the PRO. It's relatively heavy for an affordable device at 1.7kg and is impressively inert. You can still elect to change this at a later date for an acrylic one, but I

The Debut EVO 2 flows in a way that is engaging without being wearing

suspect most people won't rush to do so. The platter sits on a sub platter which the belt acts on.

The arm has also seen trickle-down from the PRO. The bearing housing is lifted from there too and is a more substantial and confidence-inspiring device than it was previously. Something that hasn't made the jump

that is retained only for the PRO is VTA adjustment. If you want to alter the height of the EVO 2's arm, you will need to use external spacers. The desire to change the cartridge is likely to be lower than before, though. The EVO 2 sports a Pick It MM EVO that is built by Ortofon to Pro-Ject's specific requirements and promises higher performance than the 2M Red that the original EVO used. The arm itself will happily support a wide range of different cartridges, however.

Under the plinth, another donation from the Debut EVO parts bin takes the form of three substantial, height-adjustable metal feet. Pro-Ject has been fitting the best feet in the business to affordable turntables for some time now, but the ones on the EVO 2 allow you to level the plinth even if the surface you place it on is not entirely flat. This means that the isolation of the playing surface is very good and the turntable is impressively resistant to outside interference and in advance of some key rivals.

One area of the EVO 2 is all new and very welcome with it. Historically, Pro-Ject Debuts have placed their power socket and output connections in a metal sub chassis under the main plinth. The EVO 2 moves them to the back of the plinth for the first time and, while this likely has very little effect on the performance, it makes connecting everything up much simpler and improves the aesthetics. Pro-Ject supplies a decent-quality grounded interconnect with the EVO 2, but you can always substitute in a longer one if needed.

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
Pro-Ject Debut EVO 2
- ORIGIN**
Austria/Czech Republic
- TYPE**
Belt-drive turntable
- WEIGHT**
6kg
- DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)**
415 x 113 x 320mm
- FEATURES**
● 33 and 45rpm electronic speed control
● 8.6in carbon tonearm with Pick It MM EVO cartridge
● 300mm damped steel platter with sub platter
- DISTRIBUTOR**
Henley Audio
- WEBSITE**
project-audio.com
henleyaudio.co.uk

Aesthetically, the EVO 2 follows the pattern dating all the way back to the original Debut. The basic proportions are unchanged, but the beefed-up arm and platter gives it a presence that its higher price requires. There are no less than 10 finishes available: Walnut, Gloss White, Gloss Black and seven Satin finishes. In a perfect world, there would be more gloss options – yellow would look fantastic – but there's not really anything else at the price that has this level of choice. Fit and finish is more than acceptable for the price too. You can justifiably say that £600 is a lot for what is notionally an 'entry-level' turntable, but it's absolutely up to the standard you would expect at the price.

Sound quality

Much more importantly, performance is realistically at the top of the pack at the asking price. Connected to the exceptionally talented and revealing Violectric PPA V790 (HFC 520) phono stage, the EVO 2 generates no unwanted noise – even though the supplied wall-wart PSU that powers the onboard AC-to-DC conversion and motor system isn't the most confidence inspiring. Instead, when the incredibly delicate *Air So Sweet* that opens *Dodie's Build A Problem* commences, the Pro-Ject extracts a gratifying level of signal and rather less noise.

Something that quickly becomes apparent is that the basic identity I have come to associate with Debut models (and indeed more expensive Pro-Ject decks) is that this is not a frenetic-sounding turntable. With the wholly ballistic *A Happy Medium* by Sheafs, you can argue that the Pro-Ject isn't quite as urgent as some other rivals can be – but it would be a stretch to call it slow. Instead, the Debut EVO 2 flows through material in a way that is engaging without being wearing.



This costs the same as the Rega Planar 2 (HFC 415) with the newly developed (and excellent) Nd3 moving-magnet cartridge. The Rega is the prettier turntable of the two and its ability to really deliver high tempo and high impact music is unparalleled. The EVO 2 is more suitable to use off a wall shelf – thanks to those feet – has electronic speed control and more scope for upgrade than the Rega. This is a keenly contested price point and, for the moment at least, Pro-Ject appears to have the edge.



The new cartridge is a considerable step forward too. Ortofon's 2M Red was one of the weaker aspects of the original EVO and I found that it truly gave its best when I moved to a 2M Blue (HFC 375). The bundled Pick It MM EVO is closer in performance to the Blue and, given that the cost of that stylus upgrade largely covers the cost between the EVO 1 and EVO 2, it has to be seen as great value.

The new feet make it impressively resistant to any outside interference

This is because those other upgrades all make a difference too. Playing the demanding but sublime *Origins* by Skapel, the Pro-Ject combines that gratifying level of detail retrieval with a general togetherness that can elude relatively affordable decks. At a point where some rival models can begin to sound fractionally disjointed and congested, the EVO 2 still generates a genuinely impressive soundstage that places material in a way that feels completely self-explanatory. It is tonally believable and manages the neat trick of flattering less than stellar pressings while also delivering the goods with truly excellent ones.

Even more gratifyingly, the EVO 2 has more to give. Thanks to Pro-Ject's expansive upgrade options, there are simple ways of getting more out of the basic turntable. The acrylic platter has already been mentioned, but my money would go on the metal sub platter and record clamp – which I tried on the original EVO and made a

profound difference at a relatively sensible outlay. Other options like the various power supply upgrades are not something I've personally tested, but also look solid value.

Conclusion

Crucially, though, you don't need to rush to start hacking up your EVO 2. What Pro-Ject has built here is a turntable that gives a very significant chunk of what the original Pro offered in more finishes and at a lower price. Given that the improvements that have gone into the new range-topping PRO B are focused to a large extent on making it part of the balanced range of turntables that Pro-Ject offers, it is not hard to argue that – if you don't have a balanced system – the EVO 2 as the precocious younger sibling represents better value for money. In fact, as it stands, this is the best turntable I've listened to under £1,000 and the best all-round Debut I have yet to test full stop. Pro-Ject's long-running affordable superstar clearly has plenty of life left in it ●

There are 10 rather fancy looking finishes to choose from



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Sounds great, looks great and feels great
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** It might look even greater in coloured gloss
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Pro-Ject's latest Debut is a truly outstanding turntable and the one to beat at the price
- FEATURES**
★★★★★

OVERALL

