



Going for gold

As one of the newest names to the UK, this luxury-looking turntable has bags of Italian design flair. **Ed Selley** takes it for a spin

The choice of turntables available to vinyl fans new and old continues to grow at a bewildering pace and the number of models available is greater now than when the format was in its first heyday back in the eighties. Some believe that saturation point will soon be reached, but new to the UK brand Gold Note has to hope that this point is a way off yet. The Italian company has been trading as Gold Note for around five years, but has existed for almost 25. It

offers a comprehensive range of equipment including amplifiers, speakers, cables and turntables of which the Valore (meaning value) 425 Plus is one of its more affordable models. It's an unsuspended, belt-driven design like the bulk of its rivals, but there are some notable differences. The first is that the basic specification is more extensive than much of the competition and the most visible part of this is that it comes with a lid included, which is a much underrated feature if you're

DETAILS
PRODUCT
 Gold Note
 Valore 425 Plus
ORIGIN
 Italy
TYPE
 Belt-drive turntable
WEIGHT
 10kg
DIMENSIONS
 (WxHxD)
 425 x 170 x 360mm
FEATURES
 • 45 & 33rpm
 • B5 9in tonearm
 • Fixed Perspex lid
 • Fitted with Vasari Gold moving-magnet cartridge
DISTRIBUTOR
 Audio Pinnacle Ltd
TELEPHONE
 01329 279119
WEBSITE
 goldnote.it

concerned about keeping the deck free from dust and interference from small hands and/or mischievous pets. Gold Note is a not a large company and yet every part of the Valore 425 Plus is a bespoke design. It ships with the company's own B5 tonearm, which is a simplified version of its B5.1 arm. The 9in arm has captive bearings for both the horizontal and vertical movements. The armtube looks like a one-piece design, but the headshell is separate from the tube and is secured via a small grub screw on the side. This makes for easy azimuth adjustment and once secured, feels very solid. The counterweight assembly is also impressively substantial and allows for a range of weights to be accommodated and for good fine adjustment. The cartridge in this case is the Vasari Gold (£369). Built inhouse, the Gold is the higher spec of two moving-magnet models with the more affordable Red (£206) having a simpler stylus profile. If you buy the Valore as a complete unit, this comes fitted but the basic design of the body, complete with threaded inserts makes it an easy fit and the 9g all up weight

with 2g tracking weight are no problem for the B5 and should work well with other arms too. The only minor downside is the small hinged stylus guard doesn't offer the protection of a full-size removable one. Perhaps the most interesting part of the design is the power supply. This is in a separate chassis and offers electronic speed adjustment. The process by which the power supply functions is no less distinctive. It takes an AC feed from the mains, which is then converted to DC. Having done this, the feed is converted back to AC before powering the motor. The reason for this slightly arduous process according to Gold Note is that the conversion process allows for the AC being sent to the turntable to be synchronised to avoid the negative effects of using it as a power source. As it isn't possible to run the turntable without it, these benefits are hard to test, but the unit itself works well and not having to move the belt between pulleys is always welcome. As a piece of design, the Valore 425 Plus is outstanding. There is a choice of finishes including various lacquers and a leather option, but the Perspex

of the review sample is something you should definitely see in the flesh before making any choices. The transparency creates a lightness and elegance that complements the clean lines of the design. When you look a little closer, there is clear evidence that Gold Note understands the materials it is using. Under the platter and around the motor housing are a series of curved strakes that alter the resonant points of the plinth to better match the requirements of the record. This is not to say that there aren't a few oddities, though. The lid has to be raised while the deck is playing or

2 and Neat Momentum 4i speakers, the Valore 425 Plus manages to get most of the immediate fundamentals right. The power supply might be an unusual design, but the platter spins up quickly and is accurate at both the 33 and 45rpm settings when checked via test mat and strobe. Into the utterly silent Cyrus there is no sign of any extraneous noise.

Sound quality

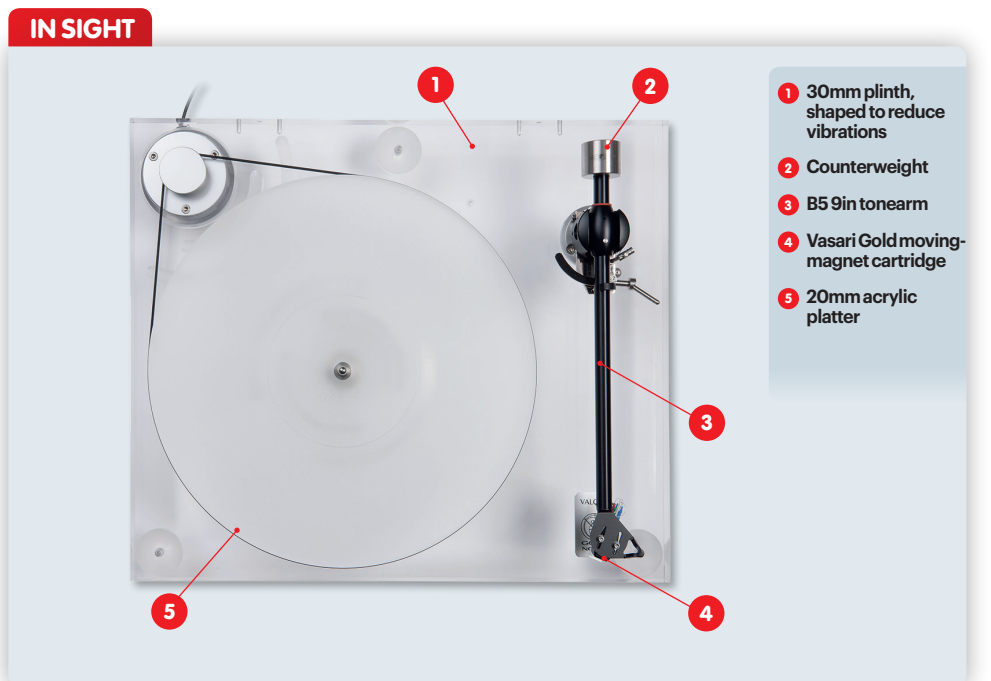
Stop marvelling at the sound of silence and the Gold Note impresses further. The overriding sense you get from it is one of balance and even handedness. The new reissue of Dead Can Dance's *Spiritchaser* is presented without any sense of embellishment and with the emphasis entirely on delivering a big, solid and informative take on the whole piece rather than spoon feeding you interesting details. Everything is there, indeed the Gold Note is adept at finding moments that are easy to miss but rather than dwell on these, you are invited to focus on the whole thing.

This means that even extremely complex and congested material is handled in a way that makes it logical and easy to follow. *Alone Again Or*, the opening track from Love's phenomenal *Forever Changes*, is a dense and slightly confused piece but the Valore 425 Plus takes it in its stride and opens it out to reveal the brilliance that underpins the album. What is equally apparent is that the top end of the Gold Note is extremely refined. This can be a slightly harsh recording, but here it is completely free of any sibilance or aggression.

Congested material is handled in a way that makes it logical and easy to follow

it will foul the counterweight as it moves outwards and removing it completely involves undoing the fixing screws. Various fittings that hold the Gold Note together are all clearly visible through the Perspex, which looks a little crude in places. The overall effect is still convincing enough to impress, though, and in the time it has spent under review it has picked up more positive comments from visitors than some rather more expensive devices and its proportions are very easy on the eye.

The Gold Note ships in an almost entirely assembled state and this means that setting it up is simplicity itself. Connected to a Cyrus Phono Signature (HFC 408), Naim Supernait



Q&A

Maurizio Aterini

Production engineer, Gold Note



ES: What benefits do you feel the power supply arrangement brings to the Valore 425 Plus?

MA: The Power Width Modulator allows the perfect input phase of the motor coils, the misalignment of which typically generates vibration in AC motors. The PWM gives computer controlled alignment to create a match otherwise unavailable using just electronic components.

Do the Valore's different finishes affect the performance of the turntable due to the different materials in use?

Yes, indeed. The acrylic sounds better being a highly dampening material. We designed a leather-covered MDF plinth because even the leather has an effective higher dampening result.

How are the precise locations and size of the curved cuts in the plinth calculated?

The cuts stop vibrations from going through the plinth and interrupt their propagation. The cut must be larger than the generated vibration wave to be effective and are made at different levels over the total diameter of the more sensitive parts including the platter bearing and the motor.

The Gold Note range is extensive, is there an underlying philosophy that links everything together?

We have been designing OEM/ODM audio products for the industry for a long time. We decided to move into our own brand and collected all our experience to merge into the same sound philosophy with all our items. Our goals are to bring detail, richness, extension and a balanced sound to all our products, which some of our Italian partners call "modern romantic sound". I think we have a relaxed but powerful and well extended and precise sound that works easily with all kinds of music.



The electronic speed control is a useful addition



Perhaps the closest competitor in ethos is Analogue Works' Zero+ (HFC 407). Price rises for the Jelco arm and Audio-Technica cartridge that complete the package ensure it is fairly closely matched to the Gold Note. The Analogue Works might use outside brands, but the effect is similar as both offer a compelling performance. The final choice for a potential buyer is whether or not the fractionally more exciting performance of the Analogue Works suits them better than the superbly refined presentation of the Valore 425 Plus. If practicality is taken into account, though, both the lid and speed control of the Gold Note undoubtedly give it a performance edge.

Some of this refinement can be directly traced to the Vasari Gold cartridge. Some quick tests of this on the end of my own Avid Ingenium Twin running an SME M2-9 (HFC 379) suggests that this is a very talented piece of equipment indeed. It manages to combine a rather beguiling warmth with enough energy and low-end impact to be a very satisfying partner with a wide variety of music. No less encouraging is that this fundamentally neutral behaviour suggests it isn't covering any bad habits on the behalf of the rest of the package.

Indeed bad habits are pretty much impossible to find with this turntable. Compared with the Roksan Radius 7 (HFC 423) that preceded it through the review process, the Gold Note feels fractionally less pitch stable. There is just the slightest sense with sustained notes that there is a waver that isn't present with the extremely hefty motor arrangement of the Roksan. More subjectively, this isn't the sort of turntable that hangs on the first picosecond of every note like its life depends on it. It never sounds sluggish, but then the pounding bassline of Kraftwerk's *Aerodynamik* doesn't quite have the urgency that some rivals are more able to deliver to the performance (see *How It Compares* box out).

This ballistic edge isn't really what the Valore 425 Plus is about, though. It has the composure and low-end articulation to handle fast material without making a mess of it while its talents are much more readily appreciated with more relaxed tempo pieces. *Blue Ridge Mountains* by Fleet Foxes is wonderfully tangible and the way that the Gold Note handles vocals is very compelling. The definition and body that it gives Robin Pecknold's lyrics is genuinely impressive for a relatively sanely priced turntable. As before, the emphasis is on the performance as a whole, but as vocals are so important to this sparse and simple piece, they leap out of the mix and front an effortlessly three dimensional and spacious soundstage.

The final twist to this is that while the Gold Note never fails to sound spacious, it is able to balance this with an ability to give everything you play the correct sense of scale. Switch between the enormous sweeping vista of M83 to the man-and-a-microphone delta blues of RL Burnside, and it will find the right scale for both without breaking into a sweat.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most fulsome summary I can give the Gold Note is that it has followed a series of very talented (and generally more expensive) turntables through the test process and not once has it been anything less than a pleasure to listen to. Indeed, with its speed control, lid and fuss-free tonearm, it is charmingly hassle free to live with. That it combines real-world user friendliness with a sonic performance that is almost unfailingly impressive means that this has to be seen as a very capable new arrival. We might well be approaching saturation point in turntable models, but this newcomer is just too good to ignore ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Refined and cohesive sound; features; build quality

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Fractional sense of pitch instability; lid fouls arm

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: A handsome turntable that sounds excellent across a wide variety of material

FEATURES



OVERALL

