

# Musical Fidelity M8xTT

Inspired by Musical Fidelity's statuesque, near all-acrylic M1 turntable from 2004, the brand's new owners have reimagined the design to partner its massive Nu-Vista amps  
 Review: Adam Smith Lab: Paul Miller

There can be no doubt that retro is 'in'. From cars to kitchen appliances to hi-fi, many manufacturers are taking inspiration from the past and bringing famous and fondly remembered designs into the 21st century. The acquisition of the Musical Fidelity brand back in 2018 by Heinz Lichtenegger's Audio Tuning Vertriebs GmbH has given the company a very extensive and highly capable back-catalogue to mine. As a result, Audio Tuning (parent of the ubiquitous Pro-Ject marque), has taken the opportunity to boost its portfolio with a spot of retro fever.

In addition to the obvious choice of a re-birth of the classic A1 amplifier [first full technical review next month] and the 'left-field' development of BBC-style LS3/5A and LS5/9 loudspeakers, Lichtenegger has wisely chosen to focus on the top-end of Musical Fidelity's historic lineup. The huge Nu-Vista amplifiers were the first fruits of this endeavour [HFN Mar & Aug '23], but the latest release is a re-working of a somewhat lesser-known Musical Fidelity creation – the M1 turntable [HFN Mar '04] – in the form of the £8249 M8xTT.

## BIGGER BOOTS

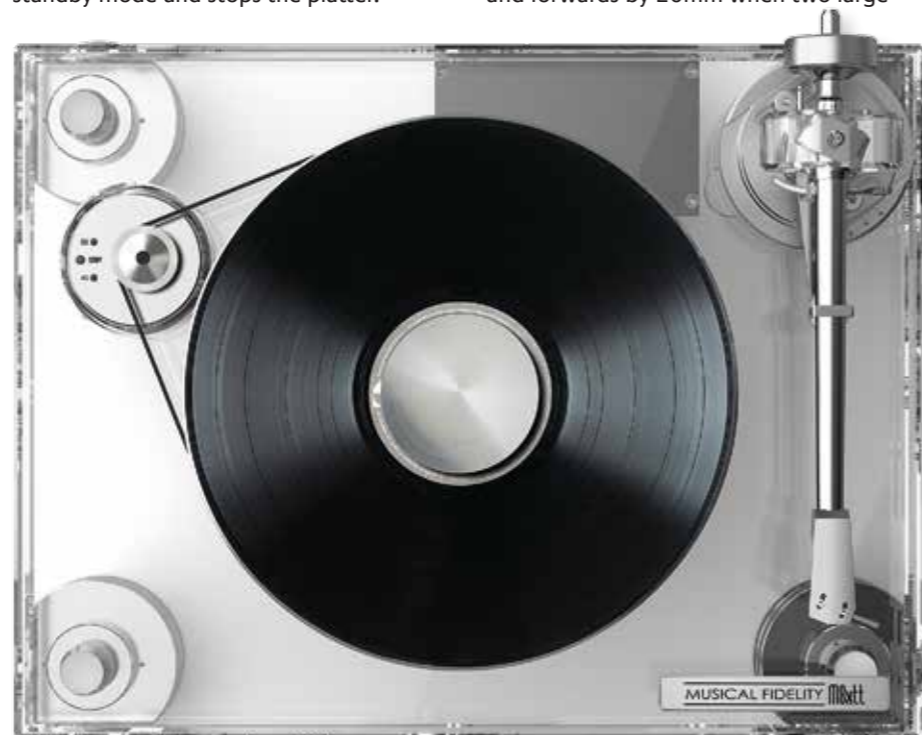
The basic construction of the M8xTT will be familiar to anyone who has encountered an M1 [see PM's boxout, p49]. The plinth consists of two layers of clear acrylic that sit at different levels on four specially-designed aluminium feet. These are both 'magnetically supported' and damped with a soft TPE polymer. Unlike the original M1's feet, the M8xTT's bigger boots comprise two parts and are adjustable to level the deck – they support both layers of the acrylic plinth but have Teflon spacers in-between which help isolate the two slabs.

The turntable motor sits in a special foam gasket on the lower plinth and

**RIGHT:** An AC motor drives the M8xTT's 10kg alloy platter via a round-section belt, with electronic speed selection provided [top left]. The partnering 10in tonearm, with Plexiglass bearing yoke, is a new and heavyweight design

locates in a cut-out within the upper layer without making any physical contact. The supplied DC PSU connects directly to the motor unit and a clean sinewave is regenerated inside the assembly to run the motor, which is an AC type [see PM's Lab Report, p51]. A future upgrade option is in the pipeline, in the form of an outboard, higher specification linear DC PSU. Drive is transferred to the lower platter's edge via a precision-ground silicone belt.

Operation is simplicity itself, with a single switch on the motor pod starting and stopping the platter and selecting the speed. The switch button illuminates green on power-up, indicating that the deck is in standby mode. Short presses then toggle the setting between 33.3 or 45rpm, each with an indicative blue LED that flashes until the platter is up to speed, then illuminates steadily. A longer press returns the deck to standby mode and stops the platter.



The platter itself is a substantial affair, tipping the scales at 10kg. It consists of two layers of aluminium with aluminium inserts in-between, which recalls the M1's two-layer acrylic platter with its peripheral weights. Both top and bottom layers are damped with more TPE and a rather swish leather platter mat is supplied as standard.

An aluminium record puck weighing in at 315g presses the record into this mat.

The arm mounted on this deck is a 10in design and, while it bears a superficial resemblance to existing Pro-Ject tonearms, it is actually all-new for the M8xTT.

Most obvious is a large Plexiglass/acrylic bearing housing that is hand-polished and annealed. The armtube is tapered and precisely machined from a single piece, and is adjustable for azimuth. The armbase has a distinctly SME-like appearance and the whole arm mount can be slid backwards and forwards by 20mm when two large

*'The vocals were both uplifting and insightful'*



Allen bolts are loosened. Pro-Ject also suggests that a range of armbases will be available in due course to accommodate alternative arms.

## KEEPING TRACK

Two counterweights are provided that will balance cartridge bodyweights of between 6-20g, and both are TPE-damped and isolated from the threaded adjuster to minimise resonances. The setup is not calibrated, however, so a good stylus balance – perhaps Pro-Ject's £20 Measure it E – is a must for setting tracking force. Bias is applied by the thread and weight system, and a support rod for the thread is fitted to the bearing housing.

The M8xTT's arm features a standard 5-pin output socket and requires the connection of a short flying lead from the termination box located on the lower plinth during assembly. This junction box offers outputs in both balanced XLR and

unbalanced RCA formats, plus a ground terminal. Fit and finish of the turntable is nothing short of outstanding but, when setting up your cartridge, be aware that the headshell lacks sufficient offset angle so you'll need to rotate your MM or MC slightly inwards.

## A VIEW TO A THRILL

With the deck set up and my Clearaudio MC Essence pick-up [HFN Aug '17] installed, I was reminded of a quip made by editor PM when I arrived to collect it. He had mused whether it would sound quite as solid yet transparent as it looks. It turns out that he was spot on. The M8xTT presents a beautifully open window onto the performance, but it achieves this in a commandingly authoritative manner. The old M1 was always a little soft at the low end; in this respect, Musical Fidelity's new model couldn't be more different.

## MUSICAL FIDELITY M1

'The Musical Fidelity M1 is a head-turner' [HFN Mar '04], and the new M8xTT certainly has no less stop-you-in-your-tracks appeal. But while that inaugural deck established the industrial design that would be copied some 20 years later, there are fundamental differences in their respective engineering. Most obviously the M1 featured a two-piece acrylic platter, each 'disc' some 30mm-thick, sandwiching eight cylindrical spacer weights that brought the total rotating mass to 5.7kg. The ~70mm deep platter allowed the use of a long, inverted bearing shaft measuring 60x13mm with a spiral 'keeper' groove machined into its surface. However, while the platter was about half the weight of today's all-alloy solution, start-up time was a lethargic 25 seconds thanks, in part, to the low-torque DC motor (with ±3% fine speed control). And the arm? That was SME's then-new M2 – available in 9-12in lengths and equipped with a detachable headshell, it was described at the time as 'a 3009 for the 21st century'. And the sound? 'Tactile and colourful!' PM



**LEFT:** Topped by a leather mat, the two-piece alloy platter is bonded via a series of peripheral metal cylinders – both 'discs' are damped with a thick inset ring of TPE polymer. There is no suspension but both acrylic chassis are supported on four huge, TPE-damped feet

In general terms, the M8xTT puts you at the heart of the action. Some turntables effectively seem to seat you in the 'upper circle' of a performance and spread the music out wide and into the distance behind the loudspeakers. The M8xTT instead places you front and centre in the stalls, and it draws

performers out into your listening room right in front of you in a manner that is quite uncanny on occasion.

But let's return to that solid guiding hand for a moment. One of my tried and trusted tests for low-end impact has long been the introduction to the title track of The Eagles' *Long Road Out Of Eden* LP [Universal 0602517546950], where a bell tolls in the distance. Reproducing the bell is easy and so is placing it in the back of the soundstage. Adding a proper sense of weight to what is actually a fairly quiet background effect is trickier, but the M8xTT made the task seem effortless.

When called upon to recreate the same effect in a main performance, the M8xTT also rose to the challenge. The drum strikes on Nanci Griffiths' 'Late Night Grande Hotel' [MCA MCST 1566] were reproduced with a snappy precision, but also a fine sense of atmosphere as the hint of echo after each beat remained. The weighty piano during the song's intro was just as well defined, and Miss Griffiths' vocals came across as heartfelt and emotive.

## LIGHT TOUCH

Fortunately, this was in no way due to any sense of overblown 'bloom' at the low end. In bass terms generally, the M8xTT is detailed and taut, with a fluidity to its upper bass that is particularly pleasing. The offbeat bassline to Bob Marley's 'Waiting In Vain' [Legend: The Best Of Bob Marley And The Wailers; Island Records BMW1] skipped along with a lightness of touch and separation of each note that seemed

## MUSICAL FIDELITY M8xTT

While the M8xTT's architectural DNA can clearly be traced back to the M1 [boxout, p49], including its retention of an inverted bearing, this latest version benefits from improved tolerances and materials. Notably, the 'joined platters' are alloy here, not acrylic, taking the rotating mass to 10kg while the bearing point is now ceramic rather than hardened steel. The upshot is a very low -71.5dB bearing rumble, reduced still further to a spectacular -73.5dB when measured through-the-groove with the record weight in place (20Hz-20kHz, DIN-B wtd re. 1kHz/5cm/sec). The undersized platter spindle assists in reducing the direct transmission of bearing noise into the vinyl LP substrate, ensuring one of the 'quietest' platters of any deck tested in *HFN*. Start-up time is a leisurely 7.8secs and the (absolute) speed error is a minimal -0.05%, however, and despite the original DC motor being replaced by a synchronous AC type here, the M8xTT suffers from a low-rate drift that contributes to a high (by the standards of its own Pro-Ject decks) 0.22% peak wow [see Graph 1, below].

The partnering 10in tonearm is very substantial indeed, its chromed and tapered tube terminated in a large, fixed headshell (the cartridge mounting slots achieve the correct offset angle even if the 'shell itself looks too 'straight'). Effective mass is a very high 18-19g so low compliance MCs are *de rigueur*. The massive acrylic yoke surrounding the bearing proper successfully diffuses any very low frequency tube modes, so there is 'energy' from 20-80Hz on the CSD waterfall but no distinct resonances. Instead, there is a (harmonic) mode at 140Hz and a higher-Q bending at 810Hz associated with the headshell platform [see Graph 2]. Bearing play is imperceptible and friction <10mg. PM



**ABOVE:** A DIN-terminated audio cable plugs into the base of the tonearm, serving a terminal box that offers both RCA and balanced XLR outputs (the latter for MCs only). An outboard 'wall wart' DC PSU feeds directly into the AC motor housing

at odds with the large, heavyweight turntable sitting on my rack.

This sense of musical control extends up through the midband, where the M8xTT displays impressive skills in terms of performer and instrumental placement. No, it doesn't quite have the image width of a Michell Orbe or the front-to-back stage depth of an SME Model 12 Mk2 [*HFN* Jan '23], but few turntables do. What it does have is a knack of ensuring individual elements of a track are kept clear in their own space. You might find yourself occasionally picking up on something within a piece and wondering if you'd noticed it before.

### SILKY SMOOTH

In the top end, Musical Fidelity's turntable is clean, silky and open. The tonearm worked superbly with my Clearaudio MC Essence cartridge, playing to its strengths of insight and clarity but without undue hardness or 'spit'. This meant crisp yet smooth cymbals and percussion, and stringed instruments imbued with a sense of realism, but no screech or discomfort. The potential to use the M8xTT with other tonearms is appealing, and I can think of a few that I would be interested to try. That said, I have a suspicion that any swap would also serve to illustrate that MF's in-house 10in tonearm really is something of a star, and well matched to the rest of the design.

While the M8xTT generally beguiles in terms of rhythm, impact and its ability to unravel complex melodies, some of the most memorable sessions I had with this deck involved material that was a lot simpler. The track 'Anyway' from

Dutch singer Elles Springs' *Reveal* album [Vertere Records VLR-001-ELLES] features nothing more than vocals, acoustic/slide guitars and acoustic bass, but the rendition offered by Musical Fidelity's new turntable was both uplifting and insightful. Springs' soft, airy vocals sounded lifelike as they projected from my loudspeakers, while the acoustic guitar, gently played in the background by Caroline Kamp, showed plenty of subtle detail.

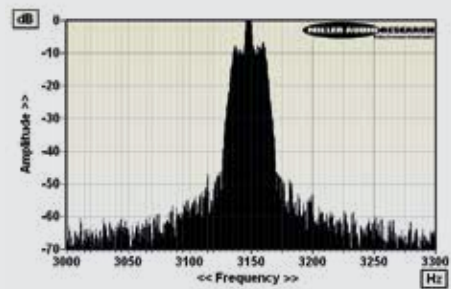
### RIB-TICKLING

And the acoustic bass? Well, that was truly vibrant. Each string pluck was vivid, with the rich and fulsome tone that makes the instrument such a joy to behold. However, while appreciating this, I was also aware that those chunky bass notes were reaching me as much through my ribcage as my ears. There really is nothing quite like both hearing and *feeling* a performance like this, which is where the M8xTT acquires itself with architectural style. ☺

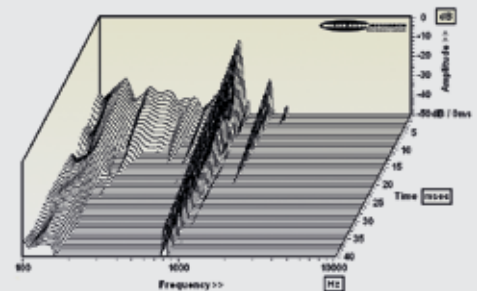
### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

The Musical Fidelity M8xTT is a masterclass in taking a classic design and bringing it right up to date. While physically and sonically reminiscent of its forebear [see boxout, p49], the M8xTT has been raised up by Pro-Ject's turntable designers – and there's the promise of more to come with the upgraded PSU. Superbly built and very fine sounding, the M8xTT is a welcome touch of 'modern retro'.

Sound Quality: 86%



**ABOVE:** Wow and flutter re. 3150Hz tone at 5cm/sec (plotted ±150Hz, 5Hz per minor division)



**ABOVE:** Cumulative tonearm resonant decay spectrum, illustrating various bearing, pillar and 'tube' vibration modes spanning 100Hz-10kHz over 40msec

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Turntable speed error at 33.33rpm	33.32rpm (-0.05%)
Time to audible stabilisation	7.8sec
Peak Wow/Flutter	0.22% / 0.05%
Rumble (silent groove, DIN B wtd)	-73.5dB
Rumble (through bearing, DIN B wtd)	-71.5dB
Hum & Noise (unwtd, rel. to 5cm/sec)	-62.5dB
Power Consumption	6-12W (1W standby)
Dimensions (WHD, with lid) / Weight	533x245x413mm / 31.5kg