

Hana SH Mk II

Moving Coil cartridge

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The Hana brand might be the *enfant terrible* of affordable cartridge design, but its first models were launched in 2014. Ten years later, the SL and

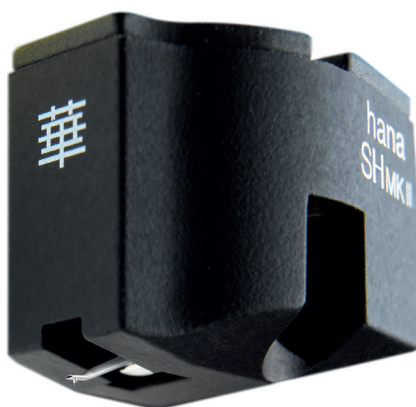
SH moving coils were upgraded to Mk II status. As the name suggests, 'SL' and 'SH' are low- and high-output variations on the same moving coil theme. We looked at the high-output SH Mk II.

These are not simply minor changes to the previous models. Between the original SL and SH launches, Hana produced the higher-end M series and two top Umami models – the Red and Blue. These new cartridges have more in common with these top-end models than the original Hanas.

Tapered cantilever

Central to these upgrades is the inclusion of a tapered aluminium cantilever, which replaced the straight model in the previous version. While the Hana SH Mk II retains the nude diamond Shibata tip, the tapered cantilever is designed to reduce tip mass. Like its predecessor, the Hana SH Mk II is designed to track at around 2g, comes in a nice little black box (albeit the outer packaging is no longer two-tone), and has the same small self-seating stylus guard. I'd prefer something that gets your fingers further from the stylus when fitting it, but it gives the Hana SH Mk II minimalist appeal.

Critical parts, including the Yoke, Pole-pieces, and gold Terminal pins, have been cryogenically treated. As before, the 2mV output, the 47kΩ suggested load impedance and 130Ω



internal impedance of the SH (original and Mk II), make it compatible with the majority of moving magnet phono inputs. In addition, the increased mass of the SH Mk II (rising from 5g to 8.6g due to a brass top plate) enhances its compatibility with suitable tonearms. It now features a broadly curved body, akin to the M series, and is coated in a matte black elastomeric paint, reputed to provide better resonance control than its predecessor.

Sadly, I didn't have an original SH to hand in testing this cartridge, but I have an Umami Red. Having logged some hours with the SH in the past, it was clear this new SH Mk II was a lot closer to the Umami than the original SH. The Umami Red is possibly the most exuberant of the Hana range, and the new SH Mk II is slightly more mellifluous and warmer than the Red, but not so warm that it sounds lush or a little dull.

Everything you played through the SH Mk II sounded really coherent, lithe and legato, with excellent presentation of vocals or guitars front and centre. It made sense of more complex and shouty pieces of music – even those on 'Machine Gun' from Jimi Hendrix *Band of Gypsies* album [Reprise] – giving you the sense of being there in the audience.

Like all the best designs, the Hana SH Mk II leads from the midrange out. Sure, that means the extreme top end isn't as extended and expressive and the bottom end isn't as full or deep as the Umami Red. But in its class, it's a tough one to beat. And any rivals that outperform the Hana at the extremes of treble and bass never seem to match its articulation in the midrange.

There's one more feather in the Hana SH Mk II cap. It's perfectly poised, both in performance and its place in the world. This isn't the cartridge you use in some grandiose tonearm that costs as much as a BMW, but it sounds fantastic in the sort of places where a sub-£1,000 cartridge might venture. Its balance of warmth, good sense of rhythm and flow, and dynamic power make it the perfect partner for something like the Technics SL-1300G, which is also tested this issue. Moving up or down the cartridge price points unseated that sense of effortless balance, making the results more uneven.

The Hana SH Mk II is an excellent addition to the cartridge line-up and goes to the head of the class for cartridges at its price. I really can't think of anything better in its category. +

Price and contact details

Hana SH Mk II: £645, \$850, €749

Manufacturer Excel Sound

🌐 Yutek.jp

UK Distributor

Air Audio Services

🌐 www.airaudio.co.uk

🌐 www.hana-cartridges.co.uk

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