

Inspire Hi-Fi Technics SL-1200 wood plinth kit



Anyone who's taken an interest in the Technics SL-1200-series turntable will know that it's the analogue gift that keeps on giving. Sadly now only available secondhand – as Technics recently discontinued them after nearly four decades of production – if you find a good used example you enter a brave new world of magical tweaking potential. Relatively inexpensively, the deck can be transformed from a good sounding record player with a bright punchy sound, into something altogether deeper, darker and more three dimensional...

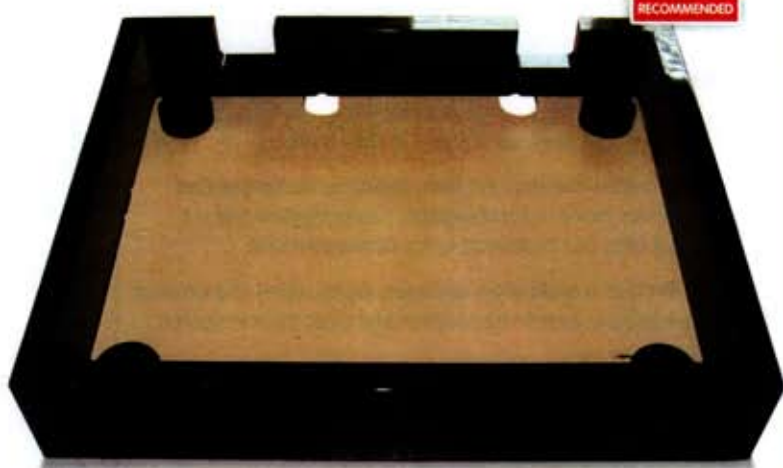
First of all, for price of a few beers at your local hostelry, you can substitute the platter mat for a superior aftermarket design and suddenly you're in a world of sweetness and smoothness you'd not previously thought possible. Also, change the stock headshell for a stiffer one, and upgrade the cartridge tags and the deck just keeps on improving. Then there are the myriad power supply upgrades, bearing mods and all kinds of other things too – even detaching the dustcover has a most useful effect!

There's also the radical surgery option – pull the stock S-shaped arm out and install a decent aftermarket design – from Rega's RB251 at one end of the price scale to SME's 309 at the other – and things *seriously* improve. Dynamics, clarity, speed, depth and detail all leap forward. This humble disco deck can relatively easily and inexpensively be transformed to the status of hi-fi giant killer...

Interestingly though, very few individuals ever single out the Technics' plinth for improvement. This is perhaps understandable, as it's a wonderfully sturdy affair, sporting a big, chunky cast aluminium top-plate (painted to look like plastic, but far from it!), and an acoustically damped rubber base. While it does a surprisingly good job of keeping mechanical noise out of the system, of course it doesn't have any suspension – save the stock plastic and rubber feet.

So, enter the Inspire Hi-Fi solid wood plinth, which provides an additional level of isolation. First, the wood further damps the vibration coming from the loudspeakers (and being wood of course it has a different resonant frequency to the Technics' own plinth), and second it decouples the SL-1200 from the outside world twice. There's 'Sorbo Pod' suspension (i.e. sorbothane rubber feet) between the deck and the plinth, and more Sorbo Pods between the plinth and your turntable shelf.

Because the plinth has been made-to-measure for the deck, fitting it is simply a case of removing the Technics' stock feet (not nice things, about the cheapest bits on it, truth be told), placing the Sorbo Pods inside the Inspire plinth (which locate onto the MDF baseboard) and gently dropping the deck down inside it. This is a very simple thing to do, and can be done in the space of about fifteen minutes. Obviously, remember to secure the arm and cartridge on its rest (I used Sellotape) to



prevent disaster happening and your stylus going south. This done, the SL-1200 sits snug as-a-bug-in-a-rug inside its new plinth, and very attractive it looks too. While the standard option of solid woods include Maple, Cherry, Walnut and Light American Oak (all built to a very good standard), if you ask Inspire nice enough they may be able to do a special finish for a small price premium. A black gloss variant gives a very 'stock' feel, making the deck look like the piece of studio equipment it was surely destined to be.

Sound quality

How then does it sound? Better, in a word. The deck assumes just a little bit more stability, solidity and smoothness – and this is something it doesn't especially lack in stock plinthed form. Music just ebbs and flows that little bit more effortlessly, the deck being even less bothered by the cruel outside world (in vibration terms) that it previously was. Tonally, it's fractionally darker and deeper, with that trademark brightly lit upper midband just toning itself down a touch. Rhythmically, there's really no difference, it's just that with an ever so slightly lower noise floor, the ear has to work less hard to enjoy the nuances of the music.

This is certainly not one of those 'night and day' transformations for the SL-1200 – in the sense that dropping an SME 309 into it is – but it's still a very real and worthwhile upgrade, bringing everything just that little bit more into focus, and imbuing the music with a slightly more organic feel. It's the sort of mod that, once you've done it, you really won't want to go back to running your deck 'naked'. It's great value for money as is, but I wonder if Inspire will offer an optional higher quality baseboard – the stock MDF affair is absolutely fine – but what about carbon fibre? That's the trouble with Technics tweaking, once you've got the habit, you just can't kick it! **DP**

DETAILS
PRICE: £287

OUR VERDICT

