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HANA ML CARTRIDGE REVIEW



8. October 2019. Many amongst us are highly cherishing the analog products that are coming from the Land of The Rising Sun. Decades of painstaking efforts in researching all the different materials and approaches have lead to the creations of many analog micro machines.

In the past few years, HANA cartridges made a highly important impact on our beloved industry. By their continuing striving for perfection and creating the products at down to earth prices, they've opened the doors to the beautiful analog universe to many of the people around the world.

When Hiroshi Ishihara (Youtek/HANA sole export agent) asked me if I would be interested in the latest HANA ML cartridge, I've happily obliged. Newly introduced materials and techniques all sounded very promising and as you can learn through the review, the HANA ML builds upon the success of the remarkable HANA SL I've already reviewed here...

MEET THE HANA ML

HANA - M series represent the brands' deluxe MC cartridges.

A special Japanese character reflects the desired sonic goals of brilliancy and splendid analog performance for music lovers and audiophiles, that are highly cherishing the vinyl.

This HANA sound is a design overachievement of Excel Sound cartridge design Master Masao Okada-san, that has over 50 years of experience with creating superb micro machines.

The "M" series are the evolutionally step up that introduces higher specification parts, advanced materials, unique technical treatment, and superior mechanical interface.

As the Excel Sound manufactures all of the major parts with specialized tooling, HANA is capable of offering affordable cartridges with excellent sound quality.

The new M series uses a Microline stylus that mirrors the cutting lathe stylus, thus fitting more precisely into the vinyl groove. This allows much more delicate musical details to fully bloom, a stereo imaging, as well as much wider frequency reproduction and better resolution.



M Series also uses a very high-purity copper wire for the windings of the movie coils. This allows a greater clarity for both ML (low output) and MH (high output) models. The ML features a new low impedance generator for optimized performance with a broader range of phono preamps as you can read at my conclusion.

The M Series cartridge body is injection molded from Delrinc. This high tech polymer has improved mechanical characteristics and offers far better damping of the resonance, thus revealing a lot more low-level information and enhances the dynamic range.

The M series uniqueness continues with the Cryogenic processing. The cold annealing at near absolute zero temperature restructures metals at the molecular level, especially affecting the Alnico based magnetic electro-motive circuit (cartridge signal generator).



A front yoke, center, and rear components are all Cryogenically treated. The result is a more precise and controlled magnetic flux field for greater linearity and musical sound quality.

M Series Delrinc cartridge bodies have also a metal threaded fittings for headshell mounting hardware. This allows much easier mounting and provides a superior mechanical interface for better bass and dynamics.

The Delrinc cartridge body also features an integrally machined brass cap providing constrained mode layer damping and its heavier 9.5-gram weight provides expanded compatibility with a wider range of tonearms and turntables.

THE SECRETS!

I've already touched the subject of what's the secret behind the HANA cartridges, but it's important to either refresh the memory or offers the insights to the new readers...

"It was more than fortunate to have met Masao Okada-san, founder of Excel Sound almost 40 years ago and then in 2015, to have him develop the HANA line of moving coil cartridges for our exclusive export. HANA "SH" and "SL" use nude natural diamond Shibata-stylus, capable of excellent high-frequency response, giving you supreme transparency and excellent traceability"



What are the secrets? First, Excel Sound produces all the major parts used in HANA MC cartridges itself, from materials like aluminum for the cantilever, Alnico for the electro-motive power magnet, pure iron for the magnetic circuit and 4N copper wire for MC wiring. The electrical sub-assembly is then packaged in an ABS plastic body. If the constituent materials are not rare or expensive but designed and manufactured correctly, they can contribute at the making of the cartridges with a very excellent sound for a reasonable price ? a rare end product indeed.

Specialized tooling is another weapon that improves the price/quality performance, so manufactured parts are consistently perfect, repeatable parts for production, parts designed for maximum performance assuring the highest level of performance.

The most essential 'secret' of the HANA cartridges might be the hand assembling of the cartridges by skilled artisans. Excel Sound craftsmen hand assemble all the parts into a perfect finished product, producing a consistent "Brilliant and Gorgeous" HANA sound. Without this precise hand assembling and the fine-tuning work by Excel Sound's renown craftsmen, with their accumulation of 50 years of cartridge production expertise, the HANA products would not sound so consistently fine and delicate.

Rare or exotic materials and extreme design is not enough to make a fine MC cartridge but might result in making an expensive one.

THE REPAIR PROGRAM

Another stand out feature of these unique Japanese cartridges is the repair program; HANA's low defect ratio allows a 'new for old' exchange service.

Whilst phono cartridges are made of relatively delicate parts, they are carefully assembled, and laboratory tested by skilled craftsmen at the factory to ensure a very low defect ratio, resulting in few returns under warranty to the manufacturer. This saves HANA Distributors and Dealers a lot from awkward office work returning cartridges to the factory! In the unlikely event of a cartridge failure within the warranty period, HANA dealer will replace it with a new one (final decision for warranty is made by Excel Sound, after inspection of returned HANA in its laboratory).

Of course, cartridges are in general the most fragile part of any vinyl record hi-fi replay system, they can get accidentally damaged when in use and will certainly eventually wear out, even when treated with care and respect. So, whether worn out or damaged during its life, your HANA cartridge Dealer will offer you a beneficial 'new for old' price, under-written by Excel Sound.

THE MUSIC

During the past few months, I've extensively used HANA ML cartridge with a variety of setups and with the widest music diversity.

Kiril Kondrashin - *Tchaikovsky / Rimsky-Korsakoff: Capriccio Italien Espagnol* Under the baton of Kiril Kondrashin, "Tchaikovsky Capriccio Italien" builds up and slowly expands. It was interesting to observe how well HANA ML could carry the first crescendo and how well the strings could expand into space. Lushly and charming.

The very begging of the track puts any cartridge to stress when the brass sonic qualities must be met. The juxtaposition of timbre density and dynamic aptness. Too quickly the orchestral brass can sound like a sample library, without a real believability factor.

HANA ML's ability to allows a massive orchestra momentum to easily expands was nowhere near its price point. A remarkable capacity of a full-scale dynamic expansion was reminding me of the attributes a few times the price. Even some of the top tier cartridges can collapse and congest with the full orchestra scale reproduction.





As with *Rimsky-Korsakoff: Capriccio Italien Espagnol* HANA ML continues to impress with Ernest Ansermet - *The Royal Ballet Gala Performances*. The delightful momentum of a "Tchaikovsky: Nutcracker Suite, Op.71a - 2a". March was swiftly followed up with HANA ML. There were no usual frequency bumps related with some cartridges, that can overflow the orchestra presentation.

A more up to speed with. There is some lightens in the metallic percussion that can take a very dramatic shift in an unbalanced presentation. HANA ML surprisingly established the needed dynamism with our showing traits of the music force's bottlenecking.

The Kingsway Orchestra Hall was built way back in 1912 and demolished in 1998 so the recordings like *The Royal Ballet Gala Performances* hold additional value.



photo credit - Wikipedia

Although the Kingsway Orchestra Hall was build as a place of worship and not as a concert hall it was considered to have the finest acoustics in London. The details of "Delibes: Coppelia - Tableau 2 - 10. Introduction and Waltz", as well as a sound stage, were easily painted by HANA ML. HANA ML forte factor allows the directness and its interactive quality that was further confirmed by another classic and personal favorite; Harry Belafonte - *Belafonte At Carnegie Hall*.

This beautiful album was recorded live at the Belafonte's most triumph times. This is amongst the more emotionally charged records for many reasons. Anyone that labels this as an audiophile record is in a serious need for a re-scratch.

Belafonte At Carnegie Hall's immediacy calls for a cartridge with the mighty, radiant inner core. The opening song introduction crescendo promises something. There is simply so much going on that might defies the ear on first listening.

The ever-changing music' impetus pulsates with the Belafonte immense life energy. Wit performance won't leave anyone cold-hearted. Even audiophiles in search of particularly sonic attributes. There are plenty of them to explore, but yours truly is all for music with remarkable recording.



Belafonte At Carnegie Hall possesses that rare, sort of cinematic storytelling that keeps you glued from the very first song to the last track.

To get a needed grander portion of Belafonte's magic a phono cartridge needs quite a few of the non-ordinary attributes that are usually connected with the more affordable cartridge.

This album deals with more harmonic complex tones than one would associate it. So in the analog domain, we're heavily dependant on the stable pitch. But keeping up with the proper speed stability is one thing. The other pitch related attributes correspond to the delivery of pure tone.

While our perception of pitch and tones is still in the domain of hypothesis a trained ear can recognize frequency varieties that even if presumably coming from a point source, our auditory system can identify them as different pitches.

And this is one of the HANA ML qualities that sets it apart from the crowd (along with unsuppressed dynamic capability).

A jubilant inner force of HANA ML paints the sonic canvas with an upper-level richness, allowing the complex spectral shadings without the time smearing effect that can be associated even with the expensive and exotic cartridges.

CONCLUSION

My deep affection for Japanese culture and bespoke creations continues to grow. Nation and state put a lot of effort into preserving the opulent heritage regardless of the industry.

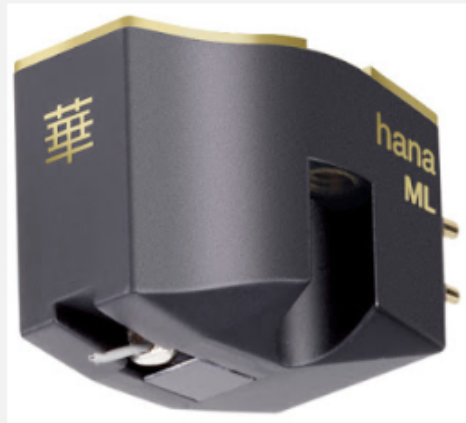
I feel privileged by a perpetual amount of audio high-end coming in for evaluation from the Land of the Rising Sun?

HANA ML is a product that embraces the past and fuse the right spirit with the present, resulting in a product that delivers sumptuous music experience without sacrificing any of the important aspects.

During the review, I've tried HANA ML with Trinity phono preamplifier, Lab12 melto2, Gold Note PH 10, Thrax Audio Orpheus, Dynamic Sound Associates DSA The Phono II and Grandinote Celio phono preamplifiers. Yes, this is quite a wide variety of choices, but I wanted to give ML a good run. A lot of analog aficionados are highly price-conscious and HANA ML is the exact product that will find a happy home in a variety of the systems at all price levels, being the main, secondary cartridge or a part of a larger collection.

There are many ways in which the HANA ML cartridge will seduce you. Without a doubt, the charming aural part is the first and foremost. Exceptionally value for the money just adds up to the scale. And the easy setup up concludes the enticing triangle.

We're living in the great times where online services like Discogs or eBay offer almost an unlimited resource to vinyl records from past and present. Most of the great music can be found for a few dollars per record with a bit of the research and surprising amount of mint records are available at the fraction of the price, that some of the remastered re-releases are fetching for.



Looking at the analog momentum from a distance does look like a highly potent revival. Numerous people are either returning into the analog heaven or starting the journey.

To fully enjoy records a proper audio setup is needed as well as a cartridge that won't only destroy the records, but derive every last bit out of the grooves.

HANA ML offers an exceptional value and a few years back it was simply not possible to derive so much music from the black grooves. What HANA ML is offering at its given value it's a true bargain.

Most of us know, has either owned or at one point in life dreamed about some of the iconic Japanese cartridges, but most of these exotic products did carry and still do quite a hefty price tag. While I appreciate and honor these products, I'm also keen on HANA's way of performing the business. HANA cater analog enthusiasts in their way.

HANA ML encompasses a grander portion of the esoteric sonic qualities at the down to the earth price, that allows many of the music lovers and audiophiles to enter an endless high-end audio analog universe, without breaking the bank.

How does HANA SL compare to the HANA ML? With the implementation of twin coils and Shibata stylus, HANA ML retains all the attributes of HANA SL cartridge but adds a few of their own.

The beautiful tone of HANA SL is still there, but with an upper degree of harmonic richness. HANA SL has also gained some additional feeling of speed and transparency. As the original impact of the SL, the ML again raises the bar with the performance.

Again I have to congratulate Youtek Limited and Excel Sound Corporation for pushing the barriers of what's possible at an affordable level. The products like HANA ML are reviving our industry and opens up the door to higher-level analog reproduction to many more people.



HANA ML cartridge is an exemplary act and more than deserves to point out. For the level of music quality that it can deliver, especially at its given price, I'm granting HANA ML the rare double-decker award in the form of Mono and Stereo 2019 Highly Recommended Product and Best Buy award! ♪

Matej Isak

PRICE

- Retail price: \$1,200.00

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

- Stylus: Nude Microline tip
- Cantilever: Aluminum
- Magnet: Alnico
- Magnetic circuitry: Pure Iron/Cryo treatment
- Coil wire: High Purity Copper
- Cartridge Housing: POM (Delrin)/Brass
- Output level: 0.4mv/1KHz
- Output balance: <1db li="" z="">
- Vertical Tracking force: 2gr
- Trackability: 70 μ /2gr
- Compliance: 10 x 10⁻⁶ cm/dyne
- Channel separation: 30dB/1KHz
- Frequency response: 12-45,000Hz
- Impedance: 8 Ω /1KHz
- Suggested load Impedance: > 100 Ω
- Cartridge weight: 9.5g
- Body Color: Black