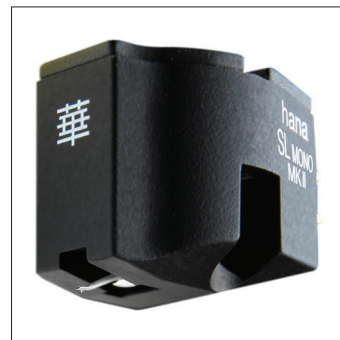




Hana SL Mono Mk II Phono Cartridge

\$850

Every now and then TAS Editor Robert Harley publishes an irate letter from a reader complaining about the space given over to luxury-priced audio gear. Fair enough, but I wonder if any of these correspondents ever bothers to notice how much space Robert regularly, indeed typically gives over to affordable gear, the present Golden Ear recipient a conspicuous case in point. Unusual for a high-end pickup manufacturer, Hana actually trumpets the fact that it eschews rare, esoteric, or exotic materials in favor of conventional, time-proven materials carefully sourced and quality controlled, with scrupulous production methods and meticulous hand-assembly, the result a line of genuinely value-driven products that yet compete in the big leagues. Low output and outfitted with a Shibata stylus, the SL Mono Mk II is a sonic beauty: luscious midrange and lower midrange with exceptional body and dimensionality that bring instruments and voices vibrantly to life; full upper-bass, weighty midbass, and bottom end of real power; and top end with a nice sense of air and a perfect dash of tingle, tickle, and mild but pleasing bite when cymbals and triangles are struck or tambourines shaken. Tracking is excellent, likewise detail and resolution, but the main story here is about musical naturalness that tilts in the direction of yin. This is a pickup that allows for optimal reproduction of your cherished mono LPs, and one I never tire of. (361)



ANDRE JENNINGS



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Retaining the Alnico magnet structure of the original Hana SL, the Hana SL MK II's cartridge yoke, pole-pieces, and terminal pins now get the cryogenic treatment. A new tapered aluminum cantilever provides increased rigidity and reduced mass at its tip where the reliable Shibata stylus is still in use. Housed in a new non-resonant cartridge body bathed with a "soft-feel-black" elastomeric resin paint and a brass damping plate on top that has threaded cartridge mounting holes, the SL MK II is now heavier (8.6 grams vs. 5 grams), while offering better coupling and compatibility with a wider range of tonearms. Lastly, the SL MK II has a new signal generator next to its Alnico magnet that uses a cross coil of

high-purity 30-micron copper, which provides 8 ohms of impedance at the cartridge terminals with an output level spec'd at 0.4mV/1kHz.

The Hana SL MK II is a cartridge with admirable harmonic richness, very good transparency to the recorded music, and excellent soundstage depth when the music contains such information. Extended listening over the evaluation period completely solidified these initial observations. Over time, the cartridge gained refinement without the ups and downs of sound-quality variations that are often attributed to new cartridges before they settle down.

Compared to the original Hana SL, the new SL MK II excels in all the characteristics mentioned above plus it has increased musical clarity. It also portrays the speed, pacing, and tempo of music's

initial transients, including a tone-rich decay that provides greater realism with superior overall dynamics. The MK II's bass is more agile and nimble than that of the original SL, while also extending deeper in low frequencies. This brings the SL MK II a few steps closer to neutral when contrasted with the original Hana SL's warmer musical palette. This cartridge isn't one of those so-called "genre-specific" items; it plays well with all types of music. The cartridge is closer to being chameleon-like and outputs what the LP presents with all the ease, liveliness, vigor, elegance, and emotional moods captured during the recording session. The Hana SL MK II does music justice and is a worthy successor to the original Hana SL. (359)