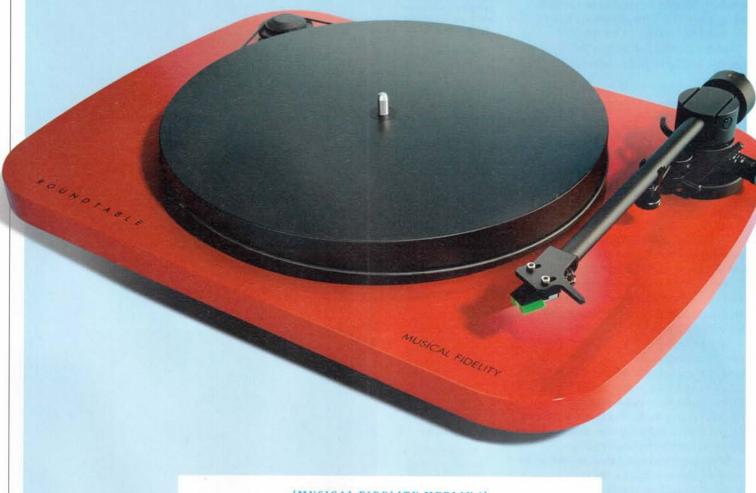
(ALSO ON OUR RADAR)

Android Auto hits the fast lane p20 The BlackBerry makes a comeback p23 Heating control made cooler p26 A stack of hi-fi for audio afficionados p29 A surfboard, with an engine p34

MOST WANTED

The Merlin 1 looks retro, but is digitally advanced. And it comes in lipstick red, which always makes us happy



A MUSICAL FIDELITY MERLIN 1)

Cutting-edge tech meets old-school vinyl in Musical Fidelity's must-have record-spinning system

→ THERE'S NO STOPPING VINYL.

Record sales are at their highest since 1996, with 1.2 million of the polyvinyl chloride discs shifted last year. Like reading paperbacks, it's a decidedly analogue rebellion in a digital world. Enthusiasts cite the warm, organic sound of the medium and the large-format nature of its artwork as reasons to love it.

As a result, we're seeing high-quality record players enter the market. Top dog is Musical Fidelity's Merlin 1, a £1,300 all-in-one deck, amplifier and speaker system, which boasts retro looks and cutting-edge sound.

The most important component here is the turntable, dubbed the Round Table in keeping with the system's Arthurian nomenclature. Music Fidelity has carefully chosen the components to ensure that it's perfectly balanced around the pivot point of the main bearing, which means that the needle will stay in place even if the player's sitting on the world's most unstable bar stool.

Other top of the line tech packed into this disc spinner includes a high-quality,

THE NEEDLE WILL STAY IN PLACE EVEN IF THE PLAYER'S SITTING ON THE WORLD'S MOST UNSTABLE BAR STOOL

low-resonance nine-inch pick-up arm with magnetic anti-skating, and steel tipped bearings housed in zirconium with rubber damping to keep its most delicate parts isolated. The spinning platter is made of medium density fibreboard, long admired for its acoustic separation properties.

Play a record and a lovely analogue signal flows into the amplifier. An in-built analogue-to-digital converter transforms this into a binary stream, which can flow into a computer so you can rip your vinyl to hard disk. And if you want to play media files stored elsewhere, Bluetooth aptX and a digital or analogue line input will do so with decent quality.

While you can connect your own active or passive speakers and sub to the system, you're better off using those supplied. These employ a multi-stepped front baffle to accentuate the sound, resulting in a wide sound stage that belies the speaker's relatively compact size.

The system ticks all our boxes – it can play the world's most long-lived recording format at a really high quality, but its cutting-edge features make it perfect for the digital home. FROM £1,300, MUSICALFIDELITY.COM, OUT NOW



{DETAILS}

1. COMPLETELY BAFFLED

While most loudspeakers use a flat front baffle, the Merlin 1's speakers use a stepped one to deliver a wide soundscape that belies their small size.

2. BLUE IN THE TOOTH

Forget the crappy sound quality of your average Bluetooth system – Musical Fidelity employs Bluetooth aptX, which delivers a CD level of fidelity. It's backwards compatible with older Bluetooth devices, too.

3. TURN THE TABLES

To create the turntable Musical Fidelity has nabbed components from higher-end systems, such as a high carbon tool steel bearing and a low resonance nine-inch pick-up arm.

4. AMPED UP

The Merlin 1 includes a pair of amplifier modules – one for each speaker – which are separated into two monoblocs to prevent cross-chatter and distortion.

{SPECS}

POWER OUTPUT
50 watts per channel
INPUTS Phono, USB,
Bluetooth aptX, line in
(digital or analog)
HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER
Integrated
CONFIGURABLE OUTPUTS
Digital or analog,
fixed or variable
SPEAKER POWER
HANDLING 15-75W
ENCLOSURE TYPE
One-way reflex
IMPEDANCE 4 Ohms

