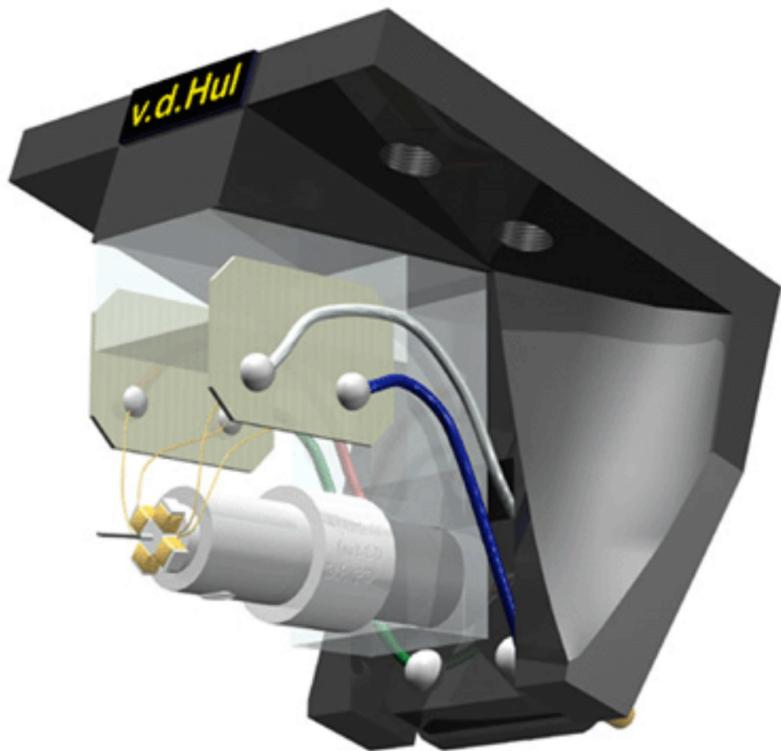


# FEELIN' GROOVY

Van den Hul's new high-end moving coil takes a less-is-more approach. So why is it so expensive?



Less is more. Rarely is this more true than it is with hi-fi equipment. Every time a layer of complexity or a feature is added to a component it affects its sonic character, and generally in a negative way. Hence AJ van den Hul's latest range-topping cartridge has even fewer elements than its predecessor.

If you are familiar with the vdH Grasshopper and the Beauty series that continued the theme of open-bodied moving coil designs, you will know that they had a pretty distinct front pole - a relatively substantial magnetic modulator that you will find on the majority of MCs. The Colibri, the name derived from a bird, does without this front pole piece all together. The obvious advantage of this is that it can have a shorter cantilever which gives it superior pulse performance because it's stiffer. The drawback is that to achieve adequate output you need more turns of coil wire which add mass and reduce damping. But if you compare the Colibri with the Grasshopper this appears to be a compromise worth making.

There are other differences however. This Colibri, the XGP, is built on a carbon-saturated nylon body with a transparent polycarbonate interlayer, the combination giving superior damping to metal bodies. Incidentally, there are several variations on the Colibri theme. XGP stands for cross (X) shaped modulator with gold (G) coils and a plastic (P) body, but you could have copper or even platinum coils, or a metal body if you prefer. It all comes down to tailoring - each Colibri is custom-made to suit your tonearm, phono stage and musical taste. The basic descriptions suggest that gold coils are best for classical while copper is the choice for jazz/rock lovers.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Colibri is an extremely sophisticated and smooth device, so much so that initially it seems a little tame. But then you realise that's because distortion has been virtually wiped out. To get the best from it however, careful matching of your phono stage is crucial, and load impedance and gain need to be close to the XGP's unusual requirements if you want to combine dynamic grunt with subtlety of tone and low-level detail. Once that's sorted, this is a cartridge that will tell you all about the instrument being played, what it's made of, the environment it has been recorded in and, most importantly, the quality of playing.

With the Colibri digging the grooves, the various instruments on Cornelius's *Point* sound extremely realistic and each has its own character and acoustic, however busy the mix becomes. This allows you to follow each performer individually, to hear what the drummer, guitarist or pianist is doing in the midst of a dense piece of music and each reveals its character to the full. Such separation can reduce the coherence of music, but here the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. With a good recording those parts have more life than you'd imagine possible.

If you know the music of Arvo Pärt you'll know it's not the jolliest of stuff, but the Colibri plumbs subterranean depths to unearth the full, tragic beauty of *Fratres* (from *Tabula Rasa*). If you think you've got it tough just combine this LP and cartridge and you'll realise the meaning of despair... Radiohead aren't even in the same ballpark!

In its XGP form the Colibri is probably the finest resolver of detail, tone and acoustic available. Its high-frequency performance is staggeringly beautiful, extended, strong and pure, the bass is deep and resonant while the midrange fills in the gap with a verve and resolve that is rarely encountered. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

## VERDICT

sound >> 98%  
features >> 92%  
build >> 80%  
value >> 85%

overall score >> 92%

## ^ PRO

Phenomenal resolution, custom building to suit hardware and software, proof that vinyl does indeed rule.

## ✓ CON

Vulnerability of design, price, requires an unusually high load impedance, danger of vinyl junkiedom.

## CONCLUSION

You won't imagine what's hidden in the grooves of your favourite album until you hear this cartridge. The resolution and tonal riches available go beyond your wildest dreams!

Hifi Choice, August 2003

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