



★ CARTRIDGE WINNER: BENZ WOOD SL

There is no black magic to moving coil cartridge design; MCs are relatively simple in their conception. But that in itself is no guarantor of universally high standards; through inexpert build and unimaginative materials choice it's perfectly possible to make a merely average transducer, and indeed many do. With that in mind, it's more than mere coincidence that some of the world's finest pick-ups come from countries that specialise in watches of superlative quality, such as Japan and Switzerland. In the case of the Benz Wood SL, it hails from the latter, a land that's established itself for miniaturised precision engineering.

Designed by Albert Lukascheck,

who personally tests each unit before it leaves the factory, the cartridge is hand built to faultless standards and sports some lovely design features which conspire to make a superb sound. As its name suggests, the Benz comes clothed in Bruyere wood, also found in the bowls of tobacco pipes. Encased inside is the generator, a crossed-coil design as found in other Benz Micro products. There's a solid Boron cantilever, with 'side-bonded' stylus, grooved rear pole piece and countersunk O-ring damper; the stylus is a Micro-ridge design with a 3 micron radius tip for excellent tracking ability.

The Benz plays music with riflebolt precision and times as accurately as Swiss railways. It produces a magical rendition of

whatever music you care to play with it, propelling the music along with an even-handed analysis of the recorded acoustic; even on average condition discs it delivers a degree of refinement and finesse that amazes at the price. Massively detailed, the levels of definition and energy in the sound, are hard to beat at or anywhere near the price. The Benz Micro Wood SL seems unperturbed by record condition or musical genre, and is a master of playing the tunes encased in the grooves in a particularly enjoyable and engaging way. A fabulous piece of precision engineering, this is a worthy cartridge award winner.

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