

Gold Note Mediterraneo

Inspired by the Florentine Renaissance, this flagship turntable aims to combine avantgarde technological innovation with sumptuous Italian aesthetics

Review: **Jonathan Gorse** Lab: **Paul Miller**

Think of Italy and one pictures a nation blessed with effortless style, eye-catching design and a strong sense of its own history. The Gold Note Mediterraneo boasts all these qualities, sitting atop the company's five-strong turntable range and costing £4990-£5445 (depending on finish) with the B-5.1 tonearm included. As well as the walnut plinth of our review sample, the deck is available in black lacquered MDF, white, and as a truly glorious alternative coated in an exquisitely-textured 24k gold foil. Sleek-looking and superbly crafted, when it comes to the spouse acceptance factor it's on a par with having George Clooney move in as a lodger.

The plinth comprises three layers, the base section being a 60mm-deep, curvaceous laminate of Italian walnut chosen, says Gold Note, for its elasticity, strength and high density. Above this sits a 3mm-thick steel plate, designed both to lower the deck's structural resonance and add reinforcement. Finally, this is capped by a 20mm-deep slab of polished black acrylic that forms the turntable's top plate, while simultaneously acting as a magnet for dust and fingerprints.

The turntable as a whole weighs a considerable 25kg and sits on three inverted black cone feet with three dished brass cups provided to prevent their sharp pointed tips causing damage to your hi-fi furniture. An acrylic lid is also supplied, and this is fully detachable.

BRONZE 'N' BRASS

As for the platter, this is 45mm thick and, in an effort to dampen unwanted vibrations, is made of a Delrin/POM-type polymer that Gold Note calls Sustarin. On top of the platter sits a good quality felt mat, with records held firm, and minor warps gently teased out, by an unthreaded but heavy LP

weight. The bearing comprises a hardened chrome steel spindle that rotates within a bronze sleeve and is supported on a 5mm tungsten ball-bearing on a brass seat.

Drive is delivered to the platter's periphery via a narrow-section polyvinyl belt from the deck's Swiss-made high torque 12V AC synchronous motor, and this is powered by Gold Note's compact PST-1 off-board supply. It was this configuration that was used for most of the reviewing, although the optional dedicated PST-10 turntable power supply was also pressed into service. Costing £864, this more advanced PSU includes no fewer than four transformers, one of which is used as part of a choke filter, and comes complete with a silver umbilical that connects to the turntable. The PST-10 features a striking milled aluminium case with stylish diagonal cooling vents and is

available in black, silver or gold finishes to suit a variety of decors.

UP IN ARMS

On the front left of the acrylic top plate are two low-profile silver buttons for selecting 33.33rpm and 45rpm speeds.

These buttons also stop the platter rotating while a further sequence of button presses permits the user to fine-tune the rotational speed [see PM's Lab Report, p45].

The supplied 9in B-5.1 tonearm is entirely

handmade in Italy and features 4N OFC Litz-style internal wiring terminated in a 4-pin DIN plug. The armtube and bearing housing are all machined from aluminium, the latter incorporating four high-precision steel bearings made in Germany by GRW. In fact, Gold Note has two tonearms in its catalogue, the B-5.1 sitting below the

'The streets of Glasgow have never felt so warm or inviting'



RIGHT: Top-down view highlights the 9in B-5.1 tonearm which uses four micro ball-bearings by GRW (Germany). The AC motor is Swiss and drives the 45mm-thick POM platter via a round-section belt. Felt mat is supplied but optional



B-7 Ceramic which, as its name suggests, features ceramic ball bearings also sourced from the specialists at GRW and, of course, offers a possible upgrade path.

Setting up the deck is straightforward – there's no suspended subchassis to wrestle with here – and it's also easy to use. The steel counterweight system found on the B-5.1 can accommodate cartridges with a mass up to 15g so the EAT Jo N°5 pick-up [HFN Dec '18] used for the review was bang on the weight limit for the arm.

Meanwhile, bias compensation is effected by the usual thread and weight system, and adjusted by moving the nylon thread along a horizontal scale at the back of the arm. As for VTA, this is changed by raising or lowering the arm in its mounting plate – easily achieved by loosening a 1.5mm hex bolt on the side of the arm mounting collar. But be warned, the bolt

head is tiny and vulnerable to damage, so audiophiles should resist the temptation to crank up the torque on this occasion!

ROCK SOLID

With the Gold Note Mediterraneo feeding a PS Audio Stellar phono stage [see p46], and Naim NAC82/NAP250 amps driving a pair of ATC SCM40 loudspeakers, it was apparent from the get go that this turntable's calling card is rock-solid stability. This is not to say it's strictly neutral in its presentation, because it's not, instead painting a sonic picture that brought the sun-drenched tones of a Canaletto painting to mind. As such, it conjures up music in a manner that is deeply appealing but, like the famous 18th century Italian painter, draws you into its own vision of the world.

Spinning up Deacon Blue's second album *When The World Knows Your Name*

ABOVE: Seen here with walnut plinth, other options include black lacquered MDF and 24k gold foil. The chassis is a laminate of wood, stainless steel and a polished acrylic top plate

[CBS 463321 1], the train-beat snare rhythm that opens 'Queen Of The New Year' showed the deck's delivery to be warm but powerful, even if the strike of the sticks lacked the sheer staccato attack and impact heard via the very best vinyl spinners. Meanwhile, the bass guitar was appropriately plump and full while the vocals of Ricky Ross were conveyed with a wonderful warmth and richness.

As for the stereo image, this was expansive, the deck setting up a wide and deep soundscape within which instruments were securely defined with a reach-out-and-touch presence. On 'The World Is Lit By Lightning', percussive effects and rim-shots careered around the room, drawing the ear right to the edges of the soundstage. Incisive it wasn't, but bathed in the Florentine glow of the Mediterraneo, the streets of Glasgow described on the album have never felt quite so warm and inviting.

SOUNDS SWELL

The Concertgebouw in Amsterdam is undoubtedly one of the finest concert halls in the world and its resident orchestra performing Beethoven's Symphony No 6 under Bernard Haitink [Philips 420 541-1] is a recording in which the string section enjoys exceptional sweetness.

The Mediterraneo fully captured the delightful string tones during the quieter sections, while the majestic swells possessed a wonderful acoustic ambience without ever sounding strident or harsh. This recording is notable for its

TUSCAN HERITAGE

Describing itself as 'a leading designer, developer and manufacturer of luxury high-end stereo systems', Italian company Gold Note was founded in 2012 by current CEO Maurizio Aterini, his wife Elena Basciano and business partner Alessio Oronti. Headquartered in Montespertoli, Tuscany, it first made its mark with the Bellagio Conquest turntable, a 1250mm-tall affair boasting a choice of no fewer than 13 different curved plinths and a 270mm-long platter spindle. This was followed in 2016 with the PH-10 phono stage, featuring two inputs, six EQ curves and a TFT colour display. Not a company to rest on its laurels, in the same year it launched a new flagship product in the form of the XS-85 loudspeaker, each cabinet standing 1.28m tall and housing five drivers.

Gold Note's first integrated amp followed in 2018, the IS-1000, which promised to bridge the gap between a traditional standalone integrated amplifier and an all-in-one music system thanks to its ability to stream music over a home network. Then in 2019 came the DS-10 DAC/streamer/headphone amp and analogue preamp. Now with a 17-strong team, including four designers, the company builds all of its loudspeakers and electronics in-house, with most of the components sourced from local suppliers.

TURNTABLE



ABOVE: Supported on three inverted cone feet, the Mediterraneo accepts an 18V feed from a supplied AC/DC unit or from the optional (£864) PST-10 outboard PSU [see below]. Phono leads use a standard DIN connection into the base of the arm

lack of pinpoint imaging, but the orchestra sounded just as I would imagine it in the hall, ranged across a wide concert stage without undue spotlighting of individual instruments. Despite this, a little fine detail was lost to the warm euphony of the deck's presentation.

POWER PLAYS

Piano is always a fine test of a turntable's pitch stability and even with the standard PSU in use there was a sense of exemplary control and grip on the 'Living Stereo' release of Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody On A Theme Of Paganini* with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra [LSC-2430]. Switching from the standard PSU to the company's optional PST-10 brought no immediate benefit to speed stability, but did prompt a little more detail to be revealed in the recording. The sense of hammers hitting piano strings, the sheer mechanical force and impetus of the playing and the rich tonality of the stringed instruments in 'Variation 18' all reached a higher level with the PST-10 at the helm.

Dynamic light and shade improved too, so the gradations and accents in Rubinstein's performance were conveyed with a little greater authority – all the way from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*. This is one of the most stirring performances in

classical music, and with the PST-10/Mediterraneo/B-5.1 front-end it truly started to come alive.

Van Morrison's 1989 album *Avalon Sunset* [Polydor 839 262-1] also demonstrated the potential of Gold Note's flagship turntable with its power supply upgrade. On the opening track 'Wherever God Shines His Light' Morrison's voice sounded that bit more transparent, or that bit less syrupy, while the punchy drum and percussion sounds were far more crisply delineated. Then came the tympani playing softly in the background of 'Contacting My Angel', all conveyed with wonderful warmth and solidity, while the electric and acoustic guitars enjoyed fine clarity and dynamics.

Finally there was the glorious brass section on 'I'd Love To Write Another Song'... Bold, occasionally strident (just as brass should sound) the fabulous exuberance of its interjections propelled the song along with real swing, making for a memorable listening experience. ○

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

The Gold Note Mediterraneo is a fine flagship turntable from this Tuscan firm. Unlike some other turntables it doesn't demand learning the black arts of suspension set-up or any other arcane optimisation. It's a fit-and-forget vinyl spinner for those seeking excellent build, elegant looks and sumptuous sound quality. Put your feet up, splash Aperol Spritz on ice and admire the Florentine Renaissance.

Sound Quality: 83%



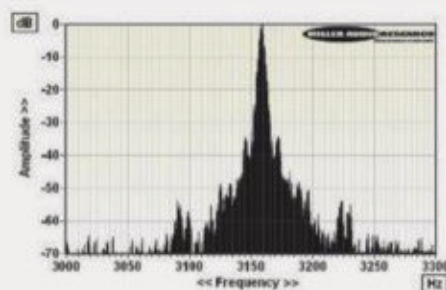
ABOVE: Rear of optional PST-10 PSU with 18V, 26V and 34V DC output

LAB REPORT

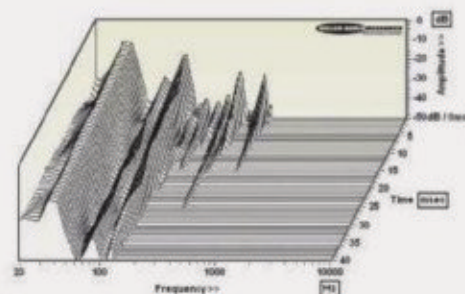
GOLD NOTE MEDITERRANEO

Despite the physical size of the 45mm-thick platter, the Sustarin (POM) polymer is not especially dense and so the start-up time remains pleasingly rapid at around 4-5 seconds. As supplied, the deck was running a little fast at +0.25% which is not audible and certainly not atypical of a new AC motor system that will likely slow with age. The W&F spectrum is complex, for while very low rate drift is thankfully avoided (this is not a DC motor, after all) there are low and higher-rate flutter sidebands at $\pm 13\text{Hz}$, $\pm 58\text{Hz}$ and $\pm 67\text{Hz}$ [see Graph 1, below] that contribute to a peak-wtd figure of 0.1%. These peaks also appear on the Mediterraneo's rumble spectrum [not shown], but measured with a coupler the -68.7dB (DIN B-wtd) figure is a little below average for the best of today's bearings. Nevertheless these vibrations are very effectively attenuated by that POM platter, reducing through-groove rumble and noise to just -71.4dB and down slightly further still to -71.9dB with the felt mat installed.

Meanwhile the resonant modes of the partnering B-5.1 tonearm are equally well defined but also high Q in nature: sharp, energetic but swiftly damped between 850Hz-1.3kHz where the appendages tend to 'sound off'. Better arm tube damping would certainly benefit the design, but the main bending mode occurs at a high 160Hz which is an indication of the inherent rigidity of the 9in anodised aluminium arm wand. This is followed by higher-Q harmonic/torsional resonances at 280Hz and 375Hz [see Graph 2]. Overall effective mass is in the mid-range at 11g and, with the 108g stainless steel counterweight, suited to cartridges in the 6-15g bracket. The bearings offer low <10mg friction and zero detectable play. PM



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



ABOVE: Cumulative tonearm resonant decay spectrum, illustrating various bearing, pillar and 'tube' vibration modes spanning 100Hz-10kHz over 40msec

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Turntable speed error at 33.33rpm	33.42rpm (+0.25%)
Time to audible stabilisation	5 seconds
Peak Wow/Flutter	0.03% / 0.07%
Rumble (silent groove, DIN B wtd)	-71.4dB (-71.9dB with felt mat)
Rumble (through bearing, DIN B wtd)	-68.7dB
Hum & Noise (unwtd, rel. to 5cm/sec)	-62.4dB
Power Consumption	3.5W (2W idle)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	470x210x360mm / 25kg