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Hana Umami Blue moving coil cartridge

Alan Sircom

The Japanese Excel Sound Corporation has made cartridges for other companies for decades. However, since 2016, the brand made its own range of moving coil cartridges under the Hana name. It hit the ground running with some excellent and affordable models. Then it changed up and produced the awesome flagship Umami Red. Today, the Hana Umami Blue joins that flagship. The Umami Blue sits between the ML and Umami Red in price and technology.

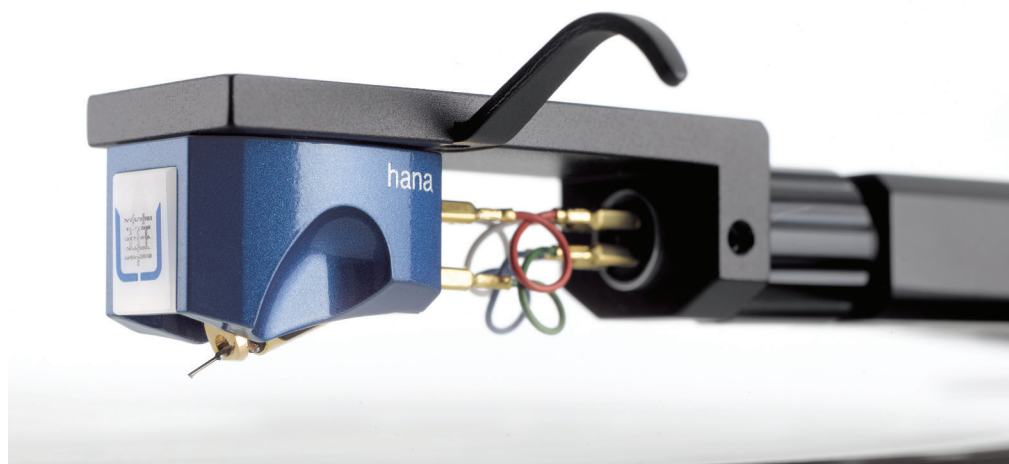
Both Umami models feature a boron cantilever and end in a microline nude diamond stylus. Both have high-purity copper coil wiring, PEEK terminal plates and 24k gold-plated terminals. And both use a permalloy armature, but it's also here where the differences emerge. The Blue uses a cross-shaped armature compared to the square one used in the Red. The Red also has a Samarium Cobalt magnet where the Blue uses AlNiCo (aluminium, nickel, cobalt). Both generators are cryogenically treated.

Red meets Blue

This results in slight changes in coil impedance, output level and compliance. It also weighs 0.3g more, although I defy anyone to notice. Red has a Duralumin body faced with ebony and finished in a red Urushi lacquer. The Blue has Duralumin and POM and a more conventional blue lacquer.

And anywhere the Umami Red can go, the Blue can go too.

I have the Hana Umami Red. It's one of my go-to cartridges. It's a cartridge



that joined the top-end of the high-end. It did so without a price tag akin to paying five quid in cartridge wear for every LP played. It's a giant killer, especially if you like a spot of dynamic range and musical energy. It's not exuberant but is exceptionally good at digging rock out of the groove. It's also a subtle and gentle performer with excellent detail resolution.

The Umami Blue has the same subtlety and grace. It has the same degree of detail and precision and an outstanding sense of imagery, image placement and organic-feeling solidity. You get that sense of musicians performing in a three-dimensional space normally reserved for super-high-end cartridges. Perhaps most significantly, it handles bass lines with depth, power, authority, and charm. Like the Red, the Blue topples giants.

I also like the overall balance of the Hana Umami Blue. The best cartridges are often slightly warm or cool at this level. The Hana Umami Blue is more natural and neutral sounding than its rivals. The usual trade-off for neutral-sounding cartridges here – honest, but a bit veiled – doesn't count here. It's just honest and neutral.

I Got Rhythm

The Umami Red justifies its higher price point thanks to extra dynamism and rhythmic drive. I played 'Are You Alive' from Orbital's *Optical Delusion* LP [Orbital] and the voice is beautifully rendered on both. The Umami Blue plays the ambience, bass, and space around this track exceptionally well. The Red does the same but tightens up the performance and makes it sound like an old-school Techno track.

The Umami cartridges more than justify their places in the pantheon of moving coils. The Hana Umami Blue brings that high-end cartridge 'wow' factor at a stunning, attainable price. It looks great and it sounds great. If it were any more Umami, you'd probably want to eat it! +

Price and contact details

Hana Umami Blue £2,149, \$2,500

Manufacturer Excel Sound

🌐 www.youtek.jp

UK distributor Air Audio Services Ltd.

🌐 www.hana-cartridges.co.uk

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