

Reloop Turn5

More than just another wannabe Technics DJ deck, this affordable direct-drive turntable shows attention to detail in both design and build – making it great value for money
Review: **David Price** Lab: **Paul Miller**

Vinyl is now well and truly out of the doldrums, and direct-drive decks such as Technics' classic SL-1200, at one time derided, have become cool again. Dismissed by sniffy audiophiles as 'just a DJ deck', once the hi-fi tweekers started modifying the SL-1200 with better tonearms, mats and feet, we saw just how good it could sound. At its heart was Matsushita's excellent quartz crystal-referenced direct-drive motor, which gave great speed stability. This, along with Japanese battleship build, made it a redoubtable performer.

When the vinyl revival kicked in, the SL-1200 was back in fashion and spawned a wave of imitators. Sadly many of these Technics lookalikes bore only a superficial similarity to the original – the quality was often dire, as was the sound... Technics own new wave of direct-drive decks [HFN Jun '16, Nov '17 and Jun '18] are quite another matter, of course!

ROCK SOLID

So it was with no small degree of caution that I unpacked the £650 Reloop Turn5. Its aesthetic design is surely inspired by the Technics LP spinners of yore, but as I pulled the turntable out of its packaging, I couldn't help but be impressed by the general solidity, quality and attention to detail shown. True, it's not as well built as an SL-1200, but neither is it a pale imitation. Just by lifting it up, tapping it and touching it, you can tell that the company has done a solid job of making a very decent turntable for the money.

Interestingly, the variable pitch facility sported by the SL-1200 is absent here, which means your budding DJ offspring cannot whisk it up to their bedrooms – or down to the school disco – to be Kanye West on the decks for a day. In practice the Turn5 is that rarest of things, an old school

RIGHT: Thick rubber mat brings the total platter weight to 1.8kg – the quartz-locked direct-drive motor's claimed 0.44Nm torque bringing it to speed in under one second. All three (33.3, 45 and 78rpm) speeds are at the touch of a button

hi-fi direct-drive deck like they used to make in the 1970s.

Described by importer Henley Audio as a 'hi-fi grade direct-drive turntable that doesn't break the bank', for once the marketing hype is right. The 458x162x368mm (whd) plinth is sturdier than expected at 12.8kg and well finished in charcoal black. Neither does the gold-coloured, aluminium diecast platter ring like a bell thanks to the substantial rubber layer on its underside. This 1.8kg platter slots over the spindle above the main bearing and motor, as per all direct-drives, and the brushless DC motor spins the platter at 33.3, 45 and 78rpm, all verified by the bright white LED strobe on its outer rim.

However, and despite that lightning-fast start-up time and superb claimed 0.01% wow and flutter, the motor seems a good

deal less torque than that fitted to my vintage SL-1200 deck. The application of a carbon fibre record cleaning brush with any force slows the platter down noticeably [see PM's Lab Report, p81].

SLICK OPERATOR

Naturally the Turn5 sports a Technics-lookalike tonearm, this statically balanced

S-shape design looking way better than many others around. Actually I was quite impressed by the overall slickness of its operation, for all the adjustments work as they should, with a fair degree of precision, and

in a similar way to the SL-1200. The alloy arm tube is nicely finished in satin black for a purposeful look, and there's subtle gold anodised detailing on some minor parts. One particular attraction is the inclusion of an Ortofon 2M Red MM cartridge on

'Taut, tight and sinewy, 'Sultans Of Swing' was a pleasure to play'



its detachable headshell, which at £95 bought separately, is better than the sort of thing you'd expect to see bundled with a deck of this price. And if you want to try alternatives, the arm's azimuth, VTA and other adjustments make this a doddle.

The rest of the deck is beyond criticism at the price – the AC mains socket is easy to reach at the back of the deck and the gold-plated RCA phono outputs are quality items, as is the supplied interconnect. The feet offer some degree of isolation and the lid is neat, but turntables – in my experience – tend to sound better with them off. Overall, the deck proved very easy to set up, not least because there's no belt and inner platter to fiddle with, and the cartridge is pre-aligned.

Were this mine, I would soon start to tweak it by fitting a lighter, stiffer magnesium headshell, better cartridge wires and a superior arm lead, as well as experimenting with aftermarket platter mats. This means that – although the

supplied bits are decent for the price – there is still scope for enthusiasts to upgrade their pride and joy.

GRACE NOTES

Those who have lived with belt-drive turntables all their lives can sometimes find the sound of direct drives to be faster and sharper-sounding, thanks to the improved speed stability that typically comes with the territory. Yet it's often a bittersweet pill, because lesser examples of the breed can fall short when it comes to tonal accuracy and long-term listenability.

This holds particularly true when it comes to budget direct-drive decks, many suffering from a screechy and/or brittle upper mid caused by poor vibration isolation and resonant platters and/or tonearms. So it was a relief to find the Reloop Turn5 to be smoother sounding than expected and an

ABOVE: A built-in strobe light provides instant reassurance that the deck is up to speed while the detachable headshell allows alternative MM and MC pick-ups to be sampled with ease

agreeable performer in most respects. By way of tribute to its disco DNA, Earth, Wind & Fire's 'Fantasy' [from *The Best Of Earth, Wind & Fire*; CBS/Sony 25AP 1190] was first to hit the platter and I was rewarded with a clean, stable sound with no nasty coloration in the audio band.

This is a pretty bright track as it stands, but the Turn5/Ortofon combination showed grace under pressure. Although tonally a little livelier than rival belt-drive designs, this wasn't an altogether unpleasant sensation and the classy

Ortofon cartridge kept things honest. The band's trademark soaring falsetto harmonies sounded expressive and detailed, yet never grated as they so often can when heard via a lesser vinyl front-end.

I was struck by the super-quick transients – especially the way the deck handled the hi-hat cymbals and fast-struck rhythm guitar, which seemed to machine-gun the song along.

This classic funk band was legendary for its 'electric' live concerts, and this vinyl spinner was able to impart much of that power and passion. Indeed it proved a veritable festival of the senses, with a taut and tuneful bass, oodles of information across the midband and zippy percussion work from bottom to top.

Pitch stability was excellent – something that really showed in the bass, which

CUE. LISTEN. RELOOP

Based in Münster, Germany, Reloop has been making DJ and pro audio equipment since 1996. Twenty years later, it formed a hi-fi division, Reloop HiFi. The company has an in-house R&D team that, 'selects manufacturing partners from around the world to deliver the products we want at an affordable price'. [This would include the versatile tonearm, inset here.] Although specialising in DJ turntables, controllers, mixers and other peripherals, Reloop now wants a share of the audiophile vinyl market. To this end, for the UK it has partnered with Henley Audio – famous for bringing Pro-Ject to this country – to offer 'a solution brand' selling feature-driven products at keen prices. Typical customers are 'people who want three speeds, stylish looks, switchable headshells and premium performance from an affordable package', a company spokesman told *Hi-Fi News*. The Turn5 is described as its purist model; Turn3 was the deck that launched the brand, and sported semi-automatic operation and USB recording, while Turn2 is the stripped-down, entry-level model.



TURNTABLE PACKAGE



ABOVE: No outboard 'wall-wart' here, but a figure-8 AC mains inlet and regulated multi-voltage PSU built inside the deck. RCA outs are accompanied by a ground post

lacked the soft-focus sound of your average budget belt-drive. The absence of bottom end overhang gave any type of music I chose to play welcome extra impetus. Even Dire Straits' 'Sultans Of Swing' [from *Dire Straits*; Vertigo 9102 021] seemed to motor along faster than I've heard it on most turntables. This classic track was infused with adrenaline, as if it had downed a bottle of Monster Energy drink, the band – appropriately – sounding like a thrashy yet precise pub rock outfit than a laid-back prog rock group.

CLASSY PACKAGE

Taut, tight and sinewy, 'Sultans' was a pleasure to play – although I couldn't help noticing a slight flattening of outright dynamics. In short, this turntable tends to sit on musical accents somewhat. This is a double-edged sword in that while it compresses the music, making it sound bigger and fuller, it lacks that final two-tenths of dynamic articulation to really ram the musical point home. Still, most inexpensive decks are guilty in this respect.

It didn't impair my enjoyment of The Smiths' 'What Difference Does it Make?' [*The Smiths*, Rough Trade ROUGH 61], which is already a pretty compressed '80s indie rock recording. While the track is a million miles from audiophile territory, the Turn5 made a grand job of it, picking through the mix to showcase guitarist Johnny Marr's sublime riffs, and the brilliantly syncopated bass and drum work.

Soundstaging was decent if nothing special, similarly priced Regas and Pro-Jects making a finer fist of this in some ways. For example, '80s electropop classic 'Puppets' by Depeche Mode [from *Speak And Spell*; Mute STUMM 5] appeared a little vague. Although the recorded acoustic was wide enough, there was some imprecision

in terms of image location while depth perspective was only so-so. The lead vocals were articulated confidently across the centre of the soundstage, but behind them things fell away a tad too quickly.

Still, listening to the Turn5, one has to pinch oneself to remember that it is, after all, just one step up from an entry-level deck. It's so good for the money that you inevitably start to criticise it for not being as good as the EISA Award-winning Technics SL-1200GR [*HFN* Nov '17], forgetting the latter costs twice the price. The Turn5 has a fundamental rightness to its sound that makes spinning LPs fun. Its problem is that it's good enough to signpost its own failings, where lesser budget decks are so poor in every respect that nothing stands out.

For example, many belt-drives at this price have such poor overall stability that you can't hear how bad their tonearms are, or the bundled cartridges obfuscate everything. Not so here – the Turn5 is a classy package that connects the listener straight to the music. Everything flows from its clock-like speed stability (low wow, at least), giving a solid base to enjoy its musical brio. 📉

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Don't confuse the Reloop Turn5 with lesser Technics DJ deck clones, for this is a decent performer in its own right. The great thing is that it survives close scrutiny, with every part from the feet to that solid plinth, the direct-drive motor, platter and tonearm all contributing to an impressive whole. Do not dismiss this new brand – it's providing a worthy alternative to conventional belt-drive rivals.

Sound Quality: 80%



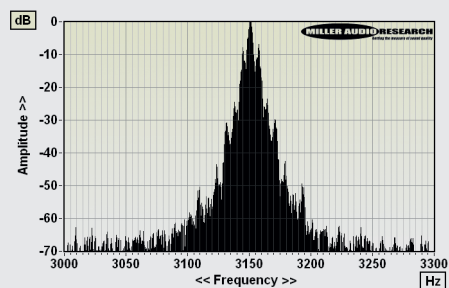
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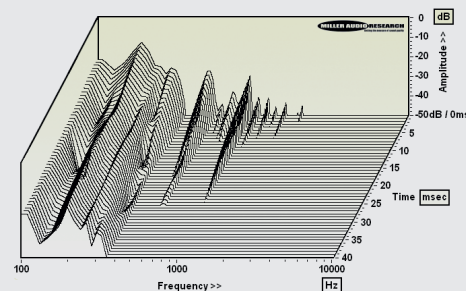
The promise of super-slick start-up times and excellent absolute speed accuracy are met in this new direct-drive design but the claim of '0.01% wow and flutter' is not. Reloop adds the caveat 'impact of stylus, record and tonearm not taken into account' but, as users will obviously be listening via all three of these appendages, Reloop's figure is evidently not reflective of real-world performance. In practice while drift and low-rate speed variations (wow) are low, our sample of the Turn5 suffered substantial flutter sidebands [see Graph 1], visible at $\pm 6\text{Hz}$, $\pm 12\text{Hz}$ and $\pm 24\text{Hz}$. The peak-wtd W&F is a high 0.25%, with 0.21% accounted for by these higher-rate speed fluctuations.

Noise, in the form of rumble from the direct-coupled 16-pole 3-phase motor, is very well isolated here, so much so that Reloop's '60dB DIN-B wtd S/N ratio' is readily exceeded by the very fine 73.2dB through-groove performance (DIN-B wtd, re. 1kHz/5cm/sec) recorded here. The damping action of the 5mm-thick rubber mat is also told in the through-spindle rumble figure which is slightly poorer – though still excellent – at 71.0dB.

The partnering S-shaped tonearm is something of a heavyweight, but the effective mass is closer to 20g than the rated 30g (still excessive for the Ortofon 2M Red). Friction is moderate at $\sim 20\text{mg}$ in both planes but play is minimal and the degree of adjustment very useful. Like most S-shaped arms, this shows a complex set of resonances with a main mode just below 100Hz and harmonics, bending and twisting modes all centred around a very broad and slowly dissipating cluster at 195Hz and 260Hz [see Graph 2, below]. The higher-Q modes at 520Hz and 970Hz are short-lived and probably linked to the headshell. PM



ABOVE: Wow and flutter re. 3150Hz tone at 5cm/sec (plotted $\pm 150\text{Hz}$, 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	33.34rpm (+0.03%)
Time to audible stabilisation	~ 1 second
Peak Wow/Flutter	0.04% / 0.21%
Rumble (silent groove, DIN B wtd)	-73.2dB
Rumble (through bearing, DIN B wtd)	-71.0dB
Hum & Noise (unwtd, rel. to 5cm/sec)	-58.5dB
Power Consumption	6-16W (5W idle)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	458x162x368mm / 12.8kg