

Belt-driven turntable system with electronic speed control  
 Made by: Roksan, Rayleigh, Essex  
 Supplied by: Monitor Audio Ltd, Rayleigh, Essex  
 Telephone: 01268 740580  
 Web: www.roksan.com; www.monitoraudio.com  
 Price: £995 (inc. arm and cartridge)

# Roksan Attesa

Launched as part of a series including a CD transport and two amplifiers – one with onboard streaming – the Attesa turntable completes Roksan's most stylish offering  
 Review: Adam Smith Lab: Paul Miller

There are a few announcements guaranteed to make an audio fan sit up and take notice, one being the unveiling of a new turntable from Roksan. After all, the company burst onto the scene in 1985 with the Xerxes – a deck that is still going strong 36 years later in '20 Plus' guise [HFN Dec '11]. However, the new deck in question is the £995 Attesa turntable, and it forms part of a completely new Roksan range.

The Attesa models also mark a new entry-level point for Roksan, sitting below the blak, Caspian and K3 components. They also continue the brand's styling evolution – the rather 'industrial' appearance of its oldest separates disrupted by the arrival of the Oxygene models [HFN Aug '13] before its new owners, none other than Monitor Audio, extended the range and appeal of the Roksan marque. The new Attesa models are its sleekest yet!

## FLOAT ON

As well as the turntable here, there are currently two amplifiers – the £995 Attesa Integrated Amplifier and the £1495 Attesa Streaming Amplifier – plus the £495 Attesa CD transport. Strangely, the amps and CD player are offered in a silver or black finish, but the turntable's options are satin white or satin black, which strikes me as a stumbling block to stylistic harmony.

Fortunately, there are no such concerns under the skin. Fully developed and assembled in the UK, the Attesa turntable is based around a single-layer plinth sitting on three isolating but non-adjustable feet. A stable and level sitting surface will be a prerequisite for this deck as it's also fitted with a 'floating' uni-pivot arm...

Meanwhile, the striking orange sub-platter contains an integral stainless steel spindle that locates into the brass bearing

**RIGHT:** Precision cut and polished 10mm glass platter is damped and (flywheel) assisted by a peripheral alloy 'edge'. Uni-pivot arm's azimuth is trimmed by sliding an outrigger to the left or right, while the counterweight is set further in, closer to the jewelled bearing

housing on the main plinth, and spins on a captive steel ball. Drive is transferred by a flat cross-section belt from an aluminium pulley atop a 24-pole synchronous AC motor. With a nod to cost and also to maintain steady belt tension, rather than use Roksan's traditional spring mounting, the motor here is secured into the plinth with a vibration-dampening gasket.

Meanwhile, the motor is driven via a two-speed synthesised supply within the plinth – one for 33rpm and one for 45rpm – and the deck is operated and speed-switched by three rather delicate touch buttons. The platter is a 10mm-thick tempered glass disc with spun and anodised aluminium edging, and weighs in at just less than 2kg. A Roksan R-MAT turntable mat tops it off. As for the partnering arm, the company has stuck with the uni-pivot bearing

configuration found on its other current tonearms – the Nima and Sara.

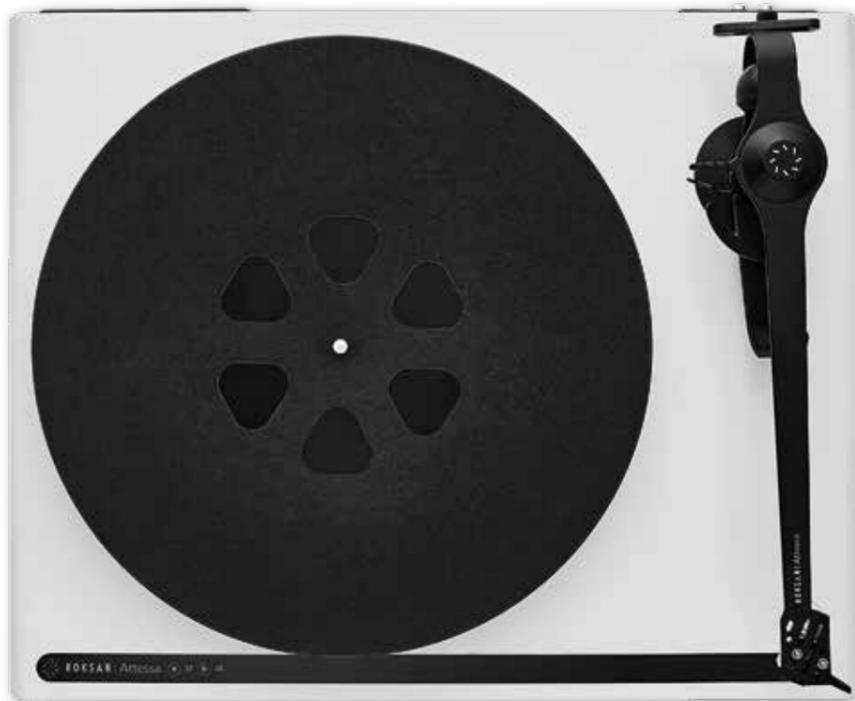
## PHONO INSIDE

On the Attesa turntable, this means a stainless steel uni-pivot on a single jewel bearing and an arm wand comprising a flat construction of lightweight ABS topped with aluminium. As noted in PM's lab report [see p67], this does confer a higher than average effective arm mass, so cartridge choice needs to be carefully considered.

Otherwise, the arm felt solid and was very stable in use, thanks largely to its separate azimuth balance and tracking force counterweights.

As part of this plug-and-go package, the deck is supplied with a pre-fitted and aligned Roksan Dana MM cartridge. This has a nominal 3.5mV output and a stylus

*'It spins its magic and you're hungry for more'*



tip described as 'diamond titanium' – if I was a gambling man, I'd wager pick-up specialist Audio-Technica is the source!

By way of final flourish, the Attesa turntable also has an inbuilt phono stage, well disguised with only a preposterously tiny slide switch to activate or bypass it, which you will find on the rear of the deck. This is dedicated to MM only, and offers no adjustable loading or gain options [see PM's boxout, below].

Setup of the deck is simple and straightforward and the quick-start guide clear enough, with the full manual available online, plus video tutorials to assist. For the purposes of this review, I parked the deck on the damped glass shelf of an Atacama Equinox RS rack, and hooked it up to a Naim SuperNait 2 amplifier [HFN

Dec '13] driving a pair of PMC Twenty5.24 loudspeakers [HFN May '17].

## SWEET ESCAPE

With the deck in 'active' mode and the inbuilt phono stage enabled, a couple of issues came swiftly to light. First, the Attesa proved more than a little microphonic in my setting, and handling the arm could result in thumps through the loudspeakers, so take care with volume!

Second, and more concerning, the Attesa has no earth terminal so I could do nothing about the soft buzz permeating the background, the noise increasing in intensity when the arm was touched. This seems a fairly basic oversight in my view.

**ABOVE:** Available in gloss white or black, the chassis hosts a 24-pole synchronous motor with soft-touch electronic speed control, a brass/steel main bearing and novel uni-pivot tonearm

Fortunately, the musical performance of the deck went a long way to winning me back around. The Attesa really is a sweet and polished performer and a typically very enjoyable listen. No matter what kind of music passes under the stylus, the Attesa has a relaxed but confident air about its presentation. It doesn't leap out and grab you by the lapels but rather it sneakily draws you in with its subtle and alluring sound. The deck has an easy way about it and after a side or two it spins its magic and you're left hungry for more.

The standout feature has to be its midband – close your eyes and it's not difficult to work out that a uni-pivot tonearm is at the business end, and a very good one at that. The traditional uni-pivot

sense of air and space around performers and instruments was present and correct, and is always a joy to encounter. However, this was accompanied by a real sense of precision in placement, the performers finely etched within the soundstage.

## ULTRA VIVID

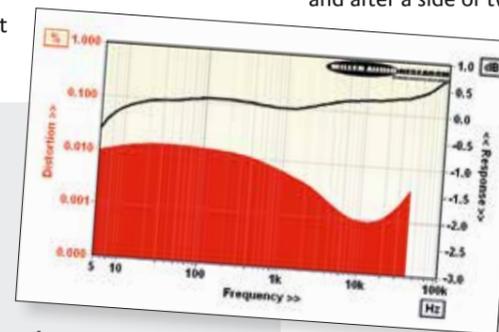
Don Henley's vocals on the title track from The Eagles' *Long Road Out Of Eden* [Universal 0602517546950] have seldom sounded more vivid and securely placed centre stage, with a level of projection out into the room that was quite uncanny. I've heard decks many times the cost of the Attesa make a far worse job of this and I was hugely impressed. Despite its apparent

## GOING ACTIVE

Tucked away adjacent to the output RCAs at the rear of the Attesa [see pic, p67] is a very small switch labelled 'passive' and 'active'. No, this has nothing to do with passive or active loudspeaker connections but refers, instead, to the disabling or enabling (respectively) of the Attesa's in-built MM phono stage. This is a fixed-gain (+46.7dB) preamp that offers a maximum 7.2V output from a 56ohm source impedance.

The latter increases through low bass frequencies to 300ohm/20Hz, presumably through capacitor-coupling, although the RIAA eq does not adopt the more recent subsonic amendment and, instead, is flat to -1dB/4Hz and -3dB/2Hz [black trace, inset Graph]. So slightly warped LPs and big, flappy reflex-loaded loudspeakers are unlikely to be comfortable bedfellows for the Attesa!

The response shows a slight HF lift (+0.3dB/20kHz) – inconsequential given the larger response variations of most MM pick-ups – while distortion decreases from a maximum of ~0.015% through bass frequencies down to ~0.002% at 20kHz [red infill, and lefthand Y axis, inset Graph]. Of greater potential subjective impact is the reduced headroom of the phono stage – the output clipping at just 34mV input. This amounts to an input overload margin of +16.7dB (re. 5mV/1kHz or +19.7dB re. the 3.5mV rated o/p for the supplied Dana MM). So higher output MM upgrades should probably be avoided. Finally, the A-wtd S/N is also a little below average (and below the 70dB spec.) at just 62.3dB re. 5mV/5cm/sec. Judged in context, however, the built-in Attesa phono stage is an ideal, if temporary, 'get you on the road/out of jail' all-in-one solution. PM



## TURNTABLE PACKAGE



**ABOVE:** Stereo RCA sockets are mounted under the left of the plinth while the 5V 'wall wart' PSU plugs in on the right. Note the minuscule 'Passive/Active' switch adjacent to the RCAs that enables the in-built phono stage [see boxout, p65]

simplicity and relatively budget nature, the arm here clearly follows in the estimable footsteps of its more expensive Roksan stablemates.

The same album also hinted at the deck's good speed stability – there are some fine keyboard effects throughout the track and it doesn't take too much to give them a subtle tremor. But through the Attesa they sounded solid, suggesting its drive system is more than capable. This also paid dividends at the low end with a detailed bass, and individual notes easy to pick up on and follow.

### MOVING ON UP

On the other hand, this bass didn't seem especially deep, so although the deck didn't sound lightweight it did lack a little authority and punch in the lower registers. With the 12in single of OMD's 'Forever Live And Die' [Virgin VS888-13] travelling under the Dana cartridge, the Attesa played it cheerfully enough but I am more used to the sound pinning me into my seat with thundering drums and snappy percussion. The Attesa made it clear all was there, but rendered the track in a way that was a little too 'safe'.

'Safe' could also be used to describe the top-end sound of the deck with its onboard phono preamp in tow – everything was sweet and well-ordered but it could have done with more crispness. Hi-hats on tracks like 'A Man Alone' from the soundtrack to *The Ipress File* [Decca DL79124] lacked their customary urgency and snap, for example. Fortunately, the Attesa is built to accommodate the audiophile's need to fiddle and upgrade!

I bypassed the deck's internal preamp and hooked-up an Arcam rPhono [HFN Jun '17]. This proved a revelation as the soft background buzz diminished and the treble took on a new lease of life. Hi-hats stepped up to the front of the soundstage again, and a sense

of glossy crispness appeared, but without any associated hardness. If I'd wondered that the cartridge was a little over-smooth, the rPhono proved not – the Dana is far more insightful than I'd given it credit.

Switching out the internal phono stage brought an all-round uplift in sound – the bass was deeper and firmer, the treble lighter, brighter and articulate as the Attesa picked up its skirts and found its mojo. The *Ipress File* soundtrack now regained the sense of frenetic urgency I'd naturally expect from the pace of the performance. Even better was that the magnificent insight, spatiality and precision of the midband remained unaffected.

There's still greater potential to be realised from the Attesa if you'll countenance a cartridge upgrade. Recognising the moderate effective mass of the arm, I substituted the Dana for a (costlier) Denon DL103 [HFN Jul '09] whereupon the Attesa's very capable bass was finally revealed. Returning to the OMD 12in single, I now felt proper impact from the drums and heard rhythms that were tight, punchy and pacy. This is clearly a deck to buy for its great sound-for-pound and then upgrade at your leisure. ☺

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

There's no doubt that the Roksan Attesa turntable is an excellent value package. I'd argue that better isolation and an earth terminal wouldn't go amiss, while the phono stage is handy as a get-you-started feature rather than a long-term solution. However the motor unit and arm are solidly implemented and, with a little effort and careful cartridge choice, really do turn in a rewarding performance.

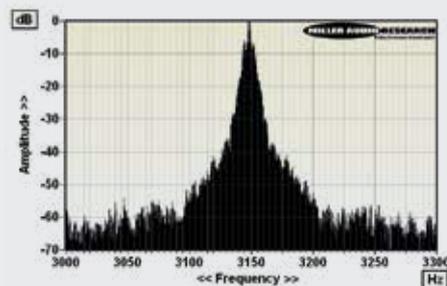
Sound Quality: 80%



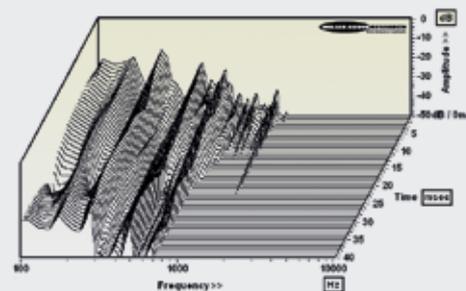
## ROKSAN ATTESSA

The Attesa is fitted with a high quality stainless steel/brass main bearing while the platter – a 10mm glass disc with a bonded, precision-machined alloy periphery – contributes a full 1.8kg to the deck's total 6.3kg weight. This well-damped platter comes up to speed over a leisurely 4-5 seconds with a fine absolute accuracy of  $-0.06\%$ . Peak wow is a low 0.03%, the main component at  $\pm 4.5\text{Hz}$ , but peak flutter is distributed over a wider  $\pm 50\text{Hz}$  bandwidth and amounts to a higher 0.09% [as illustrated by the broadened main peak, see Graph 1 below]. Through-bearing rumble is also quite high at  $-63.5\text{dB}$  (DIN-B wtd re. 1kHz/5cm/sec) with modes visible at 1Hz, 7Hz and 96Hz, but the combination glass/alloy platter with its custom felt mat takes this figure down to a more respectable  $-67.4\text{dB}$  through-the-groove. In practical terms, this is the figure that matters.

The partnering uni-pivot tonearm is rather more substantial than it looks – a half-round ABS moulding plus aluminium top section – so the effective mass is also above-average at 14.5g and arguably slightly better suited to lower compliance pick-ups than either the Roksan Dana or, in particular, the popular Ortofon 2M series. The undamped uni-pivot necessarily offers very low friction and setup is very easy but its resonant behaviour is quite 'lively', possibly due to its numerous flat alloy surfaces. There's a low-Q bending mode at 65Hz followed by harmonics, twisting and other bending patterns at 165Hz, 260Hz, 460Hz and 670Hz, followed by a smattering of short-lived resonances above 1kHz [see Graph 2]. The more energy ploughed into this arm via the pick-up, the more these modes will be aggravated, so medium-compliance MMs will be favoured over low compliance MCs. PM



**ABOVE:** Wow and flutter re. 3150Hz tone at 5cm/sec (plotted  $\pm 150\text{Hz}$ , 5Hz per minor division)



**ABOVE:** Cumulative tonearm resonant decay spectrum, illustrating various bearing, pillar and 'tube' vibration modes spanning 100Hz-10kHz over 40msec

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Turntable speed error at 33.33rpm	33.31rpm ( $-0.06\%$ )
Time to audible stabilisation	4-5sec
Peak Wow/Flutter (Peak wtd)	0.03% / 0.09%
Rumble (silent groove, DIN B wtd)	$-67.4\text{dB}$
Rumble (through bearing, DIN B wtd)	$-63.5\text{dB}$
Hum & Noise (unwtd, rel. to 5cm/sec)	$-54.9\text{dB}$
Power Consumption	5W (1W standby)
Dimensions (WHD, with lid) / Weight	432x105x353mm / 6.3kg