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A JOURNEY IN MUSIC AND AUDIO

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Presenting The Audio Beatnik's Best of 2019

Posted On : December 18, 2019

Author : Jack

**Best of
2019**

We are excited to present The Audio Beatnik's Best of 2019. It's a short list limited to products we've reviewed in the past year, and we are including a little text from the review to let you know why they made the list.

And, for the first time, we are also including Writer's Awards from Adam LaBarge and Drew Gagliano. Congratulations to all of our winners, and again, thank you for allowing us to review your products!

[...]

Best Analog Product: Hana ML Low Output Moving Coil Cartridge



Here's what Jack said in his review, *"While the Hana ML is an artisan hand-built cartridge, it also embraces some of the newest cartridge technology. This cartridge has many ways of seducing the listener into spending hours listening to music. It was a joy to use."* Read the full review [here](#).

<https://theaudiobeatnik.com/review-of-the-hana-ml-low-output-moving-coil-cartridge/>

Review of the Hana ML Low Output Moving Coil Cartridge

Posted On : October 18, 2019

Author : Jack

I was excited when I heard that Tokyo's Excel Sound Corporation, the parent company behind Hana, was bringing out an even better line of moving coil cartridges. Hana uses Excel's best materials, including alnico magnets. I love the sound of alnico magnets in speakers and in moving coil phono cartridges.

If you've followed my reviews for a while, you know that I am very familiar with the Hana SL cartridges. I used one with a ClearAudio Concept turntable in Part 1 of my "Affordable Vinyl Project" series of articles last year. I also reviewed the Hana SL Mono cartridge earlier this year. To me, the Hana SL line of moving coil cartridges is in many ways nearly a giant killer.

So, What Did Hana Improve?

The most obvious change with the Hana ML is a 1.5mm thick copper plate on top of the cartridge to improve the rigidity between the body and the headshell. You can see this plate in the picture above. Another difference that you won't see is that the ML doesn't use the composite that is used for the bodies of the SL. Instead, the ML is made from a specialized thermoplastic that has resonance properties that are similar to vinyl. And, thankfully, the new body is also threaded, which makes it much easier to mount the cartridge.

There are a few more changes that may not be as obvious at first glance. For example, the Hana ML uses an aluminum cantilever with a Microline stylus. The technical specs say this stylus profile comes closer to matching the cutting head that is used in making the LPs. Another area of change is the motor system, which now receives a cryogenic treatment. They have also used very high-quality copper wire for the new windings with 8-ohm internal impedance, making the ML compatible with 100-ohm input impedances.

Still, as good as the SL sounds, I couldn't help but be a skeptic. The old question we used to ask in the South came to mind, "If it ain't broke why fix it?"

Review System

I first mounted the Hana ML on my AMG Turbo 12-inch tonearm in my Reference System and set the tracking weight and the loading according to Hana's recommendations. The only change I made was to add a Musical Surroundings Nova III phono preamp with an external linear power supply. I also used the Hana ML with a Margules Magenta TT-10 for a separate review I'm writing on that turntable.

So How Does the Hana ML Sound?

The sound is what it's all about, and considering how great the SL was for the money, I really wondered if there could be that much difference to justify the price of the ML. Well, the answer is you can bet your bottom dollar that there is a difference. The differences between the SL and the ML and most sub \$4,000 cartridges are significant. This cartridge is a killer for most of the medium-sized giants.

The ML is a really dynamic and dramatic cartridge, and it does a great job of carrying the beat of the music. These three things are at the heart of live music and play a major role in helping recorded music sound more realistic. The ML has great tonality and instruments come across as full-bodied.

Listening to music was a pure joy with this cartridge. It could be quick, nimble, detailed, transparent and relaxed sounding. This is not a small-sounding cartridge in any way. When the music called for it, the sound was huge but with the proper scale. As I mentioned above, it is an incredibly dynamic and full-bodied sounding cartridge. I should add the dynamics are equally amazing in the deep bass, making for a powerful and deep sound.

The treble extension of the ML is beautiful. It is sweet and fast at the same time. Violins sound so much like real violins. Music seems to have just enough shimmer and air to sound natural and not unrealistically detailed. With this kind of top-end extension, it gives you many musical cues that are simply missing in a lesser cartridge, even some cartridges that cost three times as much. These same cues allow your system to have a more natural-sounding soundstage.

Conclusion

While the Hana ML is an artisan hand-built cartridge, it also embraces some of the newest cartridge technology. This cartridge has many ways of seducing the listener into spending hours listening to music. It was a joy to use.

I was trying to think of another cartridge that the Hana ML reminds me of. Then it came to me, it is a lot like the original Miyabi Standard that I reviewed for Dagogo over 10 years ago. Like the Miyabi, the ML is bold and alive sounding and can still play small music with finesse. Both use alnico magnets, have aluminum cantilevers and are handmade.

No, the ML is not quite as good as my memory tells me the Miyabi was, but you can't get the Miyabi any more. And if you could, the Miyabi would cost many times what the Hana ML does. But believe me, the ML will more than carry its weight in a system of any price and is very highly recommended!