



The Inspire Elevation turntable is all about mass. **Ed Selley** gets to grips with the multi-layered deck that takes vinyl replay to new heights

Moving on up



IN-DEPTH INSPIRE HI-FI ELEVATION TURNTABLE PACKAGE £3,140



even that the functions a turntable must perform successfully are rather set in stone, the number of different approaches taken to carrying them out are impressive. Inspire Hi-fi is very aware of this as the company's portfolio includes, belt, direct and idler drive turntables and a variety of construction techniques, all with the common aim of great vinyl replay

The latest arrival in this range is the Elevation. This unsuspended deck combines birch ply and acetyl to be as inert as possible. The birch ply forms the plinth and is built up over multiple layers to produce a thick teardrop-shaped base that houses the motor, bearing and arm board. Various options are available to then veneer the plinth should you desire.

This plinth is then combined with a hefty 50mm-thick acetyl platter. This is a heavyweight piece of engineering in its own right and furthers the isolation of the turntable. The platter is interesting in that it doesn't have a conventional spindle. It attaches to the sub platter connected to the motor via a lip on the underside – a system that works well and makes the

The Inspire Elevation is usefully forgiving of poorer-quality vinyl pressings

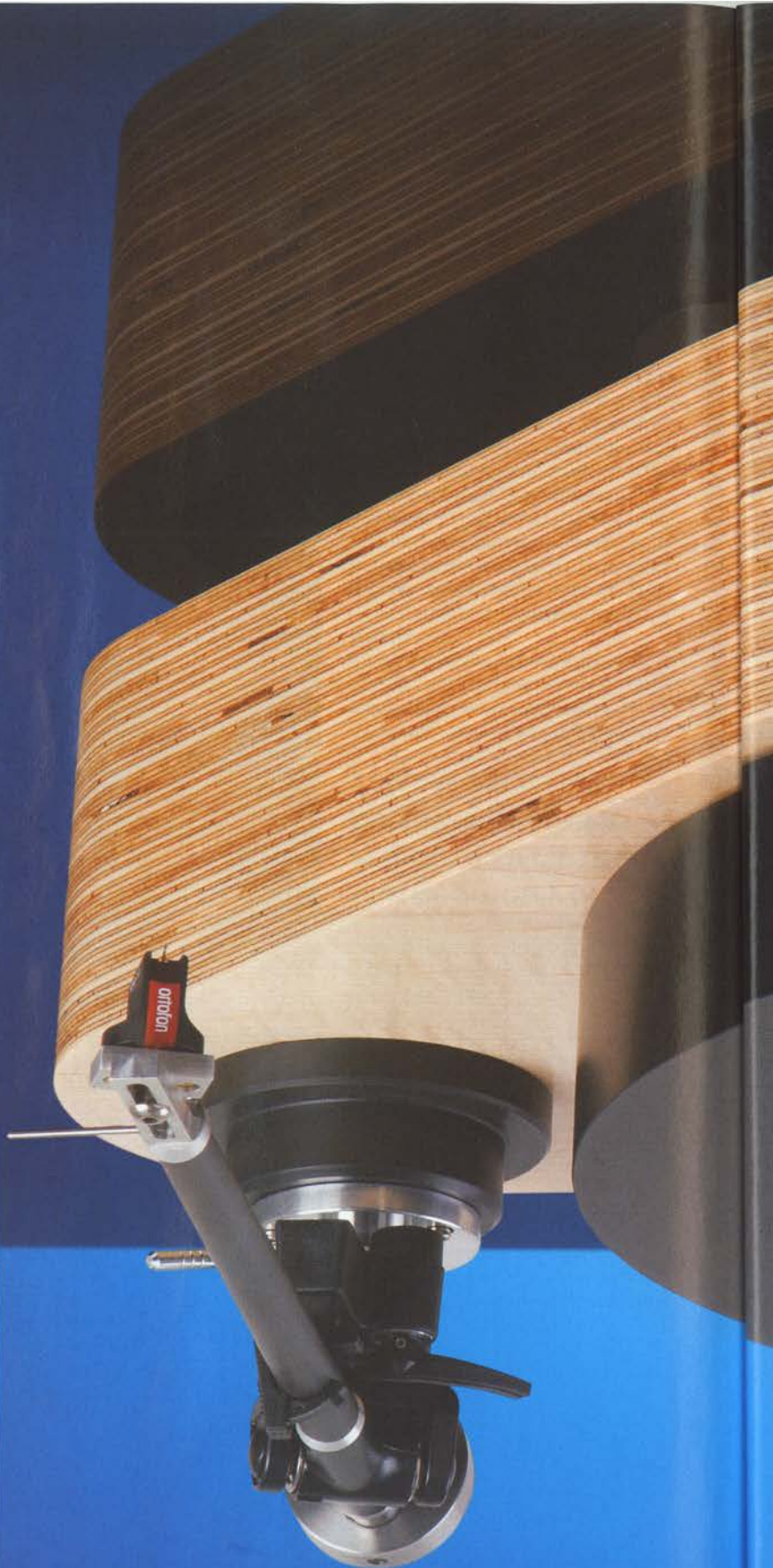
platter admirably easy to line up. The means of actually citing a record is done via a metal insert that drops into an indentation on the top of the platter. With it in, you have a spindle in the centre of the platter on axis with the bearing but not extending anywhere near it. This is then topped off by an unthreaded puck-type clamp.

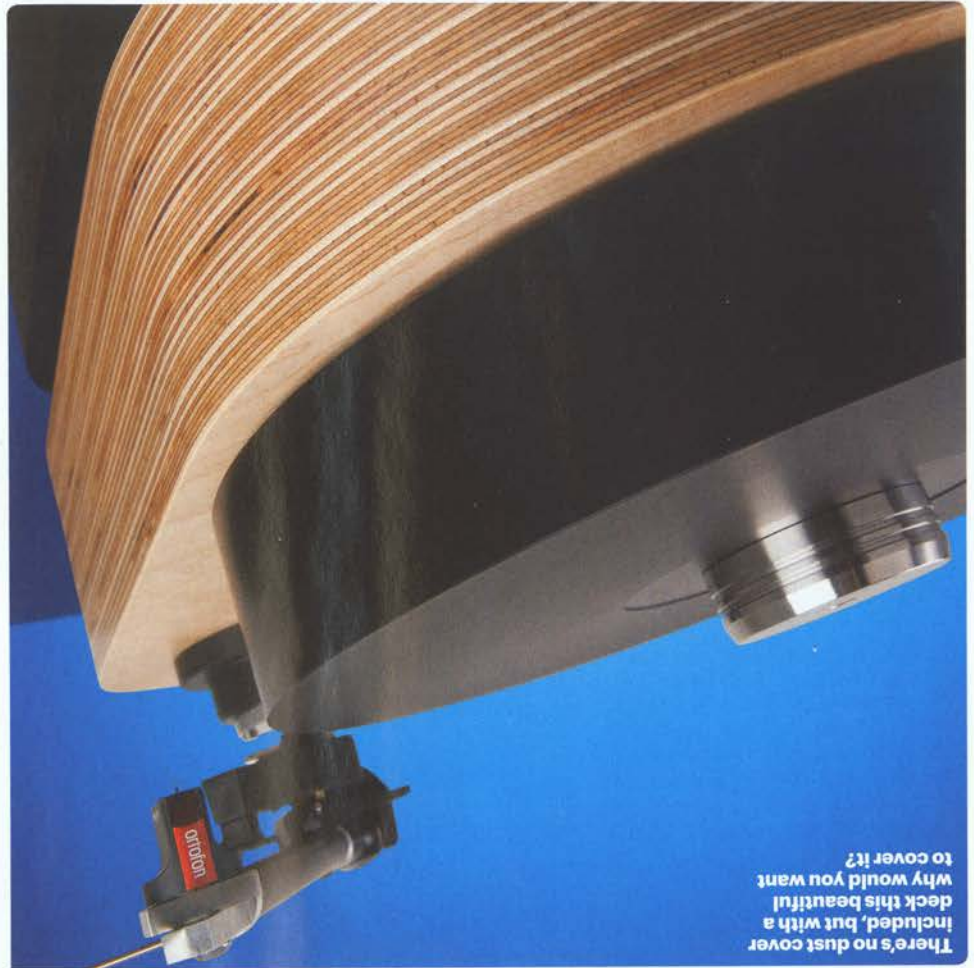
Ups and downs

The power for the Elevation is supplied by a Pro-Ject Speed Box DS Strobe. This is an offboard AC power supply that allows for electronic speed control between 33 and 45rpm and fine adjustment of both speeds via the front panel. The connectivity is a little curious as there is a slim low-voltage cable that runs from the mains to the Speed Box and then a hefty IEC cable supplying the Elevation, but electronic speed control is a useful feature as is fine speed adjustment.

To make best use of the adjustment, the Strobe (as the name suggests) is able to power a supplied strobe attachment to check the speed of the platter. This can then be used to check a calibrated disc that Inspire supplies

▶ DETAILS
PRODUCT Inspire Hi-fi Elevation
ORIGIN UK/Czech Republic (PSU only)
TYPE Belt-drive turntable
WEIGHT 12kg
DIMENSIONS (WXHD) 430 x 300 x 200mm
FEATURES
 • Birch ply laminated plinth
 • Acetyl platter
 • External AC power supply with 33 & 45rpm speed control
 • Strobe attachment supplied
DISTRIBUTOR Inspire Hi-fi
TELEPHONE 01246 268887
WEBSITE inspirehifi.co.uk





There's no dust cover included, but with a deck this beautiful why would you want to cover it?

with the deck. This is extremely useful, but the slight counter to this is that the motor in the Elevation does seem to be worked relatively hard to spin the platter. Power up the Elevation via the underside switch and the deck doesn't leap into life, but instead gently potters as it gathers pace gradually. Inspire recommends starting the deck and then swapping records or changing sides on the fly rather than stopping and starting it, which works well enough.

The review sample of the Elevation is built for Rega arm geometry, but Inspire says that the specific geometry of any 9in arm can be accommodated if you ask for it. The deck is available without an arm for £1,390 but Inspire also quotes prices with the Rega 202 and 303 arms and in the spec you see here with its own X100 Mk2 arm for £2,315. The X100 is Rega-derived (hence why it is sitting on a deck with this geometry), but substitutes a tapered carbon armtube with a metal headshell that adjusts alignment separately to the cartridge mounting. If you order the X100 with a cartridge, this is mounted and aligned to the headshell before being attached to the tube, which should ensure accurate setup. This being said, changing cartridges with it in place is not an especially tricky task either. For review, the sample arrives sporting an Ortofon Cadenza Red cartridge (£825).

Sound quality

As a finished article, the Elevation looks smart and well thought out. I personally wouldn't be rushing to veneer the plinth as the ply is a pleasant finish in its own right and gives the deck a slightly Nordic quality. Like most turntables of this type, the Elevation has no dust protection but the footprint is small enough that a number of covers will fit without issue. The build is also of sturdy in use.

Connected to a Chord Electronics Chordette Dual phono stage (HFC 373), Naim Supernait 2 and Neat Momentum 4i speakers, the Elevation reveals one aspect of its performance from the outset and by and large it is a very welcome one. With some high-mass turntables, the presentation can be a little dark with tremendous low-end drive but little in the way of top-end sparkle.

One of the closest matches is the Michell Gyrodec, £2,300 will buy you a full plinth Gyrodec with Technoarm and the cartridge options for both decks will be similar. The Inspire has an airiness and space to its presentation that is something the Gyrodec can't manage, but it hits back with a sense of timing that is beyond even the very capable Inspire. One advantage that the Michell has over the Inspire is that it can work with almost any 9in arm, thanks to the swappable arm boards which lends it a little more flexibility. Nevertheless, the X100 Mk2 arm fitted to the Inspire is easier to set up than the Technoarm and does offer very high performance.



The Elevation manages to neatly side step this and sounds extremely open and airy. The result is a deck that never hides the impressive heft it can demonstrate, but ensures that it never becomes the dominating feature. This means that with the Elevation you get the sort of joyous *The Desired Effect* by Brandon Flowers, it is able to deliver the soaring vocals and unashamedly retro arrangements with real impact while underpinning them with bass that is deep, well defined and impressively fast. The combined effect is a turntable that sounds big and confident, but without tipping over into sterility let alone dullness. When you switch to something more determinedly serious like *Big TV* by The White Lies, it never truly stops wanting to find the joy in the music, but for me at least this is never unduly distracting.

Behind this liveliness, the Elevation largely gets the fundamentals right. Tonality is consistently believable and the handling of voices in particular is extremely good. Even when there is a lot happening, it manages to make sense of the information and unpick it in such a way as to make for a performance that's easy to follow and appreciate. There is consistently good detail retrieval from all points of the

The geometry of any 9in arm can be accommodated if you ask for it

frequency response and this is presented in a way that never distracts from the overall presentation, but instead effectively augments it.

The soundstage is consistently big and spacious and – while there is sometimes the sense that it can be slightly left/right in nature, leaving the centre a little empty – it rarely distracts from the performance as a whole, although very small-scale recordings can find themselves sounding a little bigger than is really appropriate. Give the Elevation something big to work with, however, and there is no doubt that the deck can do justice to a full orchestra or similar without breaking into a sweat. The rendition of *Berlin Sumrise* by Fink and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra is a chance for the Inspire to deliver a truly vast presentation with commendable aplomb. As a further bonus, the Elevation is also usefully forgiving of poorer-quality pressings. That underlying

Does this represent the start of a family of high-mass designs or do you have your sights set elsewhere? We continue to set the bar high when it comes to high-performing products we feel cannot be matched by our competitors in terms of sound, aesthetics and cost, and all are hand-crafted to the highest specification. We have various new products in prototype and this will continue even after the current surge in turntable production ends as we strive to push the boundaries of analogue physics and sound without compromise.

Was the Elevation designed to be used with the X100 Mk2 tonearm? We designed the Elevation to be used with Rega arm geometry, which covers a wide range of options for tonearms from other manufacturers, which can fit and supply. Even with a low-cost Rega 202 arm it works superbly, but with higher-priced arms its performance increases and we think our X100 Mk2 is an exceptional arm that works well with the Elevation.

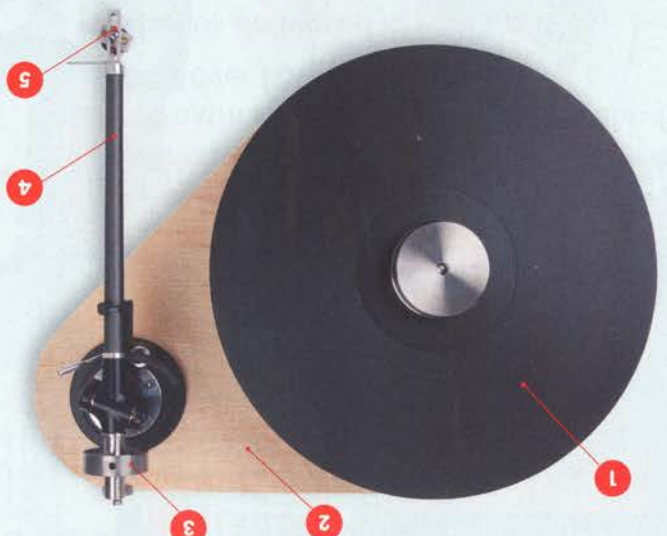
Why did you choose birch ply? It is well known that the strength built from layers of birch plywood is perfect for numerous acoustic applications. The mass we have within the Elevation and the immense strength it has forms the perfect platform for all the other parts.

ES: Where does the Elevation deck fit into the Inspire Hi-Fi range? **Ri:** As we manufacture with a wide range of materials including various types of metals, acrylics, woods, carbon fibre and more, we have built up an extensive knowledge of characteristics and applications of each material in terms of the sound produced, and the turntable body and platter are perfectly mass tuned. All our turntables have the correct combinations applied to them, so for example the Eclipse is a finely tuned product with combinations of metal and acrylics. It was 18 months in development and the use of birch ply in a dense format and also acetyl gives a smooth wide uncoloured soundstage, which leaves fine tuning down to choice of arm and cartridge.



Q&A
Robert Isherwood
Inspire Hi-Fi Ltd

- 1 Acetyl platter
- 2 Birch ply laminated plinth
- 3 Counterweight
- 4 X100 Mk2 tonearm
- 5 Orton Cadenza Red cartridge



CONNECTIONS

Conclusion
Picking out how the tonearm and the deck divide these roles and attributes isn't the easiest task in the world, but a series of tests with different cartridges (see boxout) seems to suggest that the liveliness that the Elevation demonstrates here is largely attributable to the arm that comes supplied with the deck being a commendably neutral performer. The vast array of arms that conform to Rega geometry means that if you want to keep the more matter-of-fact aspect of the deck unmodified, you probably won't have to look too far, but there is a lot to be said for the all-inspire pairing as a happy mix between accuracy and entertainment. The testing with other cartridges does suggest, though, that good (very good in fact) though the Orton is, much

of the performance of the Elevation can be unlocked by utilising less expensive cartridges. If the luxury of working out just how much you need to spend on a cartridge is the most onerous buying task ahead of you when choosing an Elevation, then it should be clear by now that this is a deeply impressive turntable. Inspire has taken good raw materials and sound design practise to produce a consistently capable turntable that works well with a huge variety of music and that should compliment a range of different systems extremely well.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★
LIKE: Open, involving and accurate sound. Solid build; good looks

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★
DISLIKE: No dust protection; not quite as accomplished with small-scale recordings

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★
WE SAY: A well thought-out and very potent deck with a real-world price tag

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★