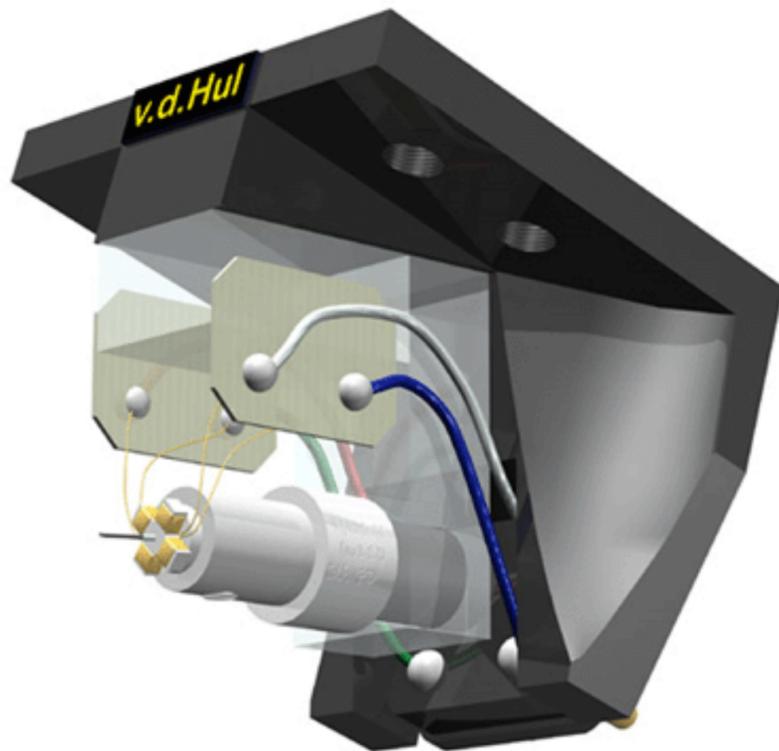


Light and almost invisible Van den Hul Colibri

*MusicHome studio, December 2000
(Translation from Dutch)*

Ever paid thousands of guilders for something weighing just a few grams? Maybe for the penny black or a set of diamonds. The new Van den Hul Colibri weighs just three gram and consists of very few components. Just consider the thing as a serious attack on the reputation of SACD. Bitstream no matter its speed will be overtaken by the Colibri indeed. Below a report of a spectacular analog summer.

The Van den Hul cartridges are certainly not designed on CAD/CAM computer systems and also aren't stored as neat blueprints in the filing cabinet. Aalt Jouk is an intuitive designer who at the most weird moments entrusts his constructive thoughts to beer mats and sales slips. His archive of brilliant ideas therefore must consist of an exotic collection of anything able to be written on. A person studying this documentation will figure out that the basic design thought consists of decreasing the amount of components and reducing weight. Logically, for lots of material crossings yield audible problems and weight causes mechanical sluggishness and possibly coloration and resonances. The ideal and fastest cartridge would have to be weightless and shouldn't contain any resonating and coloring mass. In fact all mass should be got rid of, however, conveying such a thought calls for some mental adaptation at the consumer side. But maybe there will come a day when the newest Van den Hul lies in the mailbox just consisting of a diamond stylus with built in coils and a fixing point. At least, the Colibri rather starts to look that way.



The Colibri

The Colibri is a high compliance model with an output of 0.23 or 0.28 mV. A low mass tonearm is required and the tracking force may lie between 1.35 and 1.5 gram. That notably puts limits to the phono preamp and the tonearm (*).

(* Remark: The Colibri is currently available in a number of versions with different output and system weight. Latter also enables the use of heavier tonearms. For more details about all available versions please refer to our product information about The COLIBRI. —**A.J. van den Hul B.V.**

The CAT preamp used for the test has insufficient signal gain on the phono input to be able to work together with the Colibri. The tube pre-pre that should solve this problem is not finished yet, I therefore have called the outstanding Sphinx phono preamp to help out. The Colibri is mounted in a Pluto reference turntable. The 5A tonearm is just light enough to be able to accept the Colibri. The Pluto arm just returned from having been modified and belongs to the so-called 'long' version with the flying script logo. That has the advantage that cartridges of various weight can be mounted without problems. Also the new Van den Hul with its three gram weight could be adjusted without any trouble. The cartridge has a somewhat shorter cantilever and therefore is a very 'low rider'. The optimal VTA is reached just before the rest of the construction is in danger of getting into contact with the record surface. Records that are just flat don't pose a problem. The Pluto's titanium record clamp keeps everything neatly flat. Bumpily records better stay in the closet. The Pluto turntable was coupled to the Sphinx phono amplifier with a Siltech phono cable. From there again with Siltech to the CAT. Loudspeakers are the Infinity Prelude MTS active systems. The power amplifiers are of Jadis and Spectral. Loudspeaker cables are among others of Harmonic Technology and Spectral/MIT. Reference phono cartridges are the Van den Hul Frog and the Van den Hul Black Beauty.

Performance

It is astonishing how each time again Aalt Jouk is able to improve the performance level. You think to own the perfect cartridge and then the newest version arrives. Only just at that moment you know what the shortcomings of the previous version were. Well, 'shortcomings' is a misnomer considering the performance of the Black Beauty and the Grasshoppers. But it is fascinating that it is still possible to improve the performance. Van den Hul as a matter of fact balances on the edge of the physically and technically possible.

The first thing that catches the eye with the Colibri is the opulence of things happening between the loudspeakers. An enormously detailed and nuanced palette of sounds, directions of reflections and little subtle details that never stood out before. The total space between the loudspeakers is being filled with information. Besides that, the Colibri is able to

project sound far beyond the loudspeakers. That was demonstrated by a record of Peggy Lee with George Shearing which came along with other records from the archive and reproduced a stage of five meters wide. The soundstaging, focusing and localisation of this cartridge are thus spectacularly good. The second quality that stands out is the Colibri's enormous musical coherency. In comparison to the Black Beauty this is simply an audible step towards further integration and musicality. Third, the phenomenal performance across the entire frequency range has to be mentioned. The lows go extremely deep, have a spectacular transient speed and reproduce an immense tonal nuance. The mids are smooth, full of character and seductive. The highs sound like velvet, but also can reproduce the real character of percussion instruments. You hear every difference between various brands of cymbals and every little nuance. There is lots of ambience information and through the Infinity MTS that pretty acoustic bubble stood in the listening room, immediately taking you to the space where the recording was done. In the other qualities the Colibri is a typical Van den Hul. Everything is present but no single quality forces itself to the foreground. The detailedness works extremely natural. You are aware of every little piece of information in the recording, but that detailedness is not audible as an annoying property. Playing records with a Colibri means a renewed acquaintance. Do not say that you know your records before they have been listened to with this Van den Hul. The cartridge is also extremely neutral. Just like the Infinity's it has absolutely no sound or character of its own. You are simply moved to the recording venue and purely hear what took place there. The Colibri is also fast. Across the entire frequency range transients reach frightening speeds. The amount of control is also immense. The Colibri is clearly not meant for consumers that want to provide the recording with an own interpretation in the form of some colouring or a dull over-romanticised sauce. Who wants that has to do without a whole new world of experiences. Listening to the Colibri is absolutely fascinating. It is a musical voyage of discovery where one literally experiences one astonishment after the other. In this way I have been playing Blue Note's the entire evening. You pull one record after another out of the closet and each time you are blown out of your chair from amazement. It reminds of 'La Musika'. That was a similar experience. And honour to whom deserves it. Van den Hul has managed to stay just a step ahead of Super Audio CD sound. This remark does not brush anything of the enormous qualities of Super Audio CD aside and I absolutely belong to the enthusiastic promoters of this technology. But analog sound at this level still just comes a little closer to reality.

Conclusion

The Van den Hul Colibri provides analog reproduction with new dimensions. This phono cartridge sets a new reference for soundstaging, detailedness, integration, pure musicality, spectacular speed, dynamics and bass reproduction. On the other side there is a tempting, refined, extremely subtle, captivating and almost inconspicuous musicality.

The Colibri effortlessly moves you to the original recording venue. A palette of thousands of colours and nuances provides the black gold with new insights. Only when the mailman again brings a new Van den Hul I will know what improvements can still be made to the Colibri.

MusicHome studio, December 2000

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