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In the world of high end audio, it is unusual for any company to keep the same product in production for 25 years, but even more unusual for that product to be at the top of many enthusiasts wish list for that time period. This is the legacy which the Oracle Delphi carries, originally released in 1979, the Delphi celebrates it's 25th anniversary this year, so after 25 years in production, a new importer bringing Oracle back into the UK, and a new model to the UK, this seemed like an appropriate time to review the Oracle Delphi MK. V.

The Mk. V is the latest incarnation of this classic three point, suspended sub chassis deck. Time has done nothing to diminish the visual impact of this turntable, as visually stunning now as when first released. Whilst this is a skeletal design, as with the Michell Gyrodeck and Orbe, the version submitted for review was mounted on an exquisitely finished black granite base, though the Mk. V is available with the traditional acrylic base at a lower price. The Mk. V will sit happily on most equipment stands, with dimensions of 475 mm X 363 mm X 150 mm, and weighing 16 kg, and in this case I found the RDC Aspekt rack to deliver a better sound than my usual 300 kg sand box. Moving from the Mk. V base plate, you encounter the three massive suspension towers which the magnesium / aluminium alloy sub chassis floats on, whilst all exposed metalwork on the Oracle is coated in a Polyester lacquer to avoid fingerprints marring the exquisite finish. The suspension system is a 12 component, 7 filter system. Starting with the convex feet which the towers sit on, these towers then contain Delrin suspension pillars which are designed to filter mid and high frequency vibrations, whilst conical springs isolate the entire floating structure down to 5 Hz, which are damped with rubber bushings. This entire structure is levelled up precisely with a rotating sleeve, which aids to further damp the springs, whilst a Sorbothane damper controls any residual mechanical energy, whilst a felt damper on each spring controls any potential resonance.

The bearing assembly is just as sophisticated as the suspension, with a tungsten spindle, machined with a tapered base, sitting on a carbide ball, giving minimum contact area, minimal friction and low bearing noise. To further ensure high durability and low noise this entire assembly runs in a bath of synthetic oil. Whilst most manufacturers would be happy to run this assembly in a sleeve bearing, Oracle use an arrangement of six nylon set screws. Each of these

screws has its tip carefully profiled, and is located in two sets of three screws, one set at the top of the sleeve, the second at the bottom. These are installed to a precision of one quarter of the width of a human hair, meaning the spindle is located in the sleeve with minimal contact area and drag. The precision platter has its underside profiled to allow the inner edge to be used to drive the platter whilst the outer edge is mass loaded, making the platter act like a flywheel, ensuring that micro variations in drag do not cause wow and flutter problems. Whilst this is an elegant solution to the problems of driving and mass loading the platter, a metal platter will ring if not damped, so this is taken care of by damping rings of Sorbothane running around the platters periphery, whilst the mat which sits on the platter is a polymer material which possesses an optimised impedance match for the vinyl, and manufactured with a slightly concave shape, meaning when the record is clamped to the platter with the supplied Oracle record clamp, the entire assembly becomes a laminate structure which is heavily damped and is, essentially, resonance free. The motor is a low voltage, high torque AC synchronous motor which is driven by one of two power supplies. The power supply uses an elegant solution to the quandary of using a high current, high torque power supply which will quickly get the platter up to speed and deliver enough power to avoid wow and flutter problems, but this can result in vibrations being introduced into the drive belt and into the playback system, whilst a low torque, low current system avoids vibrations being introduced into the system but cannot start unaided a heavy platter. The power supply in the Oracle uses a dual current design, with a high starting current bringing the platter up to speed rapidly, then stepping to a lower current drive for normal playback avoiding the possibility of introducing vibrations into turntable system. This system is so simple you wonder why no one else has done this. The standard power supply is essentially a wall wart style supply, but in the case of the review sample it was supplied with the £600 optional 'Turbo' power supply, essentially a high precision sine wave generator capable of delivering a smoother sine wave more precisely regulated and clocked than the standard unit. In the case of either power supply, speed is selected by an elegant paddle arrangement with two precision, aluminium paddles one for 33 1/3 and the other for 45 rpm operation. A single touch of either will start the platter at the appropriate speed and the engraved speed indicators in the tip of each paddle is illuminated. A second touch turns the power off and brings the platter to a standstill. The physical drive system is a precision ground spindle which drives a flat section belt, which is then located around the inner drive surface of the platter. Whilst this is an elegant system, it takes a little practice to install and is initially frustrating until you have the technique. Whilst earlier incarnations of the Oracle Delphi were notorious for their difficulty in setup, in the case of the Mk. V this deck was unboxed, set up and running in under 90 minutes from box to playing records.

For this review the Mk. V was used with a Graham 2.0 arm and Lyra Argo cartridge, and this turned out to be a fortuitous choice as Oracle themselves recommend the Graham 2.0 (now 2.2) as their preferred arm. This arm is my personal reference arm, doing duty usually in my Basis Gold Debut turntable.

This was connected to my Klyne system 7 PX 3.5 phono stage via XLO Signature phono cable, which in turn fed my Krell KRC-3 pre amp, with Bryston as usual providing the power via their 3B-SST and 14B-SST power amps to Martin Logan SL-3 speakers, with both ART Loudspeakers Skibo and Monopulse 42A also seeing service on the end of this system. Cabling was by Townshend Audio, with DCT-300 between phono stage and pre, DCT-100 balanced between pre and power and bi wired Isolda DCT speaker cables. All mains cabling was Isotek Elite with source equipment powered by an Isotek 2K Qube and Substation.

The first thing you realise about the Mk. V is that it is fast and phenomenally transparent. Give this deck an appropriate support and an arm like the Graham 2.0, together with a transparent cartridge like the Argo, and you have a system which communicates the slightest alteration in setup and optimisation with astounding clarity. I can see this combination bringing about a whole new self help group, Oracle tweakers anonymous, of which I would happily nominate myself as a founder member "Hello, I'm Dave, it's been six weeks since I've managed to listen to an entire track without tweaking my turntable, I need help". This is not to say this deck is a finicky, touchy deck which goes out of tune as soon as you look at it, but it just so transparent that it immediately tells you whether your adjustment is improving or damaging the music. This not only makes extracting the very best from your arm / cartridge combination effortless, but with easily adjustable VTA it makes optimising VTA on a record by record basis effortless.

The sonic balance of the Basis Gold Debut and Oracle Delphi Mk.V couldn't be more different, yet both are immensely appealing. The Basis has a push to the lower registers, with near state of the art performance in the bass registers, delivering textures in the bass and lower midrange with far greater definition, delineation and transparency than most current designs can achieve, with the notable exception of the Blue Pearl Jem. whilst the soundstaging ability of the Basis is still breathtaking, even from humble car boot sale finds, let alone audiophile pressings. It is only in the upper midrange and high frequencies that makes you aware that maybe there is a little more available with the very finest turntables. The Oracle Mk. V attacked the Basis in precisely this area, with it's performance here very near state of the art, and given that this turntable followed the Blue Pearl Jem, this is not something to be taken lightly. The level of air, dexterity and speed available from the Mk. V was astonishing, with limitless air and incredibly transient tracking, the slightest nuances of the music are captured and precisely placed on the soundstage with unnerving accuracy and solidity. Instruments which typically generate a high frequency hash or ringing such as triangles, tambourines and cymbals are rendered solidly and vividly textured, capturing transients with a speed which borders on precognition, whilst the decay of the note being held until it sinks below the noise floor. Given the attention lavished on the suspension and main bearing, this is an incredibly quiet turntable, driving surface noise levels down to a point where they cease to

register consciously whilst listening to the music, the surface noise only making an appearance on the run in and run out grooves. Despite the state of the art high frequency ability, the design team of the Mk. V resist the temptation allow artificial emphasis of the upper midrange to enter proceedings, giving a listening perspective which is almost chameleon like. The sound staging of this deck is excellent, with Gerry Rafferty's 'Night Owl' [Fame FA4131471] making a very convincing case, with the track 'Night Owl' delivering a vividly rendered soundstage, populated by solid 3D performers with a real tactility, not only to the musicians, but to the spaces between the performers, making it feel that you could sonically see the gaps between the performers. Whilst this is an ability which any deck aspiring to state of the art, like the Jem, should do, this is usually one of the first things to be sacrificed as you move to lower cost turntables.

Moving to a recording which has challenged the best, Madonna's 'Ray of Light' [Warner 9362-46847-1], this is an album which I've found needs absolute top to bottom consistency, and most turntables, even with a first rate arm/cartridge combination such as the Graham / Lyra Argo, will have some weaknesses exposed. I was expecting to find some bass problems with this album, as the title track, 'Ray of Light', has a particularly powerful driving bass line, yet even with this, whilst lacking the absolute scale and weight of the Basis or the Jem, the Mk. V still succeeded in delivering a bass line which was appropriately scaled to allow it to propel the track along with great verve and energy, making it difficult to not be drawn into the sonic maelstrom laid down by Madonna and William Orbit. On the track 'Candy Perfume Girl' the bass line is as much felt as heard with the Basis, yet with the Mk. V this crushing power was somewhat diminished, so you could still feel the bass but it didn't pound into the chest cavity as with the Basis. Even with this said, there is absolutely no lack of textural information, whilst it's ability to deliver micro dynamic shifts in the music whilst accurately displaying macro dynamic shifts is outstanding. A simpler track such as those from Dido 'No Angel' [BMG 74321-868231] shows one of this decks truly great strengths, it's ability to play female vocals. The track 'Here with me' has an excellent vocal performance from Dido, and this deck brings out every last nuance and subtlety from her performance, you can almost feel the power of her voice energising the room. The track 'Hunter' not only reproduces Dido's vocals in a mesmerising holographic image in the middle of the room, but the richly detailed soundstage is carried to far beyond the edges of the speakers with an acoustic guitar sited on the far right of the stage sounding incredibly realistic, with a sound that really evokes strings being plucked over a wooden body.

Even 25 years on from it's original release, the Oracle Delphi Mk. V is still more than capable of eliciting gasps of admiration from those unfamiliar with it, but what is even more impressive is the fact that sonically this deck has been updated to retain it's eminent position as one of the reference turntables in the arena of vinyl reproduction. Whilst I've noted that this deck's low frequency performance is behind that of the Blue Pearl Jem and it's presentation is very different to that of my Basis, it's has an ability to delivers a transparent and

immediate sound which is still totally unfatiguing. The Delphi's ability to handle any kind of material and adapt to the requirements of all kinds of vinyl, from car boot sale recoveries, through the lightweight pressings of the 80's to today's 200 gram audiophile pressings, the Delphi Mk.V with Graham arm can handle all with outstanding quality and ease, whilst it's simultaneously a tweakers dream yet is still a stable playback platform which can be considered a fit and forget option for most enthusiasts. How highly do I rate this deck? If I didn't have a deck like the Basis Gold Debut already installed, this deck would be short listed as a potential reference item. If you are considering this kind of investment in vinyl playback, then this legendary deck should be a mandatory inclusion on any shortlist. Strongly recommended, I have missed this deck since it left, sure sign of a winning component.

Key Points

- Excellent build quality
- Maintains it's settings over a long period
- Exceptionally fast and transparent

Oracle's History – 25 years of analogue playback.

The story of Oracle started 25 years ago . When they built the original Delphi prototype the sent it to International Audio Review where J. Peter Montcrieff declared this prototype to be "634 times better than the Linn". Oracle were flooded with 600 orders, and Oracle was in business. Oracle introduced three further turntables alongside the Delphi, the Paris, Alexandria and Premiere, whilst updating the original Delphi through four versions, the complete turntable production timeline is outlined below :-

Delphi AC:	1979 -1981
Delphi Mk.I	1980-1984
Delphi Mk.II	1984-1987
Delphi Mk.III	1987-1989
Delphi Mk.IV	1989-1994
Delphi MKV	

Paris 33 rpm	1989-1990
Paris 33 & 45 rpm	1990-1993

Alexandria Mk.I	1983-1984
Alexandria Mk.II	1984-1987
Alexandria Mk.III	1988-1989
Alexandria Mk.IV	1990-1994

Premiere Mk.II	1982-1987
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Premiere Mk.III	1988-1989
Premiere Mk.IV	1989-1994