

Gliding flight

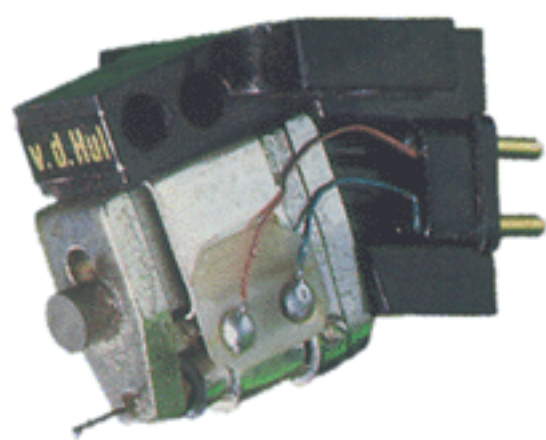
Test: Phono cartridge van den Hul "Grasshopper Black Beauty"

Aalt Jouk van den Hul wants to know it again: His "Black Beauty" glides as gently over the vinyl as no cartridge before.

*Original text by Joachim Pfeiffer
Audio 10/97 (Translation from German)*

As an analog lover I naturally am convinced that a phono cartridge with the quality grade of a van den Hul "Grasshopper Black Beauty" actually should not be treated on a single page, as intended by the editor's plan. Yes, or let's just bring out a book, an encyclopedia in 40 volumes ... There would be enough to talk about.

Aalt Jouk van den Hul's present top system meanwhile is the fourth from the "Grasshopper" series, which in my equipment reads information from innumerable vinyl records. Years ago I started with two "Grasshopper III's", the one with golden and the other with silver coils. The gold version was able to delight me at that time, however between the "Grasshopper IV" and me a genuine friendship never developed. At increased dynamics this still available model appeared a little too cool to me, a little too colorless.



Cutting both ways: The open construction method of the van den Hul prevents nasty resonances — and attracts finest dust particles (*2).

*2: The statement that the open construction method of the Black Beauty attracts finest dust particles is incorrect: The cartridge is constructed such a way that it can not accumulate an electrostatic charge. Therefore dust is not attracted. —A.J. van den Hul B.V.

Whether the "Black Beauty" (about DM 6,400) is a modification of the "Grasshopper IV" or yet a new construction, may be speculated. The boron cantilever, the stylus shape as well as the coils of both cartridges are identical (*3); In the mean time however van den Hul has discovered a new material for the magnets. Concerned about imitation he does rather not betray which material he elected for this black beauty.

*3: The reviewer's observation is incorrect. Though looking much like the Grasshopper IV, the Black Beauty is a new construction with many fine improvements over the Grasshopper IV. The differences with the Grasshopper IV GLA are:

1. Improved magnetic layout, -construction and -properties.
2. A reduced cantilever length.
3. Due to points 1 and 2 the resolution is higher.
4. The suspension uses a very special damping rubber.
5. There is more "space" between the musical instruments and vocals.
6. The output is reduced from 0.65 mV/ch. to 0.50 mV/ch. by using double layer Matched Crystal Gold coils on a cross-shaped armature, both producing a higher channel separation.

—A.J. van den Hul B.V.

No other component is able to evade an absolute evaluation as elegantly as a phono cartridge. Potential errors limit judgements too much: Is the pick-up optimally installed and adjusted, of which quality are the tone-arm as well as the internal and external wiring, is the phono preamplifier's load adjustment set correctly?

Since February first of all the Wheaton "Triplanar IV" tone-arm carried the unbelievable van den Hul. For comparison it likewise moved under the headshell of a Linn "Ekos" or Kuzma "Reference", the everlasting SME "Series V" and the from extinction threatened Breuer "Dynamic". God praise the new van den Hul reference fits without sanding off or padding procedure under all common tone-arms (the classical "Grasshoppers" despise the Wheaton and Breuer "Dynamic" — the body of this van den Hul is a tick too wide).

I think that after such a long time I am entitled to make an unambiguous judgement. "The Black Beauty" without doubt ranks among the best systems. Even though it did not display the insane dynamics of the legendary Clearaudio "Insider Gold" (around DM 14,000) in all configurations; In comparison with the renowned German however in other disciplines it demonstrated an effortless superiority. It was by no means stronger coloured, but it left a bit more air around some music events than the "Insider". And it astonished with once again reduced stylus noise.

Among the ultimate cartridges the "Black Beauty" at present is the most attractive offer. If at all, I regard it to be in competition with the great Clearaudio — in any case I prefer it to the contenders in its price class because of its musicality.

With in the future record players being on the AUDIO test stand, the "Black Beauty" and its majesty Clearaudio "Insider" will be employed. For those that have a choice ...



Uncomplicated installation: The "Black Beauty" gets along with all good tone-arms, at the MC Phono input 47 kOhm should be activated (*1).

*1: Recommended load impedance for the Black Beauty is: Standard version: > 500 Ohm; Medium & high output version: 47k Ohm
—A.J. van den Hul B.V.

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