



Dawn chorus

This latest moving-coil offering from Sumiko sees a tweak to an existing successful recipe. **Ed Selley** sees if it flies

In recent years, the bulk of Sumiko's activity has been focused at the more affordable end of its range; replacing superannuated models and adding a very capable series of moving-magnet designs. The Songbird moving-coil range above this point has been ticking over nicely in the meantime, but Sumiko has beefed it up with the addition of the Oriole – sat between the Songbird and Starling.

The Oriole's spec is in keeping with its siblings. It forgoes any form of body around the generator to reduce interference being trapped. This is attached to a solid and relatively thick top plate to control resonance (while also providing room for threaded mounts). Carts of this kind are more vulnerable, but Sumiko has designed a usefully protective stylus guard.

The Oriole uses an aluminium cantilever with a 0.5mm reinforced aluminium pipe. This is tipped with a Shibata profile nude stylus, which feeds a signal to a copper-wound generator designed to present a low impedance to the phono stage – Sumiko suggests more than 55ohm and I settle on 100ohm for the bulk of testing. Output is quoted as 0.3mV,

which is significantly lower than the 0.5mV figure of its siblings.

Aside from a relatively long cantilever – resulting in the Oriole being fractionally taller than some designs at the price – this is not a difficult cart to fit or accommodate. The body is threaded, which simplifies the business of attaching it to arms. The pins are well spaced and the 7.3g weight should not prove too taxing. The Oriole isn't cheap, but it certainly looks spectacular.

Sound quality

The Oriole is installed on a Vertere MG-1 MkII Magic Groove (HFC 506) turntable and run into a Cyrus Classic PHONO (HFC 520). While the output isn't huge, it doesn't struggle to hit any desired listening level. No less importantly, it demonstrates some very likeable traits from the off. This is not the most ballistic cartridge going; it doesn't quite deliver the driving force of *Lunatic* by The Slow Readers Club in the manner of some rivals at the price. It not that it sounds especially slow or languid, it's more that it's not as forceful as some.

This works to its benefit in that it never loses the articulation needed to

sound convincing with more complex material. *Theme De Yoyo* by Cinematic Orchestra never sounds congested or confused and the medley of different instruments is delivered with realism and confidence. So long as a modicum of care is paid to setup and alignment, detail levels are good too. Even when there's a huge amount of information to process, the Sumiko keeps it intelligible.

Voices are another area where it delivers. Marina Diamandis' heartfelt turn on *Soft To Be Strong* is emotionally engaging with the Oriole combining excellent detail retrieval with effortless realism and richness. There is always enough refinement on offer to ensure that even slightly sharp and forward pressings don't tip over into being unpleasant to listen to.

The real party piece is the space and stereo imaging on offer, however. *Live In Germany* by Kraftwerk shows this off to excellent effect. This is one of the band's earliest recordings and it combines real instruments with some

Sumiko's Oriole cart demonstrates some very likeable traits from the start

electronic undertones. The Sumiko delivers them in a compelling and believable manner, setting them in a stereo image that gives a real sense of the space they're performing in. It consistently delivers a delightful performance across a few live albums, particularly 20th-century ones.

Conclusion

With less high-tempo material, the Oriole excels at detail, tonal realism and emotional engagement. There is more than enough articulation and resolving power to keep complex music intelligible and coherent, but the icing on the cake has to be its talent for live material ●

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Sumiko Oriole
ORIGIN
USA/Japan
TYPE
Low-output moving-coil cartridge
WEIGHT
7.3g
FEATURES
● Shibata stylus
● Aluminium alloy cantilever
● Aluminium top plate with exposed generator
DISTRIBUTOR
Henley Audio Ltd
WEBSITE
sumikophono
cartridges.com
henleyaudio.co.uk

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

LIKE: Superb tonality, detail and stereo imaging; looks great

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

DISLIKE: Not the most ballistic-sounding cart; vulnerable design

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

TRACKING

★★★★★

WE SAY: The Oriole is a beguiling performer and, used in the right setup, it will excel

OVERALL

★★★★★