

Andre Jennings



Excel Sound Corporation Hana SL Cartridge

\$750

Around five years ago, I said that the Hana SL establishes a baseline of performance that any cartridge demanding a higher price should exceed, without any steps backwards in other areas. This seems like it should be a simple matter, but the Hana SL makes it a tall order for some higher-priced cartridges, especially the part about not stepping backwards. At that time, I also reported that the Hana SL had an even-handed response across the frequency spectrum, traces the grooves very well (from low-to-high frequencies), and has a touch of color that moves it ever so slightly to the warm side of neutral. Today, the Hana SL continues to impress in system configurations that include higher-cost analog front ends. At its price point, it is still a standout. This cartridge will allow the owner to enjoy his vinyl playback system while providing an anchor for future upgrades of tonearms, turntables, and phono stages. For a cartridge at any price, the Hana SL holds its own against the competition, and then some. Over the years, it has been an easy recommendation, offering low distortion, high coherence, excellent soundstage depth and width, and an uncanny sense of togetherness. It's still a keeper. (270)



Ortofon Verismo Cartridge \$6999

Sitting squarely in the empty spot between the Windfeld Ti and the top-line MC Diamond cartridge in Ortofon's Exclusive Series, the company's newest offering, the Verismo, fills the gap comfortably. Using Ortofon's Selective Layer Melting (SLM) process, the Verismo's body is made (layer by layer) of titanium to form a dense and rigid structure with high internal damping. Equipped with Ortofon's Replicant 100 stylus, Aucurum coils, low-magnetic armature, and field stabilizing element, the Verismo has the added advantage of an upgraded Wide-Range-Damping (WRD) system. (WRD consists of a platinum disc sandwiched between two dissimilar rubber/multiwall-carbon-nanotube absorbers.) The Verismo has also inherited the diamond cantilever formerly only available on its flagship MC cartridge. With the new rubber formulation, WRD provides optimal damping and improved tracking abilities. As a result, the new Verismo tracks and traces grooves effortlessly, while providing an exceptional amount of perceived realism. The Verismo offers up the most truthful evenhandedness and musical transparency that I can recall from this manufacturer, surpassing my previous most-preferred Ortofon, the MC A95. The new rubber compound and diamond cantilever have taken the Verismo to new heights. (Forthcoming)



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