



Hana

S Range moving coil cartridges

HAILING FROM TOKYO'S Excel Sound Corporation, Hana is the new name in mid-priced moving coil cartridges. The Japanese brand has been in the audio business for 40 years and is behind a lot of well-known cartridges, although the specific models are actually a well-guarded secret.

The S Range is Hana's high-performance series consisting of two models – a low output Hana-SL and a high output Hana-SH, both at the same price. Apart from the output level and impedance, the two models are identical. So why produce a high-output version of a moving coil cartridge that typically has a low output? The advantage is that it can be connected directly to a phono stage that has been designed for moving-magnet cartridges and so no step-up transformer (SUT) or impedance-matching amplifier is required. The coils of the cartridge are attached directly to the cantilever. In a standard moving-coil cartridge, the number of turns of wire that makes the coils is kept to a minimum to keep the moving mass low and this contributes to the sound quality. However, a high-output moving-coil cartridge needs more coil turns, which increases the mass of the moving parts. So, there is a view that a high-output moving coil loses some of the magic often associated with this type of cartridge.

Diamonds are forever

These models have an aluminium cantilever that is fitted with a nude diamond Shibata stylus. The quoted frequency response is 15Hz to 32kHz with a recommended tracking force of 2g. The black SL and SH cartridges are 5g in weight and the quoted trackability is 60 microns.

I start off with the Hana-SL low output cartridge in my upgraded Jelco SA-750 silicone-damped unipivot tonearm. The first job is to check the tracking ability and arm/cartridge resonance with a Vinyl Essentials test record. The resonance turns out to be at 8Hz and, although this is at the lower end of the



acceptable range of 8-12Hz, it is absolutely fine. I check the tracking ability and this proves to be around 75 microns, which exceeds the quoted figure and is very good indeed.

Starting with Elgar's *Enigma Variations* with Vernon Handley conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra. My initial impressions are great. The sound of the violins achieves the perfect balance of being both bright and lively, yet smooth, which is certainly a tricky thing to get right. The overall performance is very good indeed, but I have a sense that the bass drums are a touch reigned in.

Next up Laurent Garnier's *Tales Of A Kleptomaniac*, which has just about as much bass as vinyl is able to fit into a groove. Once again this confirms my impression that the bass, while very tight, doesn't extend down to the very low sub-sonic thumps in the stomach that it should. As the review samples are new, they clearly require a period of running in so I leave the cartridge playing for a couple of hours with the amplifier switched off and then listen to the same piece again. There is a big improvement, and the bass is now asserting itself and sounding more like the Laurent Garnier I know.

To check out how the Hana-SL handles female vocals, I play Barbra Streisand's *You Don't Bring Me Flowers*. The song is brilliantly conveyed in the opening section and as the song progresses there's no trace of brashness to her voice, just soaring energy. The Hana-SL gives a really sophisticated performance, which is very involving and refined.

Spec check

I switch over to the Hana-SH and change the settings on my phono stage to suit. The tracking ability is slightly below the SL at 70 microns, but still better than the quoted figure. The arm and cartridge resonance is once again 8Hz. After running it in, I play the same listening material as with the SL.

When pitted against its low-output sibling, the SH gives a comparable performance. The bass output is slightly better in terms of the very low frequencies, but there is a touch of brashness to both the strings and the female vocals that isn't present with the SL.

Both are superb cartridges and are strong challengers to rival big-name brands at the price. **NR**

DETAILS

PRICE
£447

WEBSITE
airaudio.co.uk/brands/hana

OUR VERDICT

