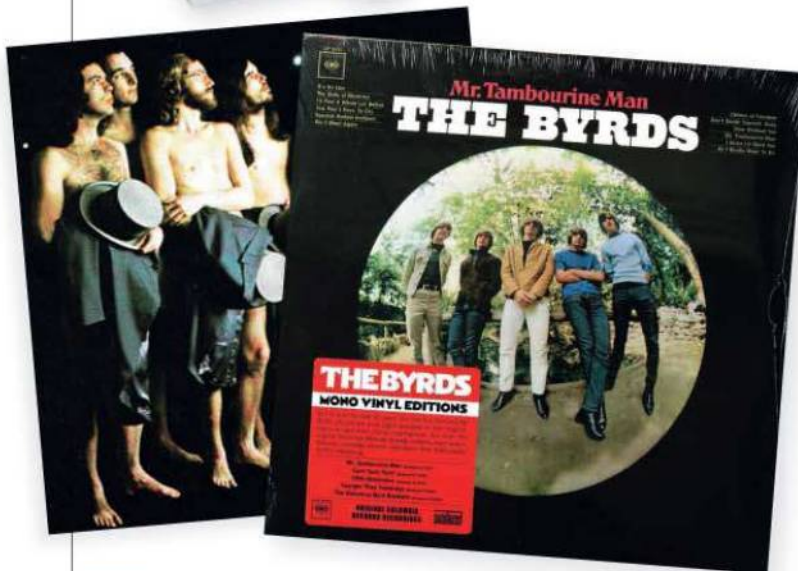




ABOVE: Authority, power and slam to spare. Bryston's got it all, p34



LEFT: Sumiko's fabulous MC flagship, the Palo Santos Presentation is premiered exclusively in *HFN/RR* on p50



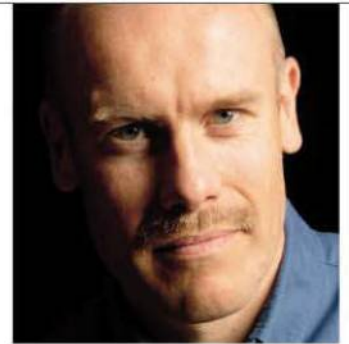
VINYL: Supertramp's *Breakfast in America* is our Vinyl Icon (p70) while we hear The Byrds' re-released *Mr Tambourine Man* on p68

Certainty. It's hardly the watchword of our times, I'm sure you'll agree. As we go to press, politicians remain behind closed doors, deciding the final hue of our next administration. Perhaps some new consensus will bring about a few surprise U-turns.

I'm not sure how many votes the Hi-Fi Party scored, but perhaps now's the time to bring added pressure to bear in the struggle for enthusiasts to retain good quality FM radio. After all, none of us is especially relishing the prospect of low-bitrate DAB (or DAB+) being daubed across the UK in the wake of the impending analogue 'switch off'.

Whatever else is happening in the UK and broader Euro-zone, the *Hi-Fi News* manifesto remains like a rock of stability for the audio enthusiast. Thanks to you we remain the UK's highest selling and most respected specialist hi-fi magazine. We're the oldest too, with a heritage that stretches back to the very dawn of stereo and more than a decade before the transistor sought to do battle with the thermionic valve.

Of course, I don't need to remind you that this battle royale is on-going, a chasm of technology and idealism reflected in this very issue by the gloriously tubular Cha'am



amplifier from Emillé (p22) and the take-no-prisoners solid-state sledgehammer that is Bryston's 7B monoblock (p34). Somewhere between the two lies a country populated by hi-fi of every colour and persuasion, but I don't expect our two polar opposites to reach any sort of consensus anytime soon.

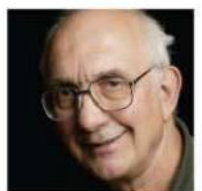
Many have tried to seek a middle way, typically realised as a hybrid of preamp tubes

'Many have sought the middle way – a hybrid of tubes and transistors'

and power amp transistors, but few have succeeded in wholeheartedly converting the hard-core from either party. Ken Kessler touches on this topical nerve in his review of the unusual Valvets (p60). "What's so unusual about a valve-based preamp partnered with a solid-state power amp?" I hear you ask. When a solid-state candidate starts talking like a tube amp...

PAUL MILLER EDITOR

HI-FI NEWS' EXPERT LINE UP: THE FINEST MINDS IN AUDIO JOURNALISM BRING THEIR EXPERIENCE TO BEAR ON ALL AREAS OF HI-FI & MUSIC



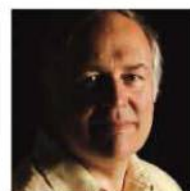
BARRY FOX
Investigative journalist supreme, Barry is the first with news of the latest developments in hi-fi and music technologies



JOHN BAMFORD
JB brings huge industry experience, a penchant for massive speakers and a love of hi-res audio in all its diverse guises



KEN KESSLER
is currently our Senior Contributing Editor and almost singularly responsible for the renaissance in valves and 'vintage hi-fi'



KEITH HOWARD
has written about hi-fi for 30 years, and edited *Hi-Fi Answers* for nine. KH performs our speaker and headphone lab tests



STEVE HARRIS
Former Editor of this very title from 1986 through to 2005. A lifetime in audio and a love of jazz makes Steve a goldmine



JOHN HOWES
Foremost collector and archivist of vintage hi-fi, famous for the UK's bi-annual Audio Jumble, John shares his experience with *HFN*



STEVE SUTHERLAND
Worked on *Melody Maker* and then edited *NME* from 1992-2000, the Britpop years. Steve brings a unique slant to our Vinyl Release pages

Sumiko Palo Santos Presentation (£1995)

Sumiko has nearly 40 years' experience with MC cartridges. Its flagship model is the beneficiary...
 Review: Ken Kessler Lab: Paul Miller

Moving-coil cartridges have been around for more than a half-century, but they didn't displace the moving magnet as 'the audiophile's choice' until the 1970s. Before that, MMs ruled for two simple reasons: higher output and better tracking ability. For decades, Shure, Goldring, ADC and other moving magnetics were default purchases. They put few demands on phono stages, allowing the industry to standardise 47kohm inputs, and MMs (allegedly) took better care of LPs.

But then moving-coils struck. Sumiko's Palo Santos Presentation is the top-of-the-line cartridge from the company that many credit with introducing moving-coils to the West [see box-out below]. As such it has real pedigree. Although the 'recipe' for a good moving-coil is hardly a mystery – the world is awash with superb examples – there is an artistry that must surely have been mastered by a company with Sumiko's enviable know-how.

Taking its name from a type of Brazilian Rosewood, the Palo Santos Presentation features a new 'generator anchoring system' to improve rigidity and reduce

resonance. Its body is shorter than its Pearwood sibling, which accounts for better clearance over the record surface to allow you to see the long grain boron cantilever during set-up. Also part of the design is a new line contact stylus said to be the most expensive money can buy: a specially ground, Vital PH diamond.

INSIDE THE BOX...

From the instant you open the box, you're assailed with a sense of 'attention to detail' that bodes well. While I could have done with a stylus cover, the packaging encourages safe handling: you simply

hold the cartridge in its 'well' while undoing the bolts that keep it in place. But, as one wag once told me, 'anyone who spends this kind of money on a cartridge deserves what he gets if he's

too clumsy to handle it.' Having seen my share of broken cantilevers – I watched as a friend circumcised a brand-new \$6000 MC when it was caught by his baggy T-shirt as he reached over his turntable – I think that may be a bit harsh. To ensure that it doesn't happen, the Sumiko arrives with what may be the most detailed user's manual I have ever seen, bar none. Read it

'The Sumiko is like a Koetsu after a week on an all-protein diet'



ABOVE: The cartridge arrives in a beautiful wooden box. But be careful: no stylus guard is supplied

cover to cover *before* you take out the Palo Santos, and you'll be safe enough.

What you find is a cartridge designed for ideal set-up. It has parallel sides and a flat front with enough clearance to allow you to see the stylus/cantilever. Unlike some cartridges I could name, its widely-spaced pins are colour-coded. The top plate is flat metal, so you can tighten it to your heart's content.

It was a breeze to fit to SME's Series V-12 on the 30/12 and the arm on Clearaudio's Concept. The 0.5mV output fed ample signal to the Audio Research PH5 phono stage at 100ohms, as well as NAD's PP-2, which happens to be fixed at 100ohms. The rest of the system consisted of the Audio Research Ref 5 preamp, Quad II-Eighty power amps and Sonus faber Cremona Auditor Elipsa, with Yter, Atlas and Kimber wires.

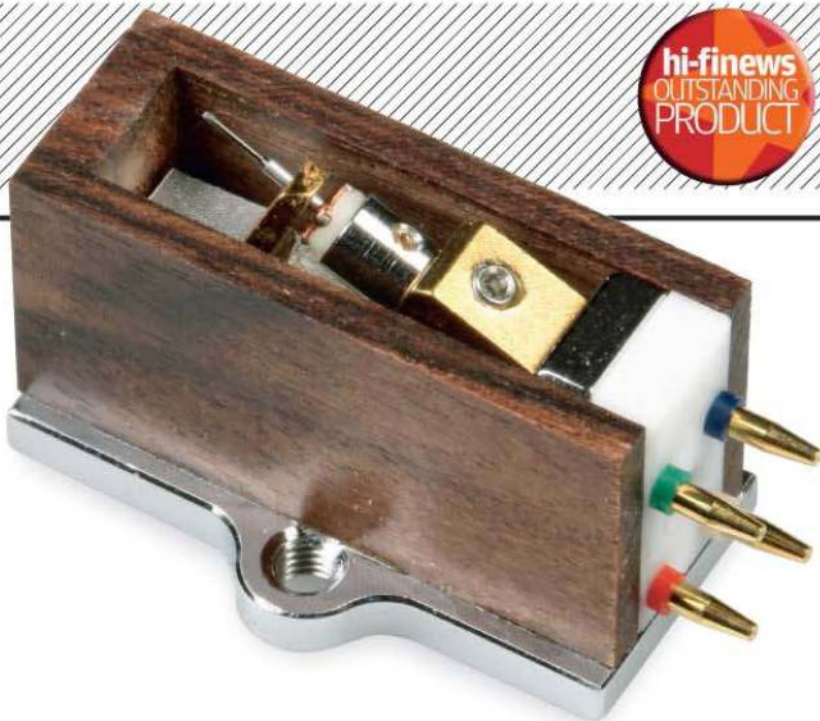
CLEAR SAILING

It starts with remarkable overall poise, much of it due to the Palo Santos' superb tracking skills. The Sumiko maintains composure regardless of genre. I played two LPs so opposed in attitude that they could have been different formats: recent 180g pressings of Humble Pie's *Smokin'!* and Peggy Lee's *I Like Men!*. The cartridge sailed from raucous boogie, with a screeching lead vocals, to silky lounge music embracing one of the huskier, sexier female vocalists of the past century.

Such disparity, though, cannot reveal the signature sound of the cartridge because the two are so dissimilar. Humble Pie's recording is all about impact and

WHO IS SUMIKO?

Most distributors are just that: importers of equipment. Sumiko, though, started out as much a manufacturer as it did an importer, its roots appropriately being in cartridges and tonearms. In the 1970s, the MC revival had yet to spread from Japan to the West. Legendary designer and Sumiko co-founder Dave Fletcher is credited with bringing Grace tonearms and Supex cartridges to the USA. He, in turn, is said to have introduced one Ivor Tiefenbrun to the pairing, who used them successfully on his then-new Linn LP12 turntable, until introducing Linn's own arm and cartridge. Along the way, Sumiko gave us The Arm and many other cartridges, before evolving into one of the USA's top suppliers of high-end hardware, including SME, Pro-ject and Sonus faber. Fortunately for us, it hasn't allowed its success in distribution to put an end to cartridge manufacture.



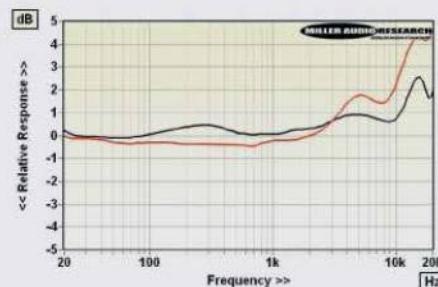
LAB REPORT

SUMIKO PALO SANTOS PRESENTATION (£1995)

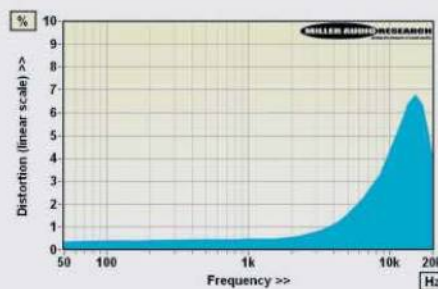
Described as an 'ultra low mass' diamond, the 75µm x 5µm profile of the stylus is an extended line contact type of exquisite quality, beautifully mounted onto a boron cantilever to offer a 25 degree VTA at a nominal 2g tracking force (arm parallel to the record surface). This is a relatively low compliance moving coil at 8/10cu (vertical/lateral) and yet it boasts the tracking prowess of a lightweight moving-magnet. Few MCs surpass the 80µm groove test but the Palo Santos traverses it with room to spare. Via the stepped 300Hz test tracks, the Palo Santos suffers just 0.3% distortion at +6dB (re. 5cm/sec), increasing to just 1% at the maximum +18dB modulation. Once again, few 10cu MCs will get past the +15dB grooves, let alone the top +18dB track.

Tracking assured, the 0.6mV cartridge output (into 100ohm) is achieved with a wide 30dB+ channel separation through the midrange and an acceptable channel imbalance of 0.45dB. The low/mid frequency response (20Hz-1kHz) is flat to within ±0.4dB leaving the output to peak at +2.5dB/+4.6dB L/R from 14-16kHz [see Graph 1, below]. Frankly, this is unlikely to add much audible brightness or coarseness, particularly as the MC's high frequency distortion is also so well managed [see Graph 2, below].

Readers are invited to view a QC Suite test report for the Sumiko Palo Santos Presentation moving coil pick-up by navigating to www.hifinews.co.uk and clicking on the red 'Download' button. PM



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



ABOVE: Tracing and generator distortion (2nd-4th harmonics) versus frequency from 50Hz-20kHz (-8dB re. 5cm/sec). This is fine result

ABOVE: Classically styled in the post-Koetsu manner – a slab-sided wooden body for easy set-up – the Sumiko has its innards exposed. Colour-coded pins make life easier

mass and attack; Lee's is about atmosphere and air and texture. But I learned that neither extreme fazes the Palo Santos. In both cases, images were rock solid, ideally positioned, realistically scaled. Treble speed and precision were vivid with Humble Pie, inducing involuntary bouts of air guitar. Conversely, the freedom of artifice via Ms Lee's session ensured that the perfection of Capitol's 1950s recording techniques maintained their elegance. This cartridge is an open window into what many regard as one of the finest-sounding recordings of all time.

WHOLE TRUTH

In-between, I had ample opportunity to try LPs where the source recordings, rather than the pressings, were less than ideal. However much I love Motown, the sound always seemed to be mastered for maximum impact over AM radio. The Four Tops' *Reach Out from Speakers' Corner* provided me with the most powerful experience yet of 'Bernadette', with full-on Motown session men heard in all their virtuosity. What the Sumiko provided, thanks to exceptional overall coherence, was an opportunity to absorb it as a whole while at the same time ignoring a coarseness I usually hear on Motown material of that era.

The Palo Santos reminded me repeatedly of the original Koetsu Rosewood, in every area except for two. While warmer than recent modern cartridges, especially with vocals as evinced by Ms Lee, Rickie

Lee Jones and even Nirvana, this MC is 'one click toward "warm",' according to Sumiko's John Hunter, who developed it. By this colloquial measure, a Rosewood is two or three 'clicks' warmer than the median. As I was listening to valves, I didn't notice a sudden chill, but the difference is audible on voices and acoustic instruments. Side by side, then, the Sumiko is like a Koetsu after a week on an all-protein diet.

Scale defines the second variance. Early Koetsu always delivered a perfectly cavernous, wide and deep soundstage, like a Denon 103D. The Sumiko favours width over depth, and I can only illustrate this with a home cinema analogy. If the Koetsu is widescreen of 1.85:1, but deeper; the Sumiko is 2.35:1. Those points aside, the Palo Santos is a true thoroughbred, and a blissful mid-point between the modern and the classic. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

While the issue of price – £2k for a cartridge! – will antagonise many, especially when an anticipated 1200 hour stylus life means that it costs around 80p to listen to an LP, that pales into insignificance when you hear the magic this MC can conjure. With tracking ability equal to pedigree MMs, the Sumiko sails through tough passages, delivering sweet treble and solid images. *This is why we love vinyl.*

Sound Quality: 88%



HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Generator type/weight	Moving coil / 8.3g
Recommended tracking force	1.8-2.2mN (2.0mN)
Sensitivity/balance (re. 5cm/sec)	595µV / 0.45dB
Compliance (vertical/lateral)	8cu / 10cu
Vertical tracking angle	25 degrees
L/R Tracking ability	80µm / 80µm
L/R Distortion (-8dB, 20Hz-20kHz)	0.8-17% / 0.4-6.1%
L/R Frequency resp. (20Hz-20kHz)	-0.5 to +2.3dB / -0.8 to +4.6dB
Stereo separation (1kHz / 20kHz)	32dB / 20dB

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Laurent Thorin on the new Nagra MSA amplifier – Haute Fidélité, January 2010
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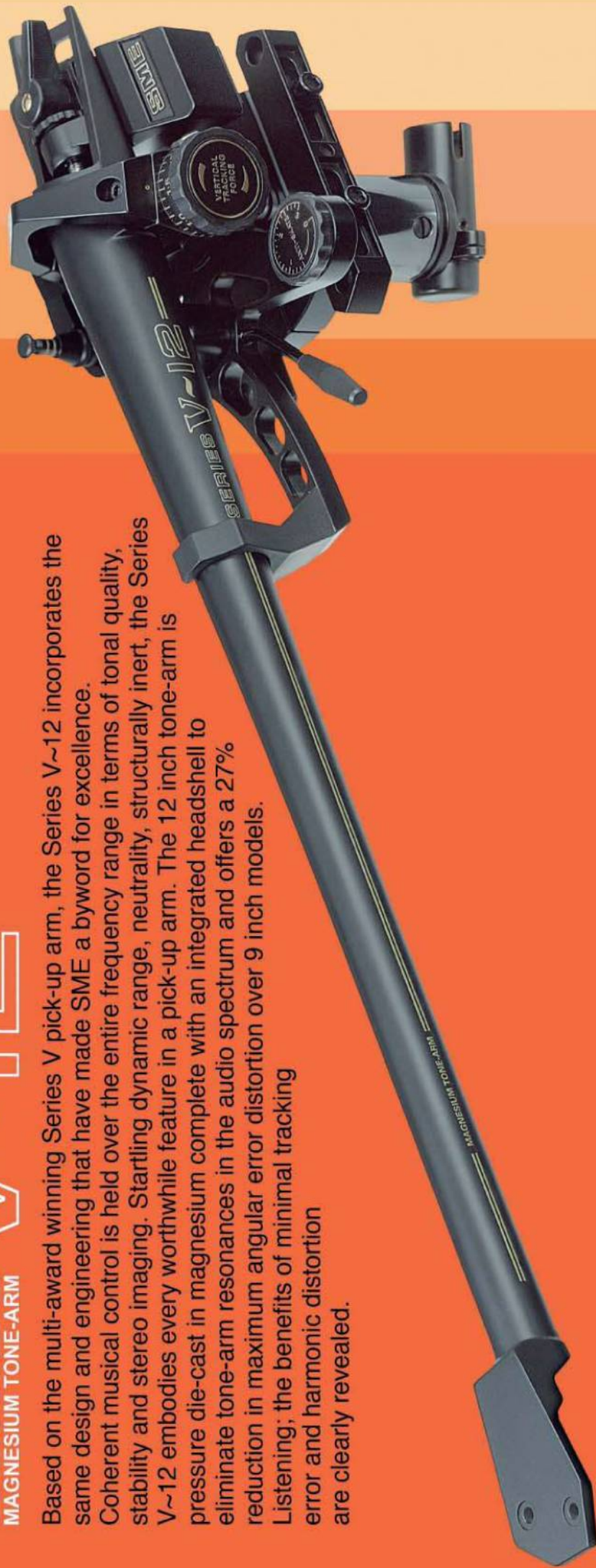


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