

BENZ MICRO ACE SL MOVING COIL CARTRIDGE

October 1, 2013



Costing exactly the same as the Goldring Legacy, the Benz Micro Ace (Advanced Cartridge Engineering) uses a micro-ridge stylus in this, it's latest incarnation. There are three versions, with differing output levels, this being the low output model, as signified by the L in the title. I reviewed this back in the May 2011 issue of this magazine and was very enamoured with the combination of detail and solidity to the sound. Indeed we were so impressed at World Towers that we gave it a Globie Award in the January 2012 issue.

The square edges to the body and visible cantilever made alignment easy and in a few moments I was listening to the Copland piece. I found that the Ace trod a very careful line between the deep solidity of the Goldring and the very open sound of the Audio Technica. I initially felt that the Goldring had a bit more heft at the bottom end but came to the conclusion that this was an erroneous impression caused by the relative lack of high frequency activity from the Legacy.

On the other hand, compared to the OC9, I felt that the Ace struck a better balance between high frequency detailing and connecting that in a more fluid way with the music in the mid and lower bands. The thirteen stringed instruments in the chamber orchestra seemed to have an easy, and I felt, more realistic balance than with any other cartridge here apart from the Denon. But here, there was enough output to drive any phono stage satisfactorily, with the perception of greater dynamic range and impact that this allowed.

Changing musical gear dramatically and playing the Joplin showed the musical flexibility of this cartridge. Having displayed a deft touch with classical music, it seemed perfectly happy to roll up it's sleeves and muck in with the unrestrained wailings of both voice and guitar without doing a disservice to either type of music. I felt aware of Janis' angst as she sang 'Little Girl Blue' and enjoyed the boogying bass guitars of 'Try'.

'Air' sounded complete and well described, with enough detail across the bandwidth to be satisfying, but without the tendency to etched detail that the Audio Technica presented.

This was also true of the 'Naughty But Nice' LP, where the focus stayed resolutely on the music and Pearl's voice, providing the husky hints that the Legacy displayed, but combining this with

subtleties of articulation provided by the OC9. I also liked the way it seemed to give me the sensation of a treble that soared away into the clouds, yet it played it's way through a 52 year old mono record with virtually no surface noise disturbance whatsoever.

An excellent performance that combined detail and musicality.



VERDICT

Smooth, lucid and full bodied, award winning, hand made cartridge from Switzerland.

FOR

Solid and grounded sound.

Excellent imaging.

Tight timing.

AGAINST

- nothing

Benz Micro Ace SL £595.00

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MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of the Ace rolled down slightly toward high frequencies. Tracing loss on inner grooves will result in a warm balance toward inner grooves. The Ace remains very accurate and smooth in its response though, as before.

Distortion levels were very low, due to vertical tracking angle measuring a correct 21 degrees. This resulted in just 1% vertical distortion.

Output was high at 0.8mV so hiss will not be a problem with most phono stages.

Benz suggest 1.8gms tracking force is ideal and a maximum of 2gms. Using this figure, tracking was fair but not up with the best, especially in the midband where the Ace managed 16cms/sec. It may well mistrack on strong vocals.

The Ace SL r emains an accurate and well engineered moving coil cartridge measurement shows. Its tracking ability is a little limited though. **NK**

Tracking force 1.7-2gms

Weight 8.8gms

Vertical tracking angle 21degrees

Frequency response 20Hz - 20kHz

Channel separation 29dB

Tracking ability (300Hz)

lateral 65 μ m

vertical 45 μ m

lateral (1kHz) 16cms/sec.

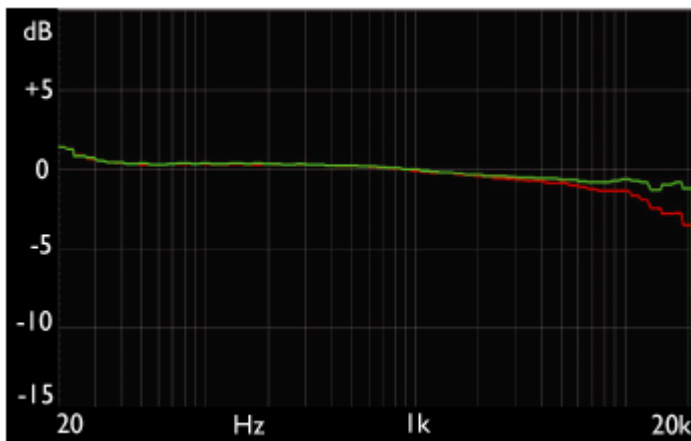
Distortion (45 μ m)

lateral 1.1%

vertical 1%

Output (5cms/sec rms) 0.83mV

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Red - inner grooves