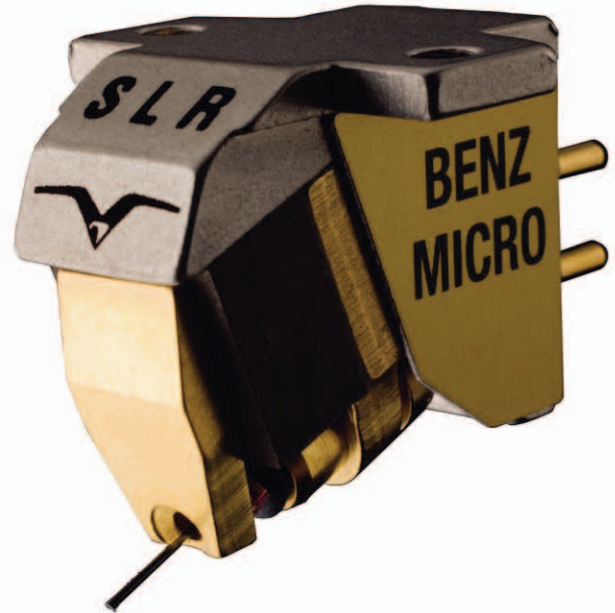


Benz-Micro SLR Gullwing MC Phono Cartridge

It seems at first a silly name for a cartridge. Even if your company is called Benz, SLR Gullwing sounds pompous unless it's a £100,000 car. In fact, the name is mostly code; 'S-Class' is the hand made moving-coil range, 'L' is the low-output version, 'R' is to denote the use of ruby in place of iron in the generator, and 'Gullwing' because it's a derivation of the popular Glider cartridge. I figure people will forgive Albert Lukaschek of Benz the Mercedes reference if the cartridge is good enough, and it is good enough.

It's nude and it's a beast! That skeletal shell is brass-coloured because it's made of brass (funny, that!), and that means it weighs in at a whopping 12.2g. The cartridge's compliance (15x10⁻⁶cm/Dyne) puts it in the friendly with high-mass arms camp, while the 0.35mV output, the 38 ohm output impedance and the recommended 400ohm (and then some) load place it squarely in the 'really good phono stage' department; if you have a phono stage with a relatively low gain (60dB and below) or a generic 'MC' setting, this probably isn't the cartridge for you. It tracks at somewhere between 1.8-2.0g, uses the new Micro-Ridge Gyger S-tip 5x120µm stylus and I found my sample tracked best at about 1.85g. Experimentation during the lengthy run-in process is a good plan.



I could write endless babble about a variety of different arms on different decks, but simple acronym arithmetic works wonders: SME+SLR=OMG. Put this on an SME IV or V (or even the Model 10 variant of the 309) and you can stop worrying about tonearms and cartridges. They just work wonders together; the character of one balances out the character of the other. And with a good phono stage it's like all the artifice between studio and listening room melts away.

I want to call this 'thrilling', but that misses the point. It could easily be mis-read as 'exuberant' and 'excitable'. Although the cartridge is exciting, it's not excitable, and the 'exciting' and 'thrilling' part of this comes from hearing your albums as if shiny and new to you. It's so transparent and naturally balanced, you go right back to your record collection and start again. What's truly remarkable about this combo – and this cartridge – is its sense of space around the notes, like it was opening up the imagery beyond the speakers itself. This comes from a profound sense of balance and poise, but also of a sound that ebbs and flows with the music in the way that so few audio components really do well. Forget subjective descriptions and just enjoy it for what it is; musically sublime.

One of nine cartridges in the S-class range, there's still a long way between this and the legendary LP-S, but mixing the good things about this, the Ruby and the Glider cartridges makes for something truly special. If you have an SME arm, this is the cartridge it has been waiting for. It's that simple really. 2011 is proving quite the year for royal weddings!

Product Details

Price £1,999

Manufactured by Benz-Micro