

# SOUND IMAGE

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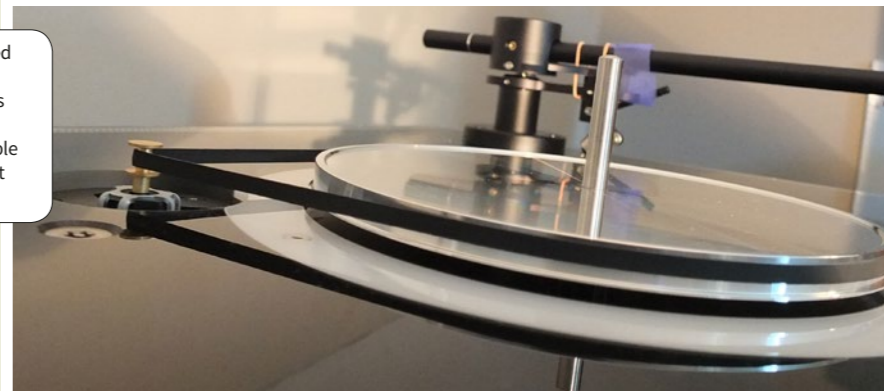
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► Set-up of the MT2 is much simplified by the Sumiko cartridge coming pre-installed and aligned; pictured right is the inner platter with belt freshly attached; using McIntosh's little bubble leveller; and performing an alignment confirmation check on the cartridge.



display here. But two layers of acrylic plates top the plinth base of black-lacquer finished MDF, and these do incorporate "custom-designed fibre-optic light diffusers and extra-long-life light-emitting diodes" in order to shine through with that pleasing shade of green whenever the platter is rotating.

Besides, there's more to McIntosh than illumination of colour. The company's primary goal is, of course, the illumination of music. To that end, the company has built to the lower price here with a different set of materials. An inner platter of CNC-precision milled aluminium supports a solid inch-thick black outer platter of polyoxymethylene, an engineering thermoplastic characterised by its high strength, hardness and rigidity. The inner platter rotates with a polished and tempered steel shaft in a sintered bronze bushing, and is belt-driven by a chassis-decoupled DC drive motor with its current coming from an external voltage-stabilised power supply.

The tonearm has a wand of duralumin, also known as dural-aluminium, a long-established hardened alloy of aluminium combined with copper and (usually) manganese and magnesium. The vertical bearings use precision ceramic surfaces with damping fluid; the horizontal bearing is a gimbaled sapphire design.

Lastly the cartridge is, as for all three McIntosh turntables, a moving-coil type. Normally that would require a specifically moving-coil phono input on your amplifier, where many amps cater only to the higher outputs of moving-magnet cartridges. And with McIntosh's top MT10 turntable that is indeed the case. But both the MT5 and this MT2 come with a Sumiko moving-coil cartridge that has a high enough output (up to 2.5mV) to be compatible with not only moving-coil phono inputs but also moving-magnet inputs. (If you need a phono stage, McIntosh's MP100 Phono Preamplifier is considered a 'companion product'.) The cartridge itself is a Sumiko Blue Point No.2, which plays a huge role, of course,

in the system's sound quality. It uses an alloy cantilever and an elliptical diamond stylus. McIntosh's Australian distributor Synergy Audio handily also distributes Sumiko, and a replacement Blue Point No. 2 will currently set you back \$799.

### Performance

If vinyl is partly about the physical interaction with the medium, then the setting up of a turntable makes this doubly so — no other hi-fi component requires such a task of careful assembly and calibration. But as befits a lower-echelon turntable (by McIntosh's standards), the task here is much simplified with the MT2, since its cartridge comes pre-installed, and indeed calibrated, along with preset tracking and anti-skating forces. The cartridge overhang and arm height are similarly preset from the factory.

But there's still a bit to be done. Once all the layers and bits had been removed from the packaging, we began by reversing the instructions provided and making the power and signal cables to the rear socketry at the start — while you can still

move the plinth around, rather than waiting till the end after everything is carefully balanced. Then it was a case of working through the well-illustrated instructions in the manual. The MT2 ships with a protective mesh on the long spindle, so we removed that, and donned the supplied white gloves to guide the belt around the inner platter and on to the pulley (see pictures above). We added the heavy main platter and felt mat. McIntosh supplies a nice (teal) bubble balance to make sure the platter is level in all directions, and the MT2's feet are your friends to achieve this, able to rotate to raise or drop until bubble centrality is achieved all over the platter.

You slide the counterweight up the back of the arm as usual, though here McIntosh supplies a vial of bearing oil and suggests lightly greasing the counterweight's hole before doing so. There's a line marking its required position, though we found this hard to judge accurately, so we made use of the supplied pivoting metal Stylus Tracking Force Gauge to adjust the counterweight's position for the recommended 2.0 grams, then returning the antiskating weight to the factory position from the minimal required to set the force.



# The illumination of music

McIntosh delivers a new turntable to which vinyl lovers can aspire more affordably than its previous ones. It's not quite so green, though.

### SUMMARY

**McIntosh MT2 turntable**  
Price: \$7995

- + Solid and detailed vinyl performance
- + Electronic speed change
- + Green light!
- Can't replace stylus alone

First up, then, we need to sort out a question we've long had regarding products from McIntosh. Their illumination. We can think of no other audio brand which is so defined by its lights and colour — backlit laser-cut glass front panels, softly-lit bouncing power meters. Head to a hi-fi show and you can almost locate the McIntosh room by the distinguished green glow which emanates from the room, and the sighs of hi-fi fans as they enter to face a set of racks loaded with this most iconic and desirable of brands.

But is it green? McIntosh never mentions green — it goes on about its "signature McIntosh blue watt meters" (sometimes nailing the shade more accurately as 'teal'). So green versus blue — is this like that dress, where you see gold'n'white, we see black'n'blue? Should we agree to meet on turquoise? Nope, it's just that the blue meters have been around longest, ever since the 1960s, back when McIntosh amplifiers were used to power Woodstock, and through the 1970s when The Grateful Dead used 48 McIntosh MC2300 amplifiers to deliver 28,800 watts from its famous

'Wall of Sound' PA. The now-green McIntosh signature, on the other hand, used to be gold, its lettering screen-printed onto the reverse of those thick glass front panels. Modern McIntosh instead back-illuminates the signature, and other things, in green. Lots of green.

### Equipment

Perhaps most green of all have been its turntables. The current range-topping MT10 has a massive 6cm-thick 5.4kg silicone acrylic platter that spins on a cushion of air, elevated by a custom magnetic bearing, and illuminated from below so that the whole platter glows green (yes, green), while a rather superfluous 'speed meter' is positioned on the front, clearly just to bring that splash of teal to the fascia. The MT10 is hypnotic; to see it is to want it. But at \$20,995, it may remain aspirational for many. Perhaps the MT5 turntable, with a still-quite-hypnotic floating 2.3kg 4cm-thick illuminated platter, at \$12,995?

Or McIntosh's new third deck, the MT2 turntable reviewed here. It would be a bit rude to call it entry-level, so let's call it relatively affordable, at \$7995. The platter isn't illuminated, it's black, and there's no teal meter on

And that's it. Pull off the stylus guard and you're ready to go with your first LP, securing it flat to the mat with the weighty record puck, which doesn't so much clamp on as weigh down the record.

We had a stream of amplifiers visit while the MT2 was in position; we listened to it through the Peachtree nova<sup>300</sup>, through NAD's C 368, through the phono stage of Cocktail's X45, and with Yamaha's A-S3000, as well as our reference Musical Fidelity pre-powers. The Yamaha amp offered the chance to compare the sound as a high-level input into a moving-coil phono input versus a reasonable low input into a moving-magnet circuit. There wasn't much to choose for most selections, but occasionally with music achieving heights of level and complexity we did think the moving coil input might be getting overloaded.

Though all these different phono stages made their mark, the underlying performance of the MT2 was clear enough. McIntosh uses the word 'precision' in its description of its deck — we'd add rock-solid. It laid open a classic rock mix with a combination of solidity to the bass elements and precision to the highs in a sound which was often too enjoyable to analyse; LPs came and went with very few review notes going down on paper, such was our distraction by the MT2's presentation. The 180g remaster of Pink Floyd's *Dogs* was one such — we noted the solidity of the bass pedal, how sizzingly fizzy those Korg/EMS-treated synths... then our notes stop, as we drifted away again.

We were able to compare directly with a number of other decks where the higher price of the MT2 should give it an inherent advantage. Sure enough, compared with the recently-reviewed Rega Planar 6 the MT2 delivered a more complete vocal tone to a favourite Jeff Lynne's ELO test track, stripping away a slight veil of artificiality and rendering it with full presence and reality dead centre-stage, no waver in tone or signal to either side. Against our resident Thorens TD 203 it was similarly a notch above with Keith Jarrett's *Flying Pt. 1*, granting the build of bass and ride cymbal a more natural staging — more open, more detailed, with more delicacy in the metallic tones of the ride, and notably an extra octave of depth to Gary Peacock's upright bass.

Having just been gifted the two-disc Giles Martin stereo remix of 'Sgt. Pepper', we gave this its first play, a thrill — check the thump to the bass pedal on the verses of *Lucy*... the depth and flange to the hurdy-gurdy-like grind behind the last verse of *Getting Better*... the clarity to the left-channel electric piano and drums of *Fixing A Hole*. We do have the digital version, and the vinyl through the MT2 might not have the same ultimate clarity but it had the more authentic tone — authentic in being the way we first knew the material (not you perhaps, young man, but the rest of us). Cracks and pops you say? We heard just one, during *She's Leaving Home*; the MT2 tracked with surity and an absolute minimum of surface noise, so low that the entry of *...Mr Kite* had quite the dynamic impact. [We were surprised to find Mr Martin Jrn again hard-panning the bass on a vinyl release (he did the same on the Hollywood Bowl remaster);



the cutting engineer and the MT2 survived this sin remarkably well, but we plan a long Sunday comparing mono, original stereo and new stereo LP releases before settling on a favourite. (Our money's on the mono.)]

Talking of mono, we had no such version quandry with Bob Dylan, since McIntosh's Australian distributor also handles Mobile Fidelity's vinyl releases, and we had to hand Mo-Fi's half-speed two-disc play-at-45rpm version of 'Highway 61 Revisited'. Speed change to 45rpm is just a flick of the big silver knob front left of the plinth — none of your belt-shifting here — and off Bob went with the whip-crack snare opening *Like A Rolling Stone*. What an experience well-delivered mono can be! *Tombstone Blues* comes across almost like a single-mike recording from early Americana days, the band in the back apparently still learning the song, with Dylan far upfront sneering his way through the verses, stepping aside in the gaps for Mike Bloomfield to rip his edgy guitar solo through the break. Again, what we heard wasn't the MT2 turntable, it was the recording, and the music. We have no negative notes on the performance. This'll do for us.

Between sessions, mind you, we did question McIntosh's method of keeping the MT2 dust-free. The dust-cover is barely worthy of its name, similar to the one that sits on our reference Thorens turntable — a contoured piece of thick acrylic which covers the platter completely when not in use, and makes a guard over the tonearm, but does absolutely nothing to prevent dust building up all over the plinth. Nor does it do anything to isolate the cartridge

acoustically from your speakers during playback, since it is removed during use, a big piece of plastic that must be leaned up against something when playing records. Since our music room sadly lacks pharmaceutical clean-room status, the dust build-up on the MT2 was significant over the month of its stay.

## Conclusion

So there's far more to recommend this McIntosh turntable than its siren call of physical illumination — it illuminates also your music, delivering a high level of vinyl joy commensurate with its asking price, only boosted by the cachet of McIntosh ownership (as Kermit realised in the end, it's both easy and pleasing to be green). Indeed the MT2's green glow is more than merely decorative. If, like us, you are prone to leaving a black turntable rotating in the dark overnight or even for days, well this is a mistake that will not be made with the McIntosh. Green means go, so if it's dark, it's off. If rotating, green! We think you'll notice. — Jez Ford

## SPECS

**McIntosh MT2** \$7995 with cartridge

**Cartridge:** Sumiko Blue Point No.2 high-output moving coil, elliptical diamond cantilever stylus

**Tonearm:** Dural-aluminium with eccentric counterweight, VTA, antisnake, azimuth adjustments

**Playback speeds:** 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  and 45rpm (electronic)

**Dimensions (whd):** 452 x 127 x 432mm

**Weight:** 13.2kg

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