

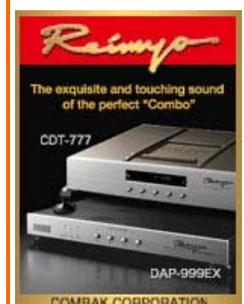
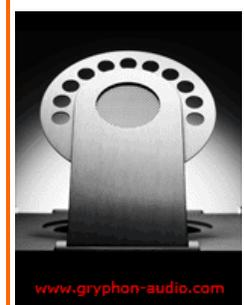
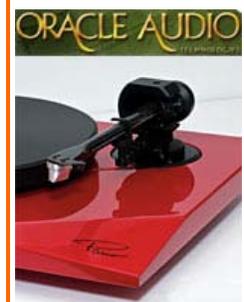


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SA Equipment

World Premiere!
 Oracle Paris Turntable System
 An excellent turntable and practically a bargain!
 Review By Tom Lyle

Although Canada's Oracle changed hands a few times since their beginnings in 1979, Oracle's chief designer Jacques Riendeau is the brother of the founder Marcel. Oracle's first turntable, the Delphi (now in its Mk. VI incarnation) is



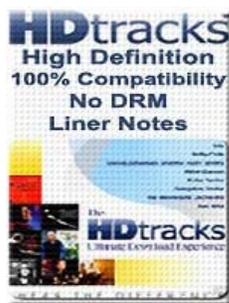
considered by many as very, very important to the history of high-end analog. It certainly ended up in many of the better systems in the homes of audiophiles in the early 1980s. Because of their success with the Delphi, it definitely gives Oracle's new Paris a leg up. What makes the Paris even more enticing though is its price, which although not cheap by any means is not nearly as expensive as their Delphi, or most other analog manufactures' top flight offerings. Yet it still comes very close to some of the best analog one is likely to hear. Although not quite plug and play, it can go from the box to playing records with only a bit more fuss than the most simple entry-level turntable packages. This undoubtedly gives it even more standing in this increasingly crowded field.

The Paris is available as a standard bundle with a Paris high output Moving Coil (MC) phono cartridge with a healthy 1.6 mV that can drive just about any phono preamp that I can think of, and comes with a Paris tonearm -- a Project's 9cc that is modified by Oracle. This 'arm is quite an impressive looking affair, and incorporates an important design feature of none other than the Tri-Planar tonearm, a curved silicon filled trough near the base of the arm-tube. The trough can be filled with a user determined amount of viscous silicon which will subsequently tailor the sound of the tonearm and thus the entire turntable set-up. The turntable retails for \$3150, the Paris tonearm \$950, and the Paris phono cartridge \$1150. Purchasing the three as a package saves \$250, for a total price of \$5000.

The turntable is fitted with three convex screw-in Delrin feet (Delrin is a crystalline polymer) for leveling the turntable's plinth with the supplied leveling tool. 3Cc of oil applied to the main bearing is easily injected into the bearing with the provided syringe. Once the turntable is level one simply attaches the aluminum sub-platter's post into the bearing hole, the belt onto the motor pulley and the sub-platter, and then the place the acrylic platter over it. It was difficult to spoil the sound of the Paris with too little or too much silicon in the tonearm's trough or the set-screw of the tonearm that lowers into the silicon bath, but I ultimately settled on Oracle's recommendations, with the fluid filled about 1/16" from the top of the trough and the tonearm's set-screw just breaking the surface of the silicon bath. One of three different tonearm weights need to be slipped onto the tonearm and with the supplied scale or one's own stylus weight gauge the downward force was set with just a bit of finesse. Since the phono cartridge is mounted at the factory azimuth and anti-skate need not be set by the user. The sample of the Paris also came with an optional clear acrylic dustcover which attaches to the turntable's base with two hinges. As I was more than hesitant to attach to this beautiful and sensitive piece of audio gear what appeared to be a sound-wave sail, I only placed the dustcover on the turntable without attaching the hinges to see how it looked. It looked very nice.

Heavy

The belt-drive of the Paris is powered by a low-voltage AC synchronous motor,



the electronics of which are identical to their pricier Delphi. Oracle claims that the oscillator circuit creates a perfect sine wave to feed the motor, which ensures accurate speed stability. Oracle includes with the Paris a strobe disc, and during setup both the 33.33 and 45 rpm speeds can be fine-tuned by two mini-screws located on the rear of the turntable. The provided power supply also isolates the drive electronics from any AC impurities and fluctuations. One can also upgrade to the same power supply as used with the Delphi model, the Turbo.

Imagine

The Paris isn't what I'd call plug and play, but still, it isn't at all difficult to set up. I imagine most will have their local dealer perform the final assembly prior to delivery to the customer. But if a local dealer is not available, I couldn't imagine someone who has never set up a turntable having any difficulties. Although I've had quite a bit of turntable set-up experience during my adult lifetime I would hardly call myself an expert, nor would I call myself the most patient person in the world regarding such things. Still, I had no trouble setting up the Paris so it was up and running rather quickly. With my sample of the Paris I was also sent the Turbo power supply upgrade. Rather than listen to the Paris for a while with the standard supply and later on switch to the Turbo, I did it the other way around and started off with the Turbo. I'm happy to report that the Paris still sounded great once I finally installed the standard power supply. However, the extra money spent on the Turbo is indeed worth every penny. It is hardly a "tweak", but a significant upgrade. Still, it is not by any means mandatory.

I spent the bulk of the Paris' review period listening to the pre-installed Paris phono cartridge, only switching to my reference Lyra at the very end. I have no idea where Oracle sourced this fine Paris cartridge. There are more than a few cartridges on the market with similar specifications, but the bodies of these other transducers look nothing like the Paris cartridge, so perhaps it has been built to Oracle's specifications. The Paris is available in three finishes, Ferrari Red, Lamborghini Yellow, white and Titanium Gray. The sample I received was supplied in the beautiful glossy red. It never failed to receive *oohs* and *aahs* from anyone, audiophile or not, that visited the listening room even before I placed a record on its spindle.

The Paris occupied the top shelf of an Arcici Suspense equipment rack. With the Arcici's thick solid steel top plate supported by a cushion of air this was certainly a fine way to isolate the Paris from any vibrations, especially those coming through the floor. But to test the Paris' semi-floating suspension I initially placed the Paris on a two-inch concrete slab that rested atop a not-so-sturdy plastic table situated next to the equipment rack. Of course there was an improvement when I eventually moved the turntable to the Arcici stand, but not as much as one might have suspected. The sound tightened up more than a bit, but as the Paris didn't react much to footfalls and the like even when it was on the concrete slab there wasn't much to complain about before it went onto the Arcici. Even though the floor of our old house is much sturdier than those of most modern suburban homes, praise to the Oracle's design of the Paris' dual-rod semi-floating chassis is due.

Gain

The Paris' RCA outputs were connected to a Pass Laboratories XP-15 phono preamplifier with its gain set for a typical MM cartridge (and the majority of high-output MCs) at 56 dB with its loading resistance at 47k Ohms. The Pass was connected to either a Balanced Audio Technologies (BAT) VK-3Xi or an Edge G2 linestage, and the power amp was for a very short time an Edge NL 10.2, but most of the time a Krell KAV-250a. Speakers were the Sound Lab DynaStat electrostatic hybrids with their very low-end frequencies helped along with a Velodyne HGS-15b subwoofer. Interconnects and speaker cables were mostly MIT, except for the interconnect leading from the turntable to the phono preamp which was a 1 meter stretch of DH Labs' Air Matrix. The Power cables were almost exclusively Virtual Dynamics. The front end's



AC was plugged into a PS Audio Power Plant power regenerator, except for the subwoofer and speakers which were connected to a Chang Lightspeed power conditioner. All the audio gear in the dedicated listening room is connected to two dedicated 20 Amp lines with Virtual Dynamics wall receptacles and the room's acoustics are treated with Echobuster panels and record shelves custom designed and built by Gotham Cabinet Craft.

I'm sure I've left out some of the design and technical information in describing Oracle's Paris. If you've read any of my reviews in the past you'd realize that this is nothing new, as I'm tons more interested in how a piece of gear sounds than the way the designers achieved the resulting sound. As long as a product is sturdy and reliable, matches one's system, sounds great, and is worth its asking price I wouldn't care if the thing was constructed out of duct tape and parts of a ball point pen. In the case of the Oracle Paris it is rather obvious that a lot of research and development went into bringing this product to market. As a bonus the thing is a gorgeous piece of audio equipment.

Smooth

The operation of the Paris was smooth, and it ran trouble free throughout the review period. I was able to tighten the record clamp with an intuitive amount of force before each side of play. It's nice that the turntable starts up with the touch of a button -- a blue LED shines above the selected 33 or 45 buttons on the upper left side of the plinth, and the platter gets up to speed within one half of a revolution. The ergonomic tonearm lift is perfectly located, and the cueing lever gently lowers the stylus to nearly the exact spot on the record if lifted during play.

If one think I'm being too hard on the Paris when discussing its sonic attributes, please take into consideration the fact that my reference for quite a while has been an analog rig that is much pricier than the Paris -- its tonearm costs nearly as much as the entire Paris combo. Yet the Oracle Paris needs to make no apologies -- and I guess I shouldn't have been surprised. Oracle introduced its Delphi model in 1979, and this instant classic is still in production. Oracle never rested on their laurels as they constantly updated the turntable throughout its existence. They obviously have learned quite a lot about turntable design throughout these years. Although not as an ambitious design as the Delphi, the Paris' robust, punchy, and rather transparent sound is testament to the design prowess of the folks at Oracle.

After the Paris was completely set up to my satisfaction, I intended to perform some off-axis listening to let the cartridge break in. As always, curiosity got the best of me and I set myself down in the sweet spot after only after about half-way through the side of the first LP. Even before the cartridge was fully broken in it



was easy to tell that I was in for a treat with this turntable system. I spent time listening to all types of music. But shortly after the turntable arrived I learned drummer Paul Motian died. I played a few of his records on which he appeared for about a side each, but spun both sides of the album *Dance* he recorded on ECM as The Paul Motian Trio released in 1978 with Charles Brackeen on soprano sax (and tenor on one track) and David Izenzon on bass. Some correctly point out that some of the ECMs from the 1970s have less than perfectly transparent sound, and some go as far as describing these records as being a bit muddy sounding. I think that's somewhat of an exaggeration, as well as too much of a generalization. There are gems to be found in the ECM catalog, and *Dance* by the Paul Motian Trio is a remarkably good sounding LP. Yes, as usual producer Manfred Eicher is a bit heavy handed with the reverb, but it seems to be used with good effect here (pun intended), only adding to the mood when necessary. Despite the title of the album this isn't akin to any dance music one is likely to have ever heard before, but those who are familiar not only with Mr. Motian's output on ECM but throughout his career, many of his fans say that Paul Motian's drumming evokes a dance within the listener's mind rather than on the dance floor. But rather than going further into the aesthetics of his playing as it relates to the music on this record, objectively there is no doubt that the Paris combo reveals that this is a great recording, not only because it is so spacious sounding. The soundstage is wide, deep, and multilayered, even though this is a result of the studio and not from actual stage placement. No worries here, as with the reverb this "fake" soundstage only adds, rather than distracts from the proceedings.

I love it when I become enveloped within the sound of a record, and on each track of the *Dance*, the sound of each instrument would wash over me. The Paris revealed that this was more of a "live in the studio" type gig more than anything else. David Izenzon's acoustic bass had a natural growl that also added to the illusion that one was overhearing a playback over the studio monitors while witnessing the recording process. The technique of not only the way Paul Motion tuned his bass drum, but the method of recording it brings to light that rather than just a thump-thump-thump this drum sounds like a large, low pitched *drum*. Of course this adds to the impression one is listening to real musicians, and although the studio is hardly a

stage, recording-wise, it is a real place in that during this session in that no overdubbing was performed. Though the studio's reverb sort of ruins any suspension of disbelief that might occur the record as spun on the Oracle Paris set-up gives one the sonic impression that the musicians are playing their instruments in the same room with each other.

Throughout this fantastic record Paul Motian manages not only to sound as he is the rhythmic anchor, but somehow melodic at the same time. This is in large part due to producer Eicher's habit of highlighting the sound of the cymbals, as he does in so many of his other records. Before it was fully broken in the highest treble sounded a bit thready through the



Paris cartridge, but as time went on this slight papery sound leveled off, and settled into a very slightly darkening of the overall tone of the high end. The low frequencies were a bit plummy sounding, which I found out later after playing more neutral records was in large part being emphasized by the recording, not the turntable set-up. Even more listening to a variety of material revealed that the bass response of the Paris combo was only very slightly tipped up in the mid-bass. Despite this, the low-end sound made the recording seem quite natural.

Again, I hope it doesn't sound as if I'm focusing on the negative. On the Motian album images were separated by huge amounts of space, and each instrument and each part of Paul's kit were solidly placed within the soundstage. Like I said before, playing this LP gave me a clear picture of what was happening that day (or most likely, that night) in the studio. The clarity of the sound was unflappable -- during crescendos no sounds coming from any instrument drifted or became distorted -- harmonically or otherwise. I played a couple of Hindemith's *Organ Sonatas* by George Markey on the Germany's Psalite label, and even during the most apocalyptic moments where it seemed as if he is coaxing the highest volume and maxed-out timbre from the organ at St. Mary's Church in Bielefeld, there is neither tracking distortion nor any other stress put upon the sound.

But keep in mind that I was judging the Paris with a previously unknown ingredient, so I mounted my reference Lyra Kleos on the Paris' tonearm. With the Kleos mounted, it was amazing how close in character the Paris turntable/tonearm combination was to the much more expensive Basis Debut/Tri-Planar when using the same cartridge. Now, I'm not saying that the Paris could equal the heft and grandeur of this more than three-times as expensive rig, but main factors that make this such a great analog set-up were there -- and was able to bring out not only the positive qualities of the Lyra cartridge (of which there are many) but of the recordings themselves that were being spun on the Paris. It was difficult to believe that the sound was a result of this rather lightweight (compared to the Basis) turntable. I'm pretty sure that the platter of the Basis weighs nearly as much as the entire Paris combination, and yet the Paris was able to project into the room a weighty, solid, and more importantly musically involving, clear sound that will likely send shivers up the spine of any listener who gives this turntable/tonearm combo an audition. To prove my point, play your copy of Bruckner's *Mass In E Minor* (his second mass) conducted by Roger Norrington on Argo. Ok, I'll admit that not everyone has a copy of this record, but they should. Those that have it know that this is an extremely difficult record for most turntables, not only for a cartridge to track during the many portions of the score that grow in intensity, but separating the voices within the choir of this challenging piece of music. Bruckner was a master of orchestration, and one can easily hear how this skill transfers to his choral work. With the Kleos mounted on the Paris 'arm this set-up not only sailed through the piece, but I was able to hear the individual voices and groups of voices in the most involving manner I thought possible.

I spent most of my time with the Paris hooked up to the optional Turbo power supply. Removing it and going back to the standard took a little getting used to, although I wouldn't go as far as saying that the sound was ruined by not using the more expensive supply. I could easily imagine one purchasing this turntable set-up without the Turbo, and adding it on later as an upgrade (although it adds \$200 to its \$900 price if added afterward), because that is exactly what it is -- an upgrade. Yes, the sound improves, but it doesn't transform it. Supplying a more healthy dose of current to the workings of a turntable motor should, at least in theory, improve its sound, and in practice it does -- I will attest to an increase in all audiophile-approved traits when using the Turbo. Do I sound a bit reluctant in giving the Turbo an unconditional recommendation? If not, I hope my comments won't deter anyone from upgrading to the Turbo supply if the funds are available. I would spring for it if the money was there.

Excellent

The Oracle Paris is an excellent turntable, not only because it sounds so great. Getting great sound from an analog set-up is easy -- that is, if one has unlimited funds, not to mention

unlimited patience. The Oracle Paris is not inexpensive, although in 2012 audiophile-dollars it would not be inappropriate to call it affordable. And in the great scheme of things, it is practically a bargain considering what one gets for their money-- a great looking, solidly built,, and superb sounding turntable, a proven tonearm design that is enhanced with Oracle's own engineering expertise, and a great sounding cartridge that can connect to just about any phono preamp on the market. As a bonus, it was not at all difficult to set up, and even easier to enjoy. And enjoy it I did. Highly recommended.

Specifications

Paris Turntable

Drive: AC synchronous motor, belt driven, external power adapter
Platter: two piece -- hub: aluminum, main platter: acrylic
Plinth Dimension : 19.5" x 15" x 6" with dust cover installed
Speed Selection: 33 and 45, adjustable
Suspension System: Adjustable, semi-floating chassis on dual rod system
Tonearm Mounting Specs: maximum center to center tonearm length – 228mm
Price: \$3150

Paris Tonearm

Basic structure: Project 9CC carbon tone arm.
Oracle Audio developed micro vibration Silicone damping device
Center to center length: 212 mm
Arm Tube: Carbon fiber
Effective Mass: 8.5 grams
Overhang: 18mm
Weight: 250 grams
Price: \$950

Paris Phono Cartridge

Type: High output moving coil
Output: 1.6mV
Frequency Response: 20 Hz to 40 kHz
Internal Impedance: 170 Ohms
Recommended Loading Impedance: Greater than 25 kOhms
Compliance: 8µm/mN
Channel Separation: greater than 28db
Weight: 10 grams
Tracking Force: 1.4g +/- 0.2g
Cantilever: Magnesium alloy
Stylus: Fine Elliptical Shape
Cartridge Body: 6061T6 Magnesium aluminum alloy
Price: \$1150

Price of Paris turntable, Paris tonearm, and Paris phono cartridge if purchased together: \$5000
Turbo power supply: \$1100, \$900 if purchased with Paris turntable.

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