

mail



Visit our website at www.hi-fiworld.co.uk or send your emails to letters@hi-fiworld.co.uk. Letter of the month wins a pair of KEF Q100 loudspeakers.

Answers by: NK - Noel Keywood; JM - Jon Myles; PR - Paul Rigby; MP - Martin Pipe; RT - Rafael Todes.

LETTER OF THE MONTH PRIZE



KEF Q100 LOUDSPEAKERS

For more advice see Letters from earlier issues at www.hi-fiworld.co.uk/letters

A pair of KEF Q100 loudspeakers are on their way to JAMES DOUGLAS
Letter of the Month winner in our January 2016 issue.

Letter of the Month

SAVE ME

It's got to that time to replace my Dynavector DV-20XH. It was my first moving coil (MC) and I have been generally pleased with it. The Dynavector sits in an Origin Live Ultra arm, cartridge isolator and feeds a World Audio Phono II/Pre-amp II and World Audio K5881, slightly modified.

Finding out I am supposed to replace a Dynavector every 3 years has made me carefully consider what I should do next. Not having an MC input restricts my choice a bit, but for the cost of Dynavector trade-in I could get MC transformers and an AT-33EV, but an elliptical stylus doesn't last as long as the DV20XHs micro-ridge?

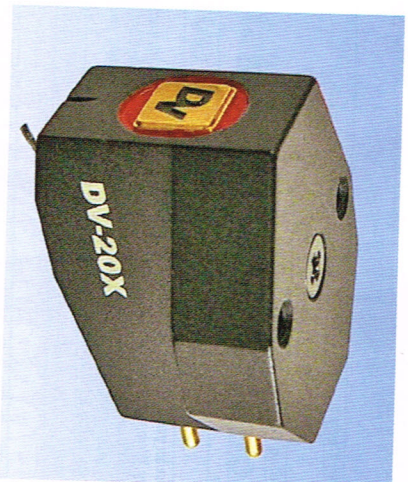
One problem I have had with the DV20XH is sibilance - Joan Armatrading's eponymous album end of side tracks for instance (Save Me and Tall in the Saddle!). Careful adjustment of VTA has reduced it beyond what I had with previous cartridges but I have always suffered from it. Ideally, what I want is a low output cartridge + transformers, or high output cartridge, with low noise, fine profile stylus, no sibilance, less than £400. (I could sneak up to £500 if the wife isn't looking, or drunk).

Simples.
What do you suggest?
Regards,
Robin Irwin

Hi Robin. I hope the wife doesn't read Hi-Fi World or you may wake up to a bent stylus. Best this happens to the outgoing Dynavector methinks.

Incoming to replace it should be a low output MC, either with external MC phono stage or transformers (quieter, but usually expensive if any good). In your case you are best using transformers feeding the World Design's Phono II but these will consume much of your budget. For DIY purposes check out Rothwell, Sower and Jensen, all well known and respected. Music First Audio wind their own very high-quality types and Icon Audio have their MC TX. There's plenty of choice thankfully, because good transformers offer lowest noise and best sound quality from MC cartridges.

I recommend you get a 'proper' low output MC because they track better than high output designs - see our review of the Hanas in this issue, these cartridges may interest you.



Dynavector DV-20XH - a high output moving coil (MC) cartridge suitable for the MM inputs of valve phono stages.

The sibilance you mention on vocals is likely caused by mis-tracking, a classic problem with high output MCs. By happenstance, we have two high-ish output MC cartridges in this issue, the da Vinci V2 from Clearaudio and the Hana EH, and both had limited mid-band tracking ability of around 18cm/sec at 1kHz, where a low output design with smaller, lighter coils will these days clear 25cm/sec - a 40% improvement no less.

Unfortunately, once a cartridge mis-tracks it imprints damage into the groove wall and you'll continue to hear this with a new, better cartridge able to track securely. Possibly one of your earlier

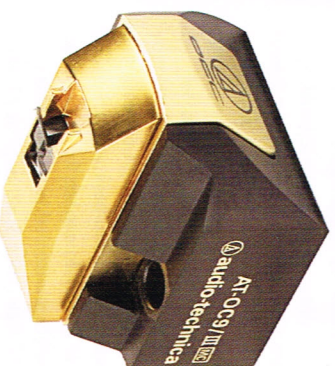
cartridges imprinted the damage; whatever, it is permanent and you will suffer it always.

A classic budget MC cartridge is Denon's DL-103. Although costing a measly £210 or so, it has a big, full bodied sound and exhibits classic MC qualities such as a sense of spaciousness, unlike so many budget MCs that often sound crude and lacklustre.

I still feel Audio Technica's AT OC-9 MLIII (£450) is one of the best budget designs, at least for punchy Rock, but the AT-33EV is fine value at £380.

You have a wide choice available nowadays as vinyl continues its journey upward, back into mainstream popularity.

Oh, and I recommend a Shure M97xE for your wife (!) **NK**



Audio Technica AT OC9 MLIII, an impressive MC cartridge with fine treble and punchy bass.

I echo Noel's recommendation of the Denon DL-103 and would agree that it has a surprisingly high-quality sound for the price. It is well worth auditioning but please listen to the Hana cartridges featured in this issue if you are able. They shocked me with their smooth and inherently mature sound qualities. Both offer a slightly different viewpoint on musical reproduction and you can see just how within the reviews but either will bring a smile to your face and possibly a song from any slightly happy spouses in the immediate vicinity. **PR**

DECCA AT HALF SPEED

Paul Rigby reminisces in the December issue (p67), about the "London" label. This was used by British Decca in the US (and Canada and Japan) as rights to the Decca name were owned by an American company (both are now part



Icon Audio MTX MC transformers - they step up the small signal from an MC so it can be connected to an MM input. Use them between an MC cartridge and MM phono input.

of the Vventi Universal conglomerate). The discs (classical at least) were pressed here but with American sleeves. From 1957-67, Decca handled UK/European recording, pressing and distribution for RCA.

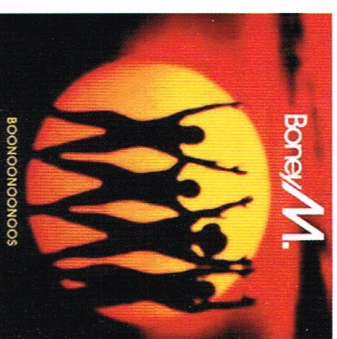
The box on p83 ("Queen" review) mentions the late Stan Ricker, pioneer of half-speed mastering in the '70s. Following WW2, Decca built on their experience with submarine detection to launch "Full Frequency Range Recording"; with their introduction of LPs in 1950, there were complaints that high frequencies were less incisive, so from the late '50s they used half-speed mastering, but without making a fuss about it. Low frequencies were now less well defined, so they modified their microphone layout to put spotlared mikes on the timps and low strings. Disatisfied with their early stereo cutting heads, they remastered much of the catalogue from the mid-60s (the Decca logo was changed from a "quarter-moon" to a rectangle; contrary to some collectors, I think the later ones sound better).

I hope the Editor (p67) will forgive my mentioning that Saxony is in the far east of Germany! Kind regards,

Mark Hodgson

From what I can make out during my own research, there have been quite a lot of attempts to establish half-speed mastering from a range of labels and even independent music production companies. A number of people have had half-speed mastering gear. I believe that included, of all people, the managerial outfit backing the pop group Boney M! Take a closer look at some of their first pressings including their 1981 LP Boonoonoonos.

Most attempts at establishing a workable and profitable half-speed system tended to head off down a sonic cul-de-sac because, as half-speed guru Miles Showell himself will tell you, having the kit is only half the job. Creating successful and consistent half-speed masters is an art and takes years of hard work to perfect. This is why Ricker (and now Showell) were/are so successful. In fact, Showell, although recognised as the world's recognised specialist in the subject, admitted that he is still learning his craft. **PR**



Even Boney M did it - master at half-speed that is.

Thanks for that Mark. I had Old Saxony in mind, where the Saxons came from, whereas Silicon Saxony is in fact centred on Dresden, in the Eastern state of Saxony as you correctly point out. It's all a bit confusing to a simple Brit like me! **NK**

BULLET PROOF

There isn't much humour in hi-fi, it's a dry subject with high prices and a minefield of variables. To minimise the last two my plan is to use the principle of simplicity i.e. the minimum of components etc. and build a vinyl