

# Benz Micro Glider SL (£745)

With several updates over the years, the Swiss company's long-established mid-price moving-coil cartridge still looks as competitive as ever...

Review: **Steve Harris** Lab: **Paul Miller**

**M**any audiophiles become quite nervous in the presence of a naked phono cartridge, and sometimes with good reason. Perhaps they once had a vinyl love affair that was terminated abruptly by a fatal accident to an exposed cantilever, and have been scarred by the experience. Ever afterwards, they will prefer cartridges which reveal no more than necessary, their cantilever and stylus put forth demurely, like an ankle showing under an Edwardian skirt. Show them the whole works exposed, and they'll turn away with a shudder.

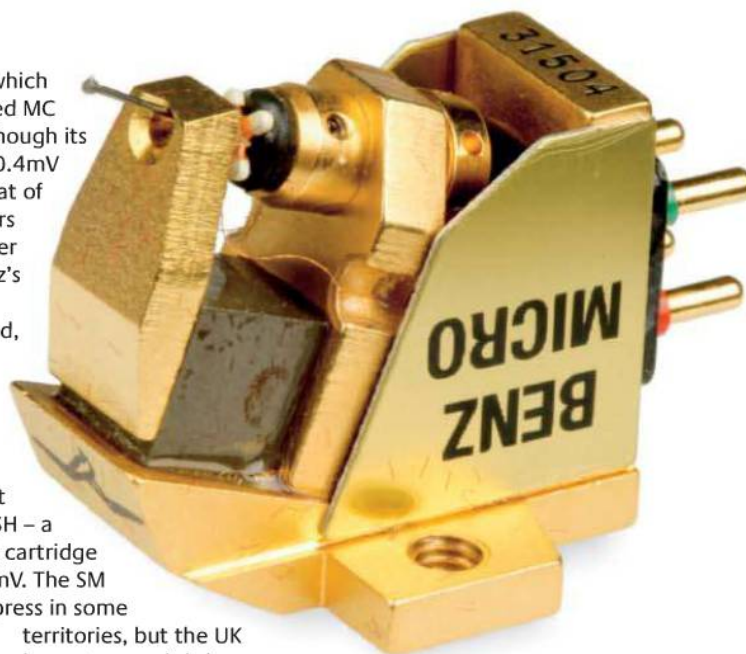
## PLAIN FAVOURITE

Assuming you don't suffer such inhibitions, there are plenty of unclad moving-coil cartridges to choose from, but Benz Micro's Glider is a long-established favourite. If you are still worried about catching your sleeve on the stylus, it may be worth bearing in mind that Benz Micro's re-tipping and repair service costs much less than that of some other brands. Currently, a factory rebuild for the Glider would cost around £300, and the charge for the more expensive models in the range is still held down to around double that.

Benz's most recent revisions led to the designation Glider SL, and the cartridge reviewed here. This is a nominally

low-output MC which needs a dedicated MC phono input, although its rated output of 0.4mV is higher than that of many competitors and slightly higher than that of Benz's upper-range models, or indeed, earlier Gliders.

Available also are the medium-output Glider SM, with output quoted at 0.8mV, and the SH – a true high-output cartridge giving around 2mV. The SM has had a good press in some



territories, but the UK importer says it is less in demand here than the other two. Perhaps this isn't surprising, as the SL's healthy output will be ample with any current MC phono stage and, if you really want

*'Bass was tight and driving while percussion sounds were excellent'*

to use an MM input, you can go for the SH.

Over the years, Benz seems to have trickled down its various generator and suspension design refinements from earlier high-end models. The Glider LS does not share the ruby plate coil former, first introduced on the Ruby model itself and used in the LP-S, but it does use a Fritz

**ABOVE:** This cartridge is founded on a strong machined aluminium chassis, gold plated to resist corrosion over a long lifetime

Geiger Signature micro-line stylus mounted on a solid boron cantilever of 0.28mm diameter [see box out].

Once installed in the SME 10, it tracked well on my test records. It even made a fair stab at the highest-level cut on the *Hi-Fi Sound* test disc [HFS 75], which sends many respected MCs jumping out of the groove.

## BLOOMIN' LOVELY

Connecting it first via the estimable Lehmann Black Cube Decade phono stage, with the Icon Audio PS3 to hand as a fine tube alternative, I settled down to listen. My main cartridge references for comparison were the excellent Ortofon Cadenza Blue and Koetsu Black.

Starting with *Dire Straits* [Vertigo 9102 021], the bass guitar was slightly less prominent than with the Cadenza Blue, with a softer attack, yet with more bloom or character. As so often with this track, the tempo seemed to change subjectively with the change of equipment, the Benz mysteriously a little faster yet still relaxed

## GEIGER COUNTING

Early diamond styli had a simple conical tip, but if the 'point' sat comfortably in the groove, it was too fat front-to-back to trace the smallest 'wiggles'. Elliptical styli offered an improvement by having the sides of the tip ground to a smaller radius, but this also reduced the contact area with the groove. Further development brought line-contact styli, which have a tiny radius on the edge, to follow groove modulations accurately, but a relatively huge radius or contour when viewed from the front, extending the contact area vertically.

There have been many variations on this theme but now, for all but its cheapest models, Benz Micro has virtually standardised on the Swiss stylus specialist Fritz Geiger's 'micro-line' FG-S, with tip radii of 5x120µm. Benz also uses this stylus for re-tipping older models returned for service.





# LAB REPORT



## BENZ MICRO GLIDER SL (£745)

With a bodyweight of just 6.8g, the Glider SL is physically lighter than the Benz MC LP-S [HFN, Aug '09] but its higher 21cu compliance ensures it's just as suited to use with medium effective mass tonearms. Its softer suspension allows the Glider SL to improve on the LP-S's already excellent tracking, sailing through the 80µm test band. RIAA-corrected harmonic distortion is just 0.15% at 300Hz (+6dB re. 5cm/sec), increasing to 0.3% at +9dB, 0.6% at +12dB and just verging on mistracking at the toughest +18dB groove where THD approaches 1%. The LP-S had hit 10% at this point and at a higher 2g downforce so the Glider's better performance at a lower 1.8g bodes well for reduced record wear. The Glider has a boron cantilever and 5x120µm diamond but close inspection revealed a slight excess of glue on the tip [see main picture]. VTA is still spot-on at 22°, however, so the stylus remains accurately aligned.

Like other Benz Micro MCs, the Glider SL is wired phase-inverting so you might care to correct polarity at the amplifier or speaker terminals. Its distortion trend (versus frequency) is also familiar – a feature of the 'pure iron cross coil' generator, perhaps [see Graph 2]. Otherwise its response is impressively flat to within ±0.5dB up to 2kHz with some slight reinforcement of the presence region thereafter [see Graph 1, below], a trend maintained into a wide 100ohm-47kohm. Standard MC phono inputs will likely make the best of the Glider's ~550µV output, however. Readers may view a QC Suite test report for the Benz Micro Glider SL by navigating to [www.hifinews.co.uk](http://www.hifinews.co.uk) and clicking on the red 'Download' button. PM

and unhurried, as if Knopfler had all the time in the world to put over his lyrics and guitar mastery. His guitar had a truly singing tone, too.

Then I went back a decade to Albert King and *Live Wire Blues Power* [Stax SXATS 1002], recorded in concert at the Fillmore West in 1968. King's set has a fantastic sense of occasion, his rich vocals and fabulous guitar sound coming to life with a really vibrant feeling of the venue, and the Benz really allowed the music to flow. By comparison, I felt that the Ortofon could sound more overtly detailed in the mid and treble and give a deeper and firmer bass. But it tended perhaps to be more admirable than lovable.

From the first drumbeats of 'The Changeling' on *LA Woman* [Elektra K42090], I felt that the Benz Micro really delivered the incredibly intense, close-knit and focused sound of The Doors. The bass was tight and driving while the percussion sounds were excellent.

### MEANING 'N' SUBSTANCE

Still running the Glider with the Lehmann phono stage, I put on Jennifer Warnes' 'Runaway Horse' from Rob Wasserman's *Duets* [GRP 97 121] and found a fine sense of space. Listening via the Icon PS3 phono amp instead, the cartridge gave a possibly more inviting sound, though Wasserman's string bass became less authoritative. Yet the mellower Icon suited the next track well, bringing Dan Hicks's zany 'Gone With The Wind' vocal to life in its every nuance. Cheryl Bentine's 'Angel Eyes' seemed more listenable than usual, as for once I found myself hearing beyond the swooping sonics and into the song's meaning.

Again, on Brubeck's *Time Out* [CBS 62068], the Glider produced a sound that was a little warmer, if less remarkably detailed on percussion for example. With the Icon phono

**ABOVE:** As usual, Benz Micro's wood box includes an individual frequency response chart as well as brush, screwdriver and spirit level

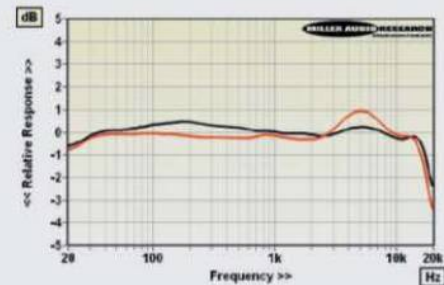
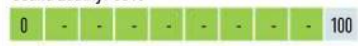
stage, Brubeck's single-note lines on 'Strange Meadow Lark' had real substance, and when he moved into chords the effect was tender. There was a slightly laidback and perhaps flattering quality compared with the Lehmann, which by contrast allowed the Glider SL to highlight the detail in drummer Joe Morello's crisp cymbal and snare sounds, and give full weight to those big 'bombs' that he drops on 'Take Five'.

Picking a classical disc almost at random, I lighted on Rachmaninov's second symphony with Previn and the LSO from 1973 [ASD 2889]. Here the Glider SL transmitted the full power of the gigantic opening chords, and the melancholy sweep of the first theme. At the expense of a slightly more distant perspective and some loss of image focus and transient attack, switching the Icon phono stage calmed this bright EMI recording down and allowed the Glider SL to make this music even more enjoyable. ☺

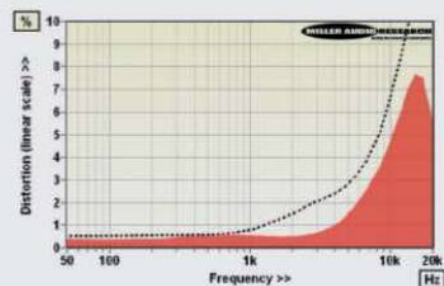
### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Disarming almost any criticism based on 'hi-fi' criteria, the Glider SL somehow manages to project the music seamlessly, as a whole entity. If its nakedness bothers you, for £200 more you can have it with a wood body, and this will still be good value. The Glider SL is warmly recommended, but be warned. Its merits might tempt you, sooner or later, to spend a lot more and enjoy the sheer magic of the Benz Micro LP-S.

Sound Quality: 83%



ABOVE: Left (black) and right (red) freq. responses, lateral groove modulation at -8dB re. 5cm/sec



ABOVE: Left (black) and right (red) tracing and generator distortion (2nd-4th harmonics) versus frequency from 50Hz-20kHz (-8dB re. 5cm/sec)

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Generator type/weight	Moving coil / 6.8g
Recommended tracking force	1.6-2.0mN (1.8mN)
Sensitivity/balance (re. 5cm/sec)	550µV / 0.47dB
Compliance (vertical/lateral)	21cu / 20cu
Vertical tracking angle	22 degrees
L/R Tracking ability	>80µm / >80µm
L/R Distortion (-8dB, 20Hz-20kHz)	0.59-10% / 0.49-5.4%
L/R Frequency resp. (20Hz-20kHz)	-2.4 to +0.5dB / -4.4 to +1.0dB
Stereo separation (1kHz / 20kHz)	41dB / 28dB



# SME

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*Ken Kessler Review – Hi-Fi News. March 2009*

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