

van den Hul Black Beauty

No, I did not forget my promise to present van den Hul's "The Phono Amp" to you. And my first experiences with it can also be read shortly at the end of the article. More about the preamp will follow in one of the coming issues, since here the new top-system, the Black Beauty, is meant to stand at the centre of interest. This phono cartridge is not a modification of the Grasshopper IV GLA, even if at first glance it looks similar for mistaking to this up to the colour of the generator attachment — to write about a "housing" would be a huge exaggeration. The two systems rather differ so considerably from each other that an upgrade of the Grasshopper to the Black Beauty is impossible. And to this the magnet material mainly has debt. From fear of imitators the Dutch phono cartridge specialist unfortunately refrains from giving further information.

With the Black Beauty, Aalt Jouk van den Hul gets by with only one layer of windings per channel (*), whereas with the Grasshopper still two were required; This thanks to the newly discovered material of the double rear pole-plate and of the small front magnet, which latter alone provides for an around a decibel higher output voltage. With the new top model the coils furthermore are no more wound on a square, but on a cross-shaped soft iron wafer. The reduction of the windings is intended to bring about a higher channel separation as well as — due to the smaller weight — an improvement of the dynamic behavior. The gold coils have a d.c. resistance of a little over 20 ohms and supply an output voltage of 0.50 millivolts at a speed of five centimeters per second — with the very most phonostages therefore no noise problems are to be expected.

(*): Actually the standard version of the Black Beauty employs two layers of windings per channel. Presently also a medium and a high output version are available on special request. —**A.J. van den Hul B.V.**

The weight saving in the coils and their carrier naturally also requires a newly tuned damping. Also here van den Hul again uses a combination of two rubbers with different mechanical properties. Compared to the Grasshopper the new construction not only is meant to offer a better tracking ability, but also takes the last bit of sharpness from sibilants. With needle and cantilever the system specialist applies the well-proven: A diamond tip with an extremely fine polished surface is bonded to a boron cantilever with a diameter of 0.3 millimeters. But enough about technology.

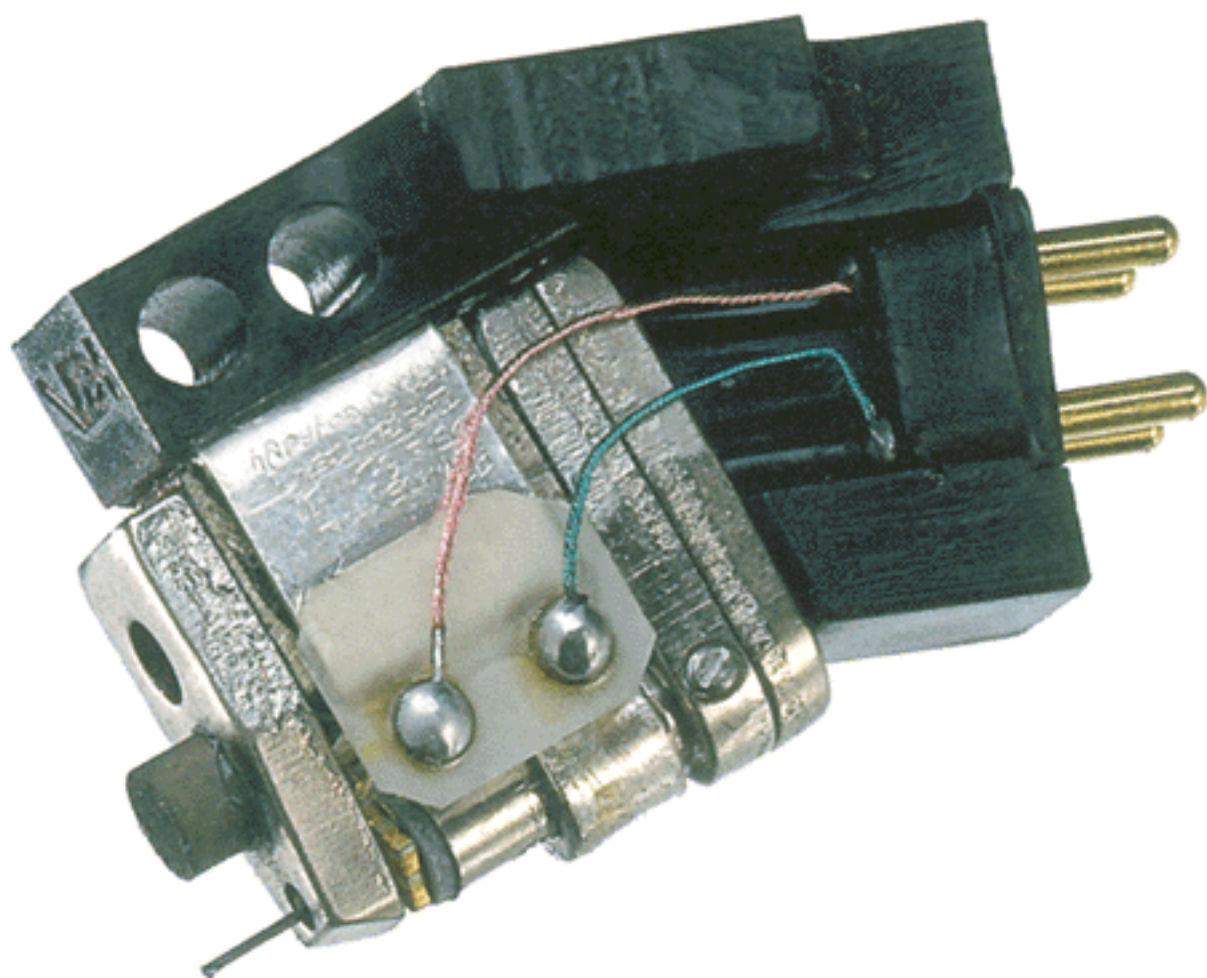
Since the Grasshopper already was in particular well harmony with Higher Fidelity's phonostage 301 and its just as dynamic as round sound, the Black Beauty was connected to it first: On the Konstant's platter lies Egberto Gismonti's "Sol Do Meio Dia", ECM 1116: As expected, with the duet of Gismonti's eight string and Ralph Towner's twelve string guitar, the Black Beauty effortlessly succeeds in untangling the different timbres from these instruments. Also the reproduction of the finest instrument handling noises does not pose any problem to our BB.

And I had likewise counted with the fact that van den Hul's newest creation highly differentiates the percussive fireworks of Colin Walcott and Nana Vasconcelos and that it renders them in a sparkling way. Totally surprising to me however is this in-flattering, almost already warm mid-frequency range. Fortunately, the somewhat "more benevolent" tonal balance, thanks to which also less well recorded albums can be listened to with pleasure, does go not at expense of the fine information.

Whether the Black Beauty really yet portrays a somewhat larger spatiality than the Grasshopper and whether it yet has to offer a tinge more dynamics, I am not able to swear to. Sometimes the limits of my acoustic memory simply have been reached. In the mentioned disciplines the Grasshopper's performances already ranked among the best of the world — and herein the Black Beauty quite certainly is not inferior to it.

With van den Hul's "The Phono Amp" the Black Beauty again plays a trace more warmly and more smoothly than with Higher Fidelity's several times more expensive phonostage/preamplifier combination. And also as far as the rendition of space is concerned, "The Phono Amp" does not need to hide itself — simply fantastic. However it is missing a little of the compelling drive that marks up the HFs. Played through the van den Hul preamplifier the LP seems to run a little more slowly: One simply has more time to perceive individual details, one on the other hand is not charmed as intensively by the rhythm as one is by the HFs. "The Phono Amp" however just arrived last minute and had only just six hours time to warm up. It certainly earned a more detailed appreciation.

As far as its excellent representation of space, its pronounced love for detail, its overwhelming joy in play as well as its almost bookkeeper-like meticulousness are concerned, the Black Beauty proves itself as a typical representative of the Dutch phono cartridge dynasty. Its exceptionally supple mid tones without a tinge of chilliness to me simply make it the



best van den Hul of all times.

Image Information	
Phono Cartridge van den Hul Black Beauty	
Static Compliance:	35 µm/mN
Recommended Tracking Force:	12 - 14 mN
Stylus Shape:	van den Hul-1S
Output Voltage:	0.50 mV (5.7 cm/sec)
Weight:	8.5 g
Price:	See Advisory Retail Pricelist on van den Hul website
Warranty:	12 Months
Text:	Dirk Sommer
Translation:	van den Hul B.V.
Photos:	Klaus Junk
Image Test Opinion	
***** exceptional	

Image HiFi, January 1998

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