



TURNTABLES, ARMS & CARTRIDGES

SME Model 12 MK2 Turntable

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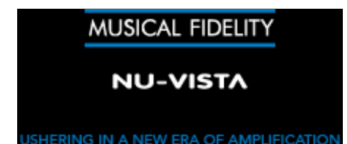
SME's flagship Model 60 turntable was more than an aspirational torch-bearer for the UK brand – it set the tone for revisions that will trickle down through the entire range

Every hi-fi era has its buzzwords, and while variations on the theme of 'digital' and 'high-res' have permeated our collective consciousness over the past few decades, the 2020s have so far proved thick with references to 'trickle-down technology'. Brands have always launched flagship products to showcase technologies that eventually 'trickle-down' to middle and entry-level ranges, but nowadays there's almost an expectation that this osmosis of tech will happen swiftly, and wholesale.

Following the launch of SME's fabulous Model 60 turntable [*HFN* Jul '22] the 'trickle down' has begun within six months, across the range, and debuts in the replacement for its Model 12A [*HFN* Sep '19]. The unveiling of the unannounced, non-press-released £10,475 Model 12 MK2 turntable has been an exercise in stealth, but the first production sample is here and revealed exclusively on these pages.

Feet Of Engineering

ortofon
accuracy in sound



The 'A' in the name is also no more – previously this signified the deck was complete with arm, but as this is now the only way to buy a MK2, the 'A' is superfluous. The changes are not immediately obvious as the Model 12 is still available in Black, Dark Blue and Grey and is still based on a curvaceous main chassis that sits on four adjustable feet. Look closely, though, and you'll notice one foot appears to be in a slightly different position. First clue...

Above the base of the chassis resides the same three-pronged subchassis as the older model, which supports the main bearing. On a longer limb is the arm mounting plate. The subchassis is isolated from the main chassis by polymer studs, but there is no 'give' in SME's arrangement – it all feels pleasingly solid.



Viewed from above, the Model 12 MK2 is all but indistinguishable from the Model 12A. It features the same 4.6kg damped alloy platter with SME's diamond-turned surface, plus screw-down record clamp and outrigger arm board

The main bearing spindle is made from high chrome tool steel, 19mm in diameter and highly polished. This spins on sintered bronze bushes in a sealed housing and supports the belt-driven sub-platter. The main platter is still a machined aluminium item weighing in at 4.6kg, and topped by a layer of SME's 'isodamp' material that has been diamond cut and scrolled for best contact with the record. A screw-down clamp ensures even contact across the entire playing surface.

AC (not) DC

So far, so familiar then, but here's where things start to change. The old Model 12 had only one power supply/controller unit for its DC motor but the MK2 has two power supply enclosures, clearly modelled on those of the Model 60, with which it shares the new AC motor. This drive is custom-made to SME's specification, as opposed to the old DC unit, which the manufacturer used to strip down and modify in-house.

It's still mounted into the chassis via a series of rubber O-rings, providing a deal of isolation, but the motor is physically much larger – hence that re-located foot. As per the Model 60, one of the PSU boxes houses the mains transformer and DC output which, in turn, feeds the second enclosure, which provides the synthesised AC feed to the motor – 33.3rpm and 45rpm only for the MK2. A power switch on the rear of the transformer box illuminates the controller's last-used speed LED on power-up. You then start and stop the deck using the power switch on the controller, while speed change is achieved by pressing the large central knob. This rotary encoder is also used to fine-tune the speeds if required, and then store the new settings.

Exquisite Finish

The Model 12 MK2 is supplied pre-fitted with SME's Model 309 tonearm. Still looking fresh, it's based around a machined magnesium arm, with constrained layer damping, and has a detachable magnesium headshell. For this deck, internal wiring is provided by SME's sister company, Crystal Cable, and terminates to RCA phono sockets on the rear of the main plinth.

Fit and finish of the turntable is exquisite, setup is easy and it's a joy to use with very swift start-up and beautifully damped arm cueing. However, do watch out when playing 7in singles, because the screw-down clamp is sufficiently large that the arm just makes contact when in the runout groove, giving rise to some alarming noises! If you play a lot of 45s, I'd advise being swift with the cueing lever as the music ends, or simply omit the clamp.



Sibling Rivalry

Fitted with a Clearaudio MC Essence cartridge [*HFN* Aug '17] and used with my Yamaha C-5000/M-5000 amps [*HFN* Aug '20], the influence of SME's flagship Model 60 was clear to hear. It transpires the Model 12 MK2 has the same delicious sense of insight and clarity as its biggest brother, and still one of the best front-to-back soundstage scales of any deck at the price. It immerses you in music and brings the performers into your listening area.