

HIGH FIDELITY

RC's guide to the gear that gets the best out of your records. By Paul Rigby



NO-DISTRESS DIGITAL

AUDIO TECHNICA AT-LP120-USB

Two issues ago, I looked at turning your music collection digital with a £1,000 system built around a Technics SL1200 – the famous DJ deck. This month, here's a cheaper way to transfer your "trapped" analogue music to digital files, freeing them up for use on your computer, phone or iPod. This is a decent-quality, reasonably-priced option to do the job, and hi-fi specialists Audio Technica have achieved it within one self-contained unit.

Contained in a single box is a turntable, which superficially resembles a Technics SL1200 in looks and weight. It arrives with an Audio Technica ATP-2 cartridge that attaches to an S-shaped arm. A set of basic cables hang out of the rear to be used as a phono amp (to connect to an amplifier) or a line out connection (for a computer). A USB socket can also be found around the back. Other controls include a dual direction button, pitch control and speeds for 33, 45 and 78rpm.

The set-up of the turntable itself is straightforward. The plugging in and assembly took me around 15 minutes. Loading and installing the Audigy software, supplied on a CD, was similarly effortless. Testing was done, using the USB, via a desktop PC. In action, recording music was as simple as playing a piece of vinyl on the turntable and pressing the record button on the Audigy program. Once completed, the file can be saved in the Audigy format or exported as a MP3, Ogg Vorbis or WAV.

Sound quality, for the price and for a USB turntable, is very good – not great, certainly not audiophile standard, but it does the job and, for playback on an iPod or car stereo, it's ideal. Yes, as a source, you could easily find a better turntable with a superior DAC, better cables, a more fully featured software package and an overall better sound, but then you'd have to spend a lot more money and you would lose the compact, easy-to-use convenience of the Audio Technica system. In addition, the Audio-Technica trounces many other similarly priced or slightly cheaper automated systems out there which often resemble discarded Fisher Price Christmas presents from the 70s! In short, the Audio Technica USB kit is an ideal introduction to vinyl-based, USB recording offering good value for money.

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NICE RACK

HI-FI RACKS RECORD STORAGE £VARIOUS

Proper record storage is essential for the long term health of both vinyl and CDs. This new company utilises a hand-made product using top quality hardwoods without a sheet of veneer or MDF in sight. Based on a modular principle that can be mixed and matched, so you can expand as funds allow, the company offers three principal designs to suit: CDs (45 discs per shelf, £79), vinyl (248 discs per shelf, £99), and DVDs (45 DVDs per shelf, £79), in either oak or satin black. Size is optional because the company manufactures its own products.

Once assembled, in place and full of records, it is difficult to prevent an explosion of superlatives. Frankly, this is the best-quality record storage system I have seen to



date. Doubly so when you consider that it arrives flat packed. The quality of the wood used, it's finish, the chunky, unyielding nature of the connection bolts and supports, the straightforward assembly process and the unending sense of "rightness" when the solid shelving system is completed are all impressive. Not so much a storage facility, in fact, as quality furniture.

01572 756447 www.hifiracks.co.uk

GIZMO OF THE MONTH

BLUE HORIZON PRO LEVEL



Making sure your turntable is sited on a level surface is important. Even the slightest of slopes will induce distortion that will be noticeable via playback as the stylus is pulled against one or the other groove walls by gravity. In addition, of course, this problem will increase wear and tear on your turntable and LPs.

Hence, a suitable leveller is recommended and there's a fair few out there – a lot cheaper than this example from Blue Horizon. Why so expensive? Unlike most levellers that sit on the platter, the Pro Level clamps onto the spindle to provide a true reading via internally fitted spring loaded plungers, meaning that this level tool is extremely accurate. In use, the sensitive Pro Level is sensibly weighty (120gm, the weight of an average LP), with a high-vision orange background behind the bubble. It's also fast and highly responsive.