

Hana

ML moving-coil cartridge



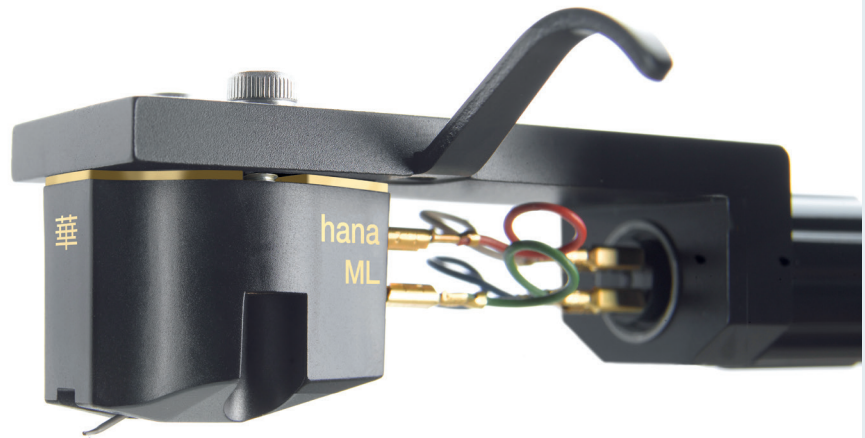
AS PART OF the Excel Corporation in Japan that has been making phono cartridges for a variety of different companies for decades, in recent years Hana has introduced designs branded with its own name. We saw models from its S and E series in *HFC* 408 and 410 but the M is the new top-tier offering, marking a significant jump in design and price.

In contrast to the composite used on the more affordable models, the M is made from Delrin – a specialist thermoplastic with similar resonant properties to vinyl. One useful addition is that this body includes threaded inserts making mounting much simpler. The body houses an aluminium cantilever with a nude microlinear stylus that Hana feels is superior to its S series Shibata as its profile more accurately matches the cutting head of mastering equipment for a far superior performance, especially towards the inner groove.

Dynamic duo

As with other designs in the Hana range, there are two models. The ML seen here is a low-output design that generates 0.4mV, while the MH is a high-output version suitable for use with moving-magnet phono stages. Both models are finished to a high standard and weigh in at 9.5g and track at 2.0g. The overall weight is relatively high, but all but the lowest mass tonearms should be able to comfortably handle it.

Initially fitted to a SME M2-9 tonearm on a Michell GyroDec that's connected to Rega's Aura phono stage (*HFC* 446), the ML can feel a little tonally dark and lacks treble energy. Portico Quartet's *Knee-Deep In The North Sea* comes across as competent but somewhat inert. Once the Hana has a further 10 hours on it, though, the tonal balance begins to shift and there is a noticeable improvement to the treble. Playing the same LP again delivers dramatically better results. The frenetic *Steps In The Wrong Direction* is filled with energy and the combination of saxophone and distinctive 'hang' percussion is



delivered with presence and a very believable sense of delay.

The lower registers are excellent from the outset. The Hana manages to deliver power and impact without losing fine detail or over powering the upper registers. The deep bass at the start of *Legend In My Living Room* by Annie Lennox is beautifully defined and impressively weighty. Even the

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titanic low end in Leftfield's *Universal Everything* is captured without dominating the performance. On a turntable that has over emphasised bass this might be a problem, but with remotely neutral partnering equipment it yields excellent results.

Switching to the more terrestrially priced Rogue Audio Triton II (p58), the Hana's impressive qualities don't fundamentally alter. Without the Rega's astonishingly low noise floor,

some of the open three-dimensional nature of how the ML performs is curtailed slightly, but the effect isn't severe. In fact the slightly livelier presentation of the Triton can work to its advantage. At times it can feel a little rhythmically restrained next to similarly priced rivals like the van den Hul DDT II (*HFC* 425), but it responds positively to partnering equipment with these qualities.

Lucky charms

That's not to say the ML can't have fun in its own right. The retro tinged rock of Greta van Fleet's *Anthem Of A Peaceful Army* is delivered with an appealing feeling of drive and snap that works well with the Hana's superb tonality and richness. The ML is able to strike the happy balance between being energetic and lively while avoiding listening fatigue even with poorer pressings. This isn't the sort of cartridge that hits you out of the box with a shock and awe style of presentation, but its considerable charms take very little time to grow on you and it's a worthy contender for any shortlist at the price. **ES**

DETAILS

PRICE
£995
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OUR VERDICT

