

# Audio-Technica

## AT-95E phono cartridge

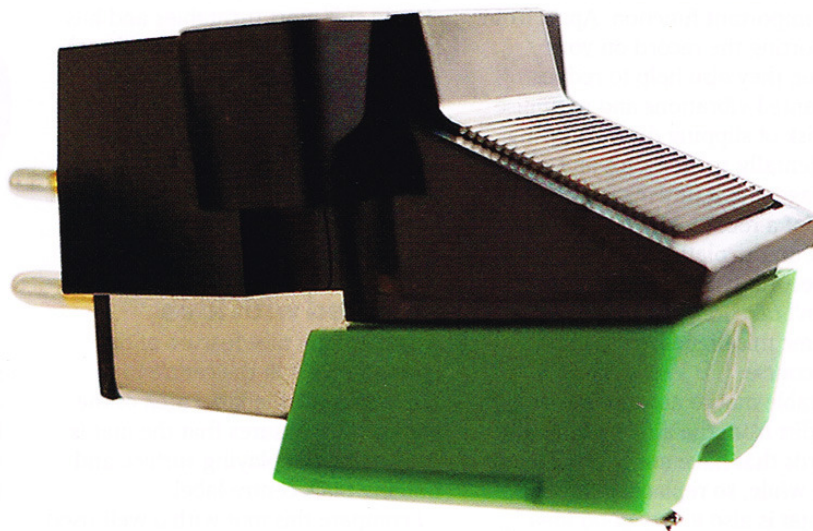


**MANY PEOPLE IN** the West tend to regard Japanese companies as massive corporations, on a par with Sony. Some are, of course, but not all – and Audio-Technica is one of Japan's smaller ones. It's basically a family-run business, started in 1962 in Tokyo's central Shinjuku district by Hideo Matushita. Japanese cultural, craft and artisan tradition has always placed a premium on precision engineering on a small – or even micro scale – and so it was no surprise that many companies started making pickup cartridges during the vinyl era. Audio-Technica started with the AT-1 and then AT-3 moving magnets, then the AT-1001 tonearm and latterly micro cassette recorders, headphones, microphones and interconnects.

By the early eighties when the AT-95E was launched, the company had a strong provenance of making phono cartridges, and began to do well in moving coils as well. A precision-made dual magnet design, it sports a green plastic detachable stylus assembly to which a standard aluminium cantilever is attached via a rubber damper. At the end you'll find a bonded round shank stylus, with an elliptical profile. When it was introduced, elliptical styli were still fairly prestigious things to have on budget cartridges, but now it's totally routine. The cartridge motor assembly is housed in a screened metal case and glued to a black plastic half-inch mounting block. It's all solidly made in Japan, and very well considering the price.

### Tale of the tape

The vital statistics of the AT-95E are pretty routine nowadays, but were extremely good at the time of its launch. It tracks between 1.5g and 2.5g (I get best results around 2.2g), weighs 5.7g in total so will balance in most tonearms with ease, and has a standard 47,000ohm recommended loading. The company claims a 3.5mV (mV at 1kHz, 5cm/sec) output, which is decent but nothing special and a frequency response of 20Hz to 20kHz, which is fine.



With its detachable stylus, the joy of the AT-95E is that if you break it you can slot a brand new one in for around £20. Better still, if you're feeling tweaky there are various fancy aftermarket alternatives, such as the LP Gear ([www.lpgear.com](http://www.lpgear.com)) ViVid Line for around £60. Or, if you're feeling keen, superglueing a brand new stylus to your AT-95E body will further improve the sound. This is precisely what Linn did back in the mid-eighties to make the Linn Basik cartridge – although it did it to the 95's cheaper AT-93 sibling, which had an inferior spherical diamond fitted.

This is no giant killing cartridge – £1,000 Lyra moving coils need not stir from their slumbers – but what it does do is provide an extremely good basic level of performance in a totally fuss-free way, for a very small amount of money (in cartridge terms). Rather like a good cheap hatchback car, you keep coming back to it thinking you're having a little more fun than perhaps you've paid for!

Housed in a good basic turntable – such as a Rega P3, for example – the Audio-Technica sounds fast, fun and frenetic, making music a pleasure to listen to and throwing loads of detail out at you. It tracks surprisingly well for a cheap cartridge, and delivers a spacious and deep soundstage that captures the fundamentals of the music brilliantly.

Tonally, it's ever so slightly bright and forward, but then again the vinyl medium isn't, so the AT-95E has some help here. The result is an explicit, well defined sound that has a taut, lithe bass and an open and engaging midband. In absolute terms, it pushes images just a little forward and into your face, but it's all relative and by CD standards sounds quite laid back. Treble is decently smooth and couth with no obvious nasties, although it's not the last word in extension.

### Needle craft

Critics of the Audio-Technica will say it's slightly sterile and analytical. It's true to an extent, inasmuch as you'd never call it a romantic cartridge, and it doesn't time as well as really good moving coils. But at the price there are no complaints. Again, tonally it could do with a slightly more generous bass, but careful setup can help here, as can superglueing the stylus in place – although you'll void your warranty if you do this, of course. Properly aligned in a semi-decent tonearm, tracking at the right weight and given an LP side or two to warm up, the AT-95E is capable of a surprisingly good sound. Overall, it's a cracking little MM phono cartridge for any starter or classic deck – pick-up a bargain now! **DP**

#### DETAILS

PRICE  
£30

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#### OUR VERDICT

