

van den Hul MC - ONE Special



Although the van den Hul name is now synonymous with cables this Dutch company had been making fine cartridges for some time before the digital invasion, founder AJ van den Hul having started the company with handmade needles in the 1970s.

In a range that includes models costing thousands of pounds, the MC One Special is a relatively affordable example. It's a 'selected' version of the MC10 Special, a hand-built cartridge using silver wire coils and a boron cantilever (the tube that connects the stylus to the coils). Because of the relatively wide sample variations with cartridges, it's not unusual for makers to charge a bit more for selected samples of a particular model - ones that are found to perform better than the rest. Grado is another manufacturer that does this - the Prestige Gold on page 46 is a 'selected' version of the Prestige Silver, for which an additional £20 is charged.

Compared to its forebear, the MC One, this Special version has a thicker front pole and an extra small magnet which increase output and are claimed to enhance resolution. The cartridge has a relatively heavy aluminium body with threaded inserts to make installation less fiddly. It comes with the bare minimum of accessories and instructions - just the specifications inscribed on the inside of the box.



Lock it into the headshell and drop it in the groove and you'll hear why apparently sane individuals are prepared to spend the price of a decent pair of speakers on a moving coil cartridge. It reveals the third dimension, depth, and brings genuine stereo to the table. All the less costly cartridges here do this to some extent but next to them the vdH sounds like real three dimensional sound compared to a facsimile thereof. The inability to resolve this elusive aspect of reproduction is what kept CD from sounding convincing for so long and it's still got a way to go to match something like this cartridge.

The effect on music is to give the sound ample space to expand and take shape, to sound solid in the true stereo sense. With the Beefheart this makes instruments and voices sound more real and vivid, better able to draw you into the music. You can fully appreciate the contortions of both singer and band to pull together this apparently disparate collection of noises into a musical whole, and you can enjoy the music all the more for it.

The Massive Attack LP revealed the cartridge's remarkable low frequency resolution, the various elements that make up the industrial bass sounds on *Inertia Creeps* putting in an appearance for the first time. Likewise, Joni Mitchell seemed almost in the room, transported from 1976; the sense of presence was stunning and the music made a lot more sense now that each player's contribution was put into perspective. With the Rachmaninoff you could revel in the natural tone of the instruments within the sort of soundstage an orchestra might inhabit, while the John Fahey piece was pulled together in all its zingy new steel string excellence.

Ratings:

- ● ● ● ● Build
- ● ● ● ● Sound
- ● ● ● ● Value

Overall rating:

- ● ● ● ●

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