

Sumiko Pearwood Celebration II

The middle of three models in Sumiko's *Reference* range of cartridges, this £1,072 *Pearwood Celebration Mk II* is beautifully made and combines a sweet sounding Alnico magnet with a rigid long grain boron cantilever and naked elliptical diamond stylus. Coils are low oxygen copper and specific output is rated at a healthy 0.5mV output, albeit from a higher than average 30 ohms coil impedance. Its classic enclosed construction is potentially less susceptible to damage from accidental handling.

The suspension is long life, selected synthetic rubber, set to a moderate compliance of 12cu, which nicely matches the 7g mass and recommended 2g downforce. The stylus is a fine elliptical. Midband separation of 30dB is claimed, and ambitious +/-1.5dB limits for a 10Hz to 40kHz frequency response. Threaded inserts for bolt fixing are incorporated in the cast alloy back plate, and the body is carved from dense pear wood, as is its presentation box. A first rate set of install and set up instructions are included.

Sound Quality.

Sumiko describes the *Celebration II* as a precision device where alterations in alignment can have a significant effect on performance. While true of all cartridges, Sumiko take pride in this particular aspect and explain the subjective effects. After about 50 hours of running in the alignments were reset, and the advice to set the back of the arm a little low and then come up to a subjective optimum for VTA proved spot on. We verified that too high a VTA resulted in a bleached sound that lacked some weight and dynamic power and diluted focus.

On song, this is a fine performer, with a smooth, open sounding, and light-textured tonal balance, and a modern character that's closer to a CD balance than many. Although a little light in timbre, it has a sweet, almost ethereal presentation, and the sound seems to waft towards one, notably free of strain.

Those who have not heard better would be really happy with its very good resolution, stable focus, impressive clarity, and stable groove contact. It clearly outclasses the fine value Sumiko *Blackbird*, as it should at this higher price.

However, while it does have a good measure of dynamic expression and pace, in this more costly company it tends to sound so well mannered that it verges on the polite, with some relative loss of excitement and drive. When compared with the best there is also some shortfall in absolute clarity and transparency. The bass does not drive with such clear edge definition, or such precision of timing, and some of the expression evident in committed vocal sections appears diluted, with the emotional power held back to some degree.

That word expression, used in a wholly musical context, is relevant here, as the sense of dynamic contrast generated by a committed performance is rather less than that found in the very best but admittedly more costly cartridges. Perhaps with a lesser phono stage the degree of difference might be less obvious, but the Naim *Superline* reveals such differences clearly. Nonetheless we got a good overall score of 75 marks for this model, so it came out right after all.

Lab Report

Specific output was a healthy 0.385mV, sufficient for use with some of the quieter, higher gain moving magnet inputs. Frequency response was remarkably uniform over the important central range (+/-0.5dB, 50Hz to 6kHz), rising gently to +2dB by 11kHz and then lifting rapidly to an out of spec +4dB by 20kHz. Channel balance was fine at 0.38dB and remained consistent over the whole range. Separation was a quite good 26dB in the midband, if a little below spec, but holds to a pretty good 24dB over the wide range of 40Hz to 10kHz.

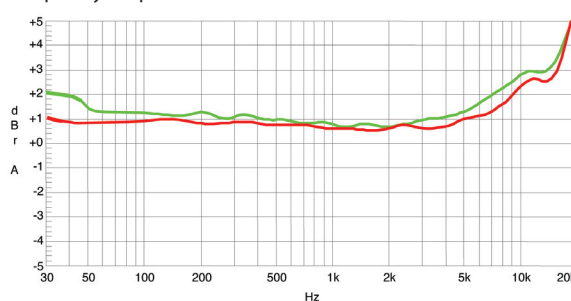
Distortion was generally moderate, though on the lateral track there was some imbalance of distortion between channels, this not evident for vertical modulation. It showed surprisingly good trackability, even the +18dB Supertrack was passed at the rated downforce. The low frequency resonance was typical at 9.5 Hz with a moderate 12dB rise, not requiring additional damping.

Conclusions

This cartridge is a fine performer, the listening test results making it comparatively good value in this group. The lab results were generally good, though as is often the case the specifications were optimistic on some parameters. Very good tracking means secure, low noise groove contact and low disc wear. It's essentially neutral, albeit with added 'air' in the high treble. It behaves well, with a technically sound performance, and aligns so well you know when it's right. At the price it deserves recommendation.



Frequency Response



Symmetry

Tel: 01727 865488
www.symmetry-systems.co.uk
Price: £1,072

Manufacturer: Sumiko	Model: Pearwood Celebration II (S/N 8080)	Price (UK): £1072
Type: low o/p moving coil	Specified Output: 0.5mV	Impedance: 30 ohms
Cantilever: boron rod	Stylus: super elliptical	Enclosed body type
Cartridge weight: 7 g	recommended downforce: 2.0 g	100 -300ohm loading
Output 3.45cm/s: 0.385mV	frequency response 50Hz-6kHz	+/-0.5dB
Channel balance: 0.15dB	frequency response 20Hz-20kHz	+4/-0.5dB
Separation:	24dB typical 40Hz to 10kHz	20dB at 20kHz
Distortion:	300Hz lateral +9dB: 0.63 %	300Hz vertical +6dB: 1.1%
Trackability 300Hz TF (g)	300Hz lateral +15dB at 1.3g	300Hz vertical +12dB at 1.5g
Supertrack Test	+18dB lateral	passed at 1.8g
Stylus finish and alignment	Finish excellent	Alignment excellent
LF resonance, 15g test arm	Frequency: 9.5Hz (12cu)	Rise: 12dB
Suggested arm type	effective mass 8 to 16 g	Damping needed?: no