

Review of EAT C-Dur by Ken Kessler  
(Lab: Paul Miller), 07/2024 on :



# EAT C-Dur



Every product range has its sweet spot and the combination of EAT's C-Dur deck with C-Note tonearm and optional Jo No5 moving-coil pick-up makes it the 'plum' choice

Just below the mid-price point of European Audio Team's (EAT) nine-model range, the C-Dur belt-drive deck looks likely to identify a new price/performance benchmark. We have been flooded with decks at the £10,000-£12,000 mark to designate entry to the scary high-end, and companies such as MoFi, Thorens and Pro-Ject have numerous models from £500-£3000, but something was needed in between from, say, £3000 and £5000. At £3500 with arm, EAT's C-Dur – German for C major – fits the bill.

Shown on these pages is the C-Dur in its high-gloss plum (wooden) finish with the 10in C-Note straight carbon-fibre tonearm, also available with the Jo No5 moving-coil cartridge, all in for £4798. As noted in the box-out [p61], a variant with a black satin finish is offered too, while the future promises more. Whatever else may become available, this is one of the best-looking minimalist turntables I've seen, especially at the price.

## **All You Can Eat**

By minimalist, I'm referring to the layout or now-generic look that dates back a half-century to Rega's original Planar 2 and 3: an unadorned rectangular slab of Bauhaus utility, the minimum number of controls, no floppy suspension. But that does not preclude a luxurious presence, and the plum C-Dur looks like a million bucks, aided by the oversized 5.2kg, 13.5in platter which makes it seem more substantial.

Arriving in a crate, the C-Dur is packed with a detailed owner's manual which one might be tempted to ignore if a seasoned audiophile. That would be a mistake, especially when it comes to dealing with the arm's anti-skating arrangement, because little details demand one's attention. As an example, the rear of the deck has only a socket for the outboard 'wall wart' PSU – there are no RCA outputs because the arm uses a supplied cable and 5-pin DIN-style connector inserted from underneath. And you will want to connect it before you fit the platter.

Once you've attended to that, as the C-Dur rests on three adjustable feet (which provide some isolation), the deck is simple to level. You then fit the sub-platter and the round cross-section belt over the pulley, followed by the main platter/spindle assembly. As this deck provides two electronically-controlled speeds, it is not necessary to remove the platter to change between them, as is the case with EAT's less costly turntables.

Supplied with the C-Dur is a felt mat, and I ran it strictly as supplied: no tweaky mats, no pucks. Indeed, I went beyond that as I used the company's E-Glo phono stage and E-Glo I integrated amp, so cables aside, it was an all-EAT system from source to amplifier output.

## Grease Is The Word

As for the familiar C-Note tonearm [HFN Feb '15], it was conceived to combine the advantages of a unipivot with the stability and ease-of-adjustment of conventional gimbal bearings. Available in 9, 10 and 12in lengths, its tube is carbon fibre, chosen for rigidity, while the headshell is aluminium. Inside the tonearm is a special silicon-based grease to dampen any resonances 'by more than 50%' according to the company.

The arm is a dream to adjust bar one aggravating detail. In most respects, the arm addresses convention with an adjustable counterweight for tracking force. The counterweight is a two-part affair, with a removable section to accommodate a wide range of cartridges. The headshell is slotted, VTA can be adjusted by loosening two set screws that grip the pillar, and azimuth can be adjusted via a removable nut at the top of the pivot.

Where I issued a litany of '@\$%£\$!&\*£' came with the hanging-thread anti-skating arrangement. A pivoting rod on the platter side of the pillar supports a weight which must be connected via a nylon filament to a barely accessible, knurled screw head on the other side of the pillar, snaked around it in a channel. I recommend fitting this before you do anything else, so you can tip the deck at an angle to work it in place.

Cleverly fitted into the three soft-touch buttons which select 33.3rpm, 45rpm or standby are LEDs to show state of play. Standby glows green when neither speed is selected. Press 33 or 45 as needed and blue LEDs indicate the selection, flickering until the speed is achieved.



Seen here in its high gloss plum finish, the 50mm MDF plinth supports a 1.8kg stainless steel/ceramic ball bearing block and precision-machined 5.2kg alloy platter. 33.3/45rpm speed selection is via top-mounted buttons.

## **Instant Reveal**

I was delighted to find, via a precision chronograph, that – depending on whether the LP was 140g, 180g or 200g – the C-Dur always achieved the desired speed at a rapid 3.5-4.5sec. This was despite the massive, oversized platter which, by the way, has only one downside compared with 12in or smaller platters: as the mat is thin and some LPs (mainly from the 1970s) lack raised lips around their circumference, you may need to use your fingernails to lift the LP from the platter. Less a criticism and more a fact of audio life, non-suspended decks such as the C-Dur are more likely to be microphonic and so, for best performance, place it on a hi-fi shelf or rack, well away from your loudspeakers.

At the risk of eliciting groans for the clichéd use of The Eagles' The Long Run, trust me when I tell you that the sound extracted from this amazing pressing was as instantly revealing as anything I might have selected. The kick drum that opens the title track was delivered with such smack, such impact, such force that it even instilled in me increased respect for the rest of the EAT chain, as well as the assorted speakers I employed.

It wasn't just the power or the scale of this underpinning which dazzled me, despite it rivalling the impressions made by Kodo percussion. Instead, it was the manner of its delivery. What I heard was uncannily soothing on the ear, a balm that was irresistibly more-ish and inviting, which might have some of you thinking, 'Ah! No top end!'. But that was not the case. What I heard was simply a consistent top-to-bottom presentation shorn of any edginess, while transients remained crisp and the treble extended.

This was communicated repeatedly with every guitar break, the notes precisely defined in attack and decay but with utter fluidity in between. This sense of ease almost pulled me away from focusing on both specific areas of the sound and the overall delivery. What struck me next, then, as the 'nature' of the C-Dur, was the absolutely cavernous scale of its soundstage. Even via speakers as disparate as LS3/5As and DeVore O/93s, it was wide beyond the edges, and seamless in between.

The C-Note arm's counterweight is damped by a sorbothane-like polymer while the nylon thread for the bias outrigger sits in a groove around the arm base, improving stability. The tonearm leads connect via a five-pin SME/DIN connector



## Open Invitation

It did not create artificial spaces between the instruments or vocals – quite a feat when a three- or four-part harmony was reproduced both perfectly blended and detailed enough to focus on the individual singers. The openness exposed minuscule details that have eluded me for nearly a half-century. That should allay any notion that the C-Dur’s gentility is achieved through a loss of forensic capabilities. Or that it cannot rock: Walsh’s solos throughout and especially the crispness of ‘Heartache Tonight’ put paid to that idea, too.

Attracted as much by the soundstage as by the overall smoothness, I turned to Nancy Wilson’s sublime *Son Of A Preacher Man*, which I knew possessed ‘big band’ scale. No, it wasn’t brave of her to cover a song owned by Dusty Springfield and Aretha Franklin, but Wilson made it hers by making it even more sultry. A sublime stylist, Wilson was backed on this 1969 recording by musicians and night-club-style arrangements which wouldn’t have been out of place on a Sinatra album a decade earlier.

Here the C-Dur exhibited just the right amount of refinement to showcase a vocalist of supreme clarity and diction, proffering soul, country and blues material. If you believe that the sound system, as much as the recording itself, conveys the emotion in the music, then the C-Dur succeeds beyond any doubts about that balance.

I tested this by trying two other cartridges that are easily distinguished from the Jo No5, one rather ‘cool’ sounding, yet the vivacity of Wilson’s delivery was undiminished. I did the same with another singer of similar intensity but a completely different mien, Judee Sill via her eponymous debut from 1971. While the Wilson album is brassy and bold in places, Sill’s exquisite singer-songwriter effort is in the early Joni Mitchell vein.

As intimate as any work in the genre, the superb sound of this 45rpm 2LP pressing digs deeper, and both Sill's delicate singing and piano playing were showcased perfectly by the C-Dur. Conversely, they enabled the deck to perform of its best – and please note that I was listening to it in absolutely stock form, as befits any review.

If any instruments embody the capabilities of the C-Dur, it's the two most difficult to reproduce: voice and piano. In tandem, as Sill's were heard here, the C-Dur displayed proficiencies so close to decks at twice the price that it is now my reference in the £3000-£5000 sector. Yes, it's that good.

### **Hi-Fi News Verdict**

What a joy! Aside from the fiddly anti-skating thread, the C-Dur was a dream to set up, performing flawlessly and encouraging long listening periods. Bizarre it may be to attribute 'relaxing sound' to a turntable, but there was a sense of ease and freedom from aggression which recalls the primary difference, for some, between valves and solid-state. Or, in this case, analogue versus digital – vividly. I love it.

**Sound Quality: 87%**

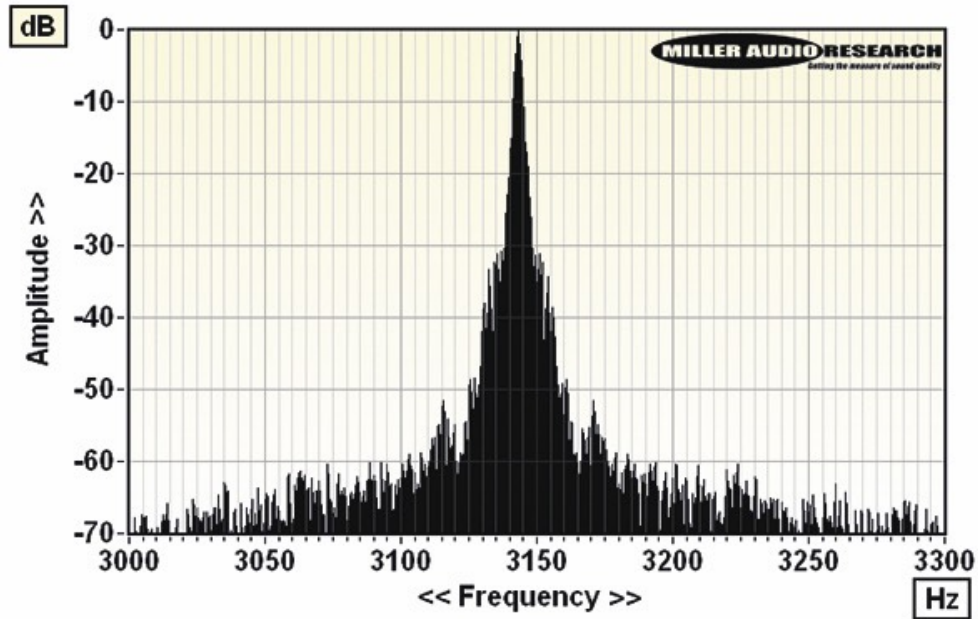
### **Lab Report**

As supplied, the C-Dur had a swifter 4-5 sec start-up time but a similar, and slightly slow (–0.22%), absolute speed as witnessed in the C-Sharp model. In practice this will be rather less impactful than the excellent pitch stability enjoyed by this deck – a peak-wtd wow of just 0.02% and flutter of 0.04% puts the C-Dur in some exalted company. This result is especially fine bearing in mind the round-section drive belt is glued rather than continuous... The DIN-B wtd –69.5dB through-bearing rumble improves by about 2dB through-the-groove courtesy of the felt mat, but spectral analysis of the bearing reveals specific noise/resonances between 70-90Hz – again, similar was seen on the C-Sharp and E-Flat turntables from the EAT range.

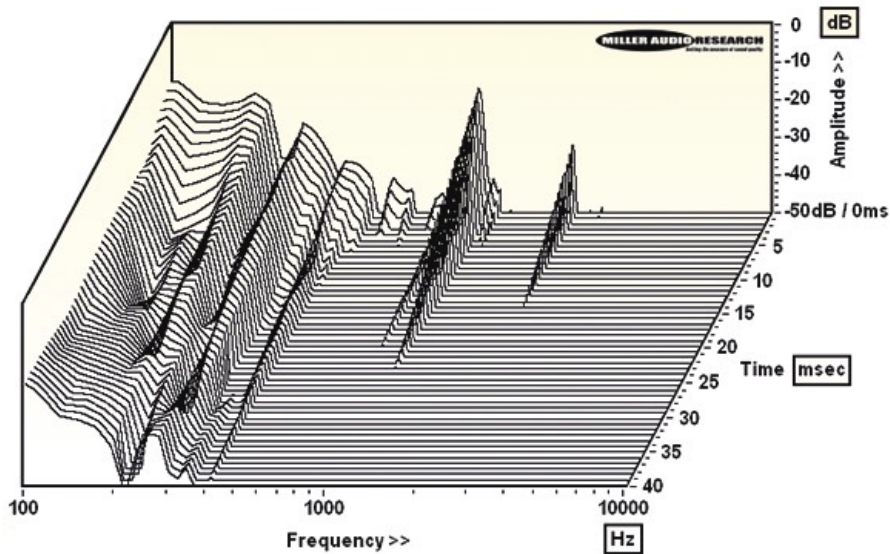
The partnering C-Note tonearm has a combination Cardan (vertical) and stabilising uni-pivot (horizontal) bearing, which offers good stability and low friction (<10mg) in both planes. This established arm features an alloy bearing housing, tapered carbon-fibre tube and bonded alloy headshell, the latter lifting the overall effective mass to a medium-high 15g, supporting the use of low compliance MCs with 'heavyweight' mounting hardware. The low-slung thread-and-weight bias mechanism is a nice feature, improving the arm's stability.



The carbon tube's main bending mode is deferred to an impressively high 200Hz [see Graph 2] with other twisting, bending or harmonic modes at 280Hz and 420Hz, managed by the tube's internal damping (carbon tubes can exhibit high-Q resonances if undamped). The sharp but short-lived peak at 1.1kHz, and likely harmonic at 2.2kHz, are both linked to the alloy headshell/fingerlift but both will be modified once a cartridge is bolted into position.



*Wow and flutter re. 3150Hz tone at 5cm/sec (plotted  $\pm 150$ Hz, 5Hz per minor division)*



*Cumulative resonant decay spectrum for the 10in C-Note tonearm (100Hz-10kHz over 40msec) showing short-lived modes at mid/high frequencies*