

Two world premieres

Gryphon Diablo 333 & Jadis JA170

Audiophile bars: Music & Wines

Exclusive interview: Renaud Capuçon

Behind the scenes: our editors' systems

Encounter: Frédéric Vedel from Audio Synthèse

Dark Side of the Moon turns 50

Tests : Audioquest Powerquest 707 - Aurorasound HFAS-01 - B Audio

Alpha One - B&W 603 S3 - Børresen X3 - Diptyque Audio DP-140 MkII

Esprit Lumina - GGTKT Model M1- Hana Umami Blue - iFi Audio iDSD

Neo 2 - Isol-8 MiniSub Axis & SubStation Integra - Luxman PD-191 A

Musical Fidelity LS3/5a - Neodio TMA - Solidsteel VL3 - SPEC RSA-BW7EX

Stromtank S1000 - Taga Harmony HTR-1500CD - Triangle Magellan

Cello 40th - Viablue UFO Dome, Rocket & Rocket XL - YBA Heritage A200S

PHONO CARTRIDGE

HANA UMAMI BLUE

Laurent Thorin



Hana's Umami Blue is the result of a fusion of the best technological choices implemented by the brand on its ML and Umami Red cartridges. The Hama Umami Blue boasts fine reproduction combined with outstanding musicality. To achieve such a result, this cartridge calls on uncompromising design choices.

Like its predecessors, it is based on a moving coil architecture. Its body is based on the Auricle structure already used on the Umami Red. Machined from a solid block of duralumin A7075, it combines rigidity and low mass. It ensures perfect support of the cartridge generator in «Open Air» configuration. To eliminate any undesirable vibratory states, the Umami Blue body also features a POM polymer front insert acting as a damper.

The moving-coil generator is equipped with ALNICO magnets. These super-powerful magnets are identical to those used in the ML. They create an intense, highly linear field in the air gap. As a result, the risk of saturation is extremely low, contributing to Umami Blue's remarkable musicality. The moving coils



ORIGIN

Japan

PRICE

€ 2.500

TYPE

Moving coil (MC)

WEIGHT

10,8 g

BODY

Duralumin (A7075)

CANTILEVER

Boron

DIAMOND

Microline Nude Diamond
Cryogenic generator, cross-shaped armature
and Alnico (Al-Ni-Co) magnet

RECOMMENDED CONTACT FORCE

2 g

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

15 Hz to 50 kHz

CHANNEL BALANCING

0.5 dB at 1 kHz

CHANNEL SEPARATION

30 dB at 1 kHz

RECOMMENDED LOAD

80 to 100 Ohms

OUTPUT LEVEL

0.4 mV

TIP

Elliptical diamond

DYNAMIC COMPLIANCE

10 x 10⁻⁶ cm/dyne (at 10 Hz)

in this generator are made from extremely pure, high-quality copper. They are handcrafted with the utmost care by Excel Sound's master craftsmen on a Permalloy cross-armature identical to that used on the ML.

The Umami Blue's pickup uses a Microline-cut diamond in the shape of the engraving burin used to make Master discs. In this way, the diamond perfectly follows the groove of the vinyl record, extracting the most minute details. What's more, this Microline cut greatly reduces wear on the record, preserving all its qualities, even after repeated playback.

However, it would be unfortunate to lose the subtlest details of the sound message when conveying the vibrations from the diamond to the moving coils. To avoid such losses, the UMAMI Blue is equipped with a boron cantilever. Its rigidity is close to that of diamond. The transmission of the tiniest vibrations is thus perfectly ensured, enabling the Umami Blue to reproduce the most subtle micro-details, as well as the full dynamic range of the vinyl record.

Finally, Umami Blue features a special cryogenic treatment. A true «cold annealing» process is applied to the Umami Blue's generator and gold-plated output pins. This sudden drop in temperature has an impact on the material's molecular structure, further increasing its rigidity while dimensionally stabilizing the parts. The result is a longer service life.

All the know-how that Masao Okada-san, the master creator of Hana phono cartridges, has acquired over decades is now concentrated in Umami Blue to meet the demands of the most uncompromising audiophiles for the reproduction of «vinyl sound» and all its musicality.

IN USE

We used this cartridge in several configurations. First on a Linn Sondek LP 12, then on a Kuzma Stabi S and finally on a top-of-the-range Technics SL1200. The difference in turntable and tonearm allowed us to highlight the characteristics of this cartridge, which proved to be relatively universal. However, it was on the Kuzma that the combination proved most musically successful.





On paper, compliance seems rather high, but in use we found it easily accommodated medium-weight tone arms. And while the recommended load is between 80 and 100 ohms, we found that maximum load gave the best results. We tried various phono preamps with success, but it was with the best that Blue really came into its own.

THE SOUND

A few years ago, we fell in love with the Umami Red, so it was with great curiosity that we set our sights on this new Blue model. After a run-in with our special Clearaudio disc, we were delighted to discover a cartridge with a singing, well-balanced character, providing delicate, refined musicality. The sound spectrum reproduced is broad, with a taut bass that never overflows. If you like your vinyl listening typified by opulent bass and plenty of warmth, you won't be totally satisfied with this Blue. For her, analog reproduction is all subtlety and finesse. If, on the other hand, you're looking for a cartridge capable of plunging deep into the groove to extract a wealth of precise information, you'll be completely satisfied with the Blue. It's capable of giving you an exhaustive vision of your black discs, while providing excellent reproduction of ambience. It's unrivalled when

it comes to highlighting the nuances of piano playing. Listening to the Goldberg Variations with the Blue is a real treat. You can even have fun comparing different versions, and be quite surprised by the differences that emerge. On the other hand, with heavy messages such as rock or modern music, you'll easily feel the tension, but may not enjoy the full outpouring of energy you'd expect. Don't blame this cartridge for this, but choose it for its accuracy, its infinite respect for timbre, and its ability to immerse the listener in the performance. It's a matter of taste.

OUR CONCLUSION

A great success for Hana. The Blue offers a viable and interesting alternative to many of its high-profile competitors. It's fine, subtle, precise and musical. The Japanese manufacturer has done things right, because between the Blue and the Red, the hierarchy is perfectly respected. We'll choose the latter for uncompromising systems, and take full advantage of the newcomer in a wider context, and on a sample of more affordable turntables to obtain a more restrained final bill. It's a clever move on the part of the Japanese manufacturer, who is extending his influence in this field. ■