

Pro-ject 1 Xpression Carbon UKX | Turntable | £575

Music with plenty of Xpression

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Pro-ject is best known for its class-leading budget turntables. It has dominated that market for more years than we care to remember, and continues to do so. So successful has the company been in this respect, it's easy to forget it makes some mighty fine products at more ambitious prices too. You can count this latest version of the long-running 1 Xpression among them.

Carbon footprint

The Carbon in the product's name refers to the material used in the supplied arm. It's unusual to find carbon-fibre arms, even at far higher prices, so it's clear Pro-ject is trying hard to offer something special for the price.

There's more to a good arm than just tube material. We're pleased to report the one fitted to the 1 Xpression is a substantially engineered unit with smooth, play-free bearings and a nice solid feel. You'll find an Ortofon 2M Silver cartridge attached to the arm: it's a modified version of the company's much-admired 2M Red moving-magnet, which bodes well.

Pop the cork

The platter on the UKX is acrylic, changed from the composite steel/thermo plastic elastomer one used on the standard version. While it's perfectly fine to place a record directly on the acrylic, Pro-ject also supplies both cork and felt mats too. Each option changes the sonic presentation a little, with the final choice coming down to personal taste and system matching as much as anything else. Just remember to adjust the arm height to compensate for the varying thickness of the mats. We preferred

the direct acrylic option for its extra clarity. Set-up is relatively simple, though newcomers to turntables may find attaching the bias weight a little fiddly. The rest of it is straightforward: add the platter, fit the belt, and attach the counter and bias weights to the arm. Once up and running we're impressed with what we hear. We use two systems: one based around the Arcam A19 amplifier and B&W 685s, and the other our reference Bryston /ATC set-up. Regardless of partnering kit, it's clear this Pro-ject is a great-sounding deck.

Rapid ear movement

It's the sonic clarity that stands out first. Listening to R.E.M.'s *Automatic for the People* we're taken with the high level of detail. This deck digs deeply, and defines notes with class-leading precision. It's a fast, controlled sound that makes tracking low-level instrumental strands easy. The presentation is composed too, staying stable even when things get busy.

Tonally, things are nicely balanced with no part of the frequency range dominating. The Ortofon 2M Silver cartridge comes across as a refined and articulate performer, and has no trouble working into any of the phono stages we tried.

Move onto Orff's *Carmina Burana* and the Pro-ject continues to impress with wide-ranging dynamics and a decent amount of punch. There's also a pleasing

Self-improvement

Improvements on this version includes a better motor and new power supply - the aim being to improve speed stability and reduce any unwanted mechanical energy.

sense of scale and a nicely-layered sound stage - this is a deck that majors on analysis. We can't think of a rival that tells us as much about a recording. However, compared to the likes of Rega's RP3 it can sound a touch clinical, downplaying the rhythmic and forceful aspects of the music a little. This never goes too far though, with the Pro-ject remaining an entertaining listen regardless of genre.

Package of pleasure

We still think the 1 Xpression Carbon UKX is a terrific package for the price. It's balanced and insightful, rivalling the class leaders in overall ability. It's worth serious consideration if you love the idea of spinning some of your favourite vinyl.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR High level of resolution; articulate sound; good cartridge; nice presentation

AGAINST Some rivals sound more enthusiastic

VERDICT Clearly one of the class leaders. Nothing else at this price digs up as much detail or delivers it with such precision

Needs to beat

Rega RP3/Elys 2
£550 ★★★★★

The current class champion remains an excellent choice



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