



## Ortofon Quintet Blue £325

With its simple looks and solid body, will this new Blue MC make its mark against its high output rivals?

### DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
Ortofon Quintet Blue

**ORIGIN**  
Denmark

**TYPE**  
Moving coil cartridge

**WEIGHT**  
9g

**FEATURES**  
• Quoted output: 0.5mV  
• Cantilever: aluminium  
• Stylus: fixed/nude elliptical  
• Tracking weight 2.3g

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**F**rom entry-level bargain moving magnets like the 2M Red to its budget busting £5k Anna MC statement, Ortofon seems to have a cartridge for everyone. Starting at £200, the company's new Quintet MC series challenges the notion that MCs should cost a king's ransom to justify investing in over a good MM design. The five-strong Quintet range comes housed in bodies made of a special acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS) thermoplastic material, chosen for its lightweight and durable properties. Internally each model packs fixed neodymium magnets and each step up the Quintet ladder brings improvements to coil wires, cantilever material and stylus profile.

The Blue improves on the £200 Red by using an elliptical stylus of the nude type, whereby the whole stylus is a solid diamond that's bonded to the cantilever, instead of an elliptical diamond tip bonded to a metal shank that's in turn bonded to the cantilever. The Blue also upgrades the Red's standard copper coil wire with pure 4-nines copper taken from the £500 Bronze model. At the top of the Quintet tree sits the Black variant, which boasts a nude Shibata-shaped stylus affixed to a boron cantilever and Ortofon's Aucurum coil wire (gold plated 6-nines copper). A mono model at the same price point as the Blue completes the range.

At 18mm the Blue has the tallest body of all the models on test, so it's

worth checking that your arm can be adjusted to accommodate its height and VTA. Once at the right height, its rectangular body and threaded mounting holes make it easy to align, although its output pins could do with being more widely spaced to make wiring up a bit easier.

### Sound quality

Being the only low output MC on test could imply that the Ortofon will be the most demanding of its partnering phono stage, to ensure its signal is brought up to MM levels without undue influence.

A few bars into the Little Dragon song shows how unfussy it actually is, as it presents all the detail in the track with real dynamism. It may not be as highly revealing as the Goldring or Sumiko models, or have as much overall warmth as the Grado, but the line it treads between these models makes for a highly engaging compromise. On the Barrett track, lead guitar notes in the instrumental section sound sharp but never harsh, with chords struck firmly before reverberating with natural echo.

Its soundstage is expansive left to right, of a similar size to the one rendered by the Benz and it also possesses a greater talent for bringing instruments within it to life. On *La Traviata* it really plays to how the piece moves from quiet passages to louder sections with great effect, pulling you into the music. Each instrument gets the space to let its

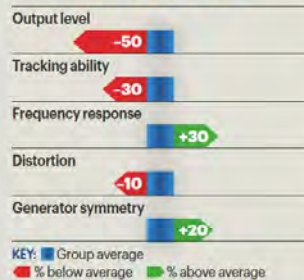
CARTRIDGES £265-£510 **GROUPTEST**

### ON TEST

Ortofon's new Quintet Blue is the only traditional medium-output MC in this month's test, besting its claimed 0.5mV into a 100ohm load at 0.62mV with a superb 0.1dB channel balance and acceptable >25dB separation through the midrange. In practice, its performance is not dissimilar to Ortofon's own Vivo Blue MC. The Quintet Blue's compliance is a symmetrical 16cu in vertical and horizontal planes and the 'nude elliptical' stylus offers secure tracking up to -70um groove modulations, just losing its grip at +18dB (315Hz).

Just like the Vivo Blue, the Quintet Blue's high frequency distortion and response are both lifted with lateral cuts, reaching +1dB through the presence band and mid-treble, suggesting that its soundfield may be emphasised stage front. Equalised distortion (-8dB) is low at <1.5% up to 2kHz, but climbs to a peak of 16% at an inaudible 17kHz. **PM**

### RESULTS AT A GLANCE



notes grow, which it knits together into a cohesive whole, revealing its measured and neutral presentation.

Picking up the pace with the REM tracks shows it is equally capable when letting its hair down. *Turn You Inside-Out* makes a grand entrance that's full of impact and depth, while the guitars are cranked up with raucous energy, without becoming too hard edged when the volume heads north.

Bass is well articulated and evenly presented without being overly emphasised or rolling off too early, making its presence and detail felt without becoming overwhelming on more demanding bass-heavy music • ▶

### Hi-Fi Choice

#### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★  
**VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★  
**BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★  
**FEATURES** ★★★★★

**LIKE:** Open and detailed sound; well built  
**DISLIKE:** Tall body may need tonearms with adjustable height  
**WE SAY:** Fantastic sounding mid-price MC that does everything right

#### OVERALL

★★★★★



**GROUPTEST** CARTRIDGES  
 £265-£510

## Group test verdict

After countless laps on the wheels of steel to take this month's pick-ups to their limits, **Andrew Simpson** pulls into the pit lane with his final verdict

**EVERY CARTRIDGE IN** this group has plenty to offer, and what you go for comes down to system matching, budget and personal taste.

The Nagaoka isn't a bad sounding cartridge by any means and offers a similar performance to last year's Nagaoka, which was our crowned winner. Price hikes over the years means the MP-300 now costs more than twice as much as the MP-150 and it's substantially bettered by cheaper competition.

Next up is the Goldring and if your system needs a shot in the arm this could just be the ticket, but as a long

term solution the Goldring is just too revealing, so partner wisely if your system is already on the bright side.

The third pick-up to head for the car park is the Benz Micro, which offers surprising levels of Swiss precision for under £300. But while I expect it's genteel and open soundstage will appeal to many, it's a bit too well mannered and would benefit from more vivacity and a stronger voice to really make its mark.

The Grado takes third place by offering a sound that's full-bodied with a rich tone and an analogue warmth, making it a joy to listen to.

It's also superb value for money and with its hand-made wooden shell it could have easily passed for the most expensive on test despite being the cheapest. Where it loses out to the Sumiko is in the accuracy and refinement stakes.

The Sumiko's model name may sound more Subaru forecourt than high-end vinyl and its naked design is enough to give vinyl newbies nightmares, but when set up for optimal performance it's a stonkingly honest cartridge for the cash with a level of sophistication and detail that belies its price.



**WINNER**

While on paper the Blue's spec doesn't better its rivals, it's the execution of its engineering that earns it top marks. It offers the most comprehensive and enjoyable performance with all music, showing Ortofon has clearly hit upon another magic formula.



**Make/model** Benz Micro MC Silver



**Goldring** 2500



**Grado** Reference Platinum 1



**Nagaoka** MP-300



**Ortofon** Quintet Blue



**Sumiko** Blue Point Special EVO III

	Benz Micro MC Silver	Goldring 2500	Grado Reference Platinum 1	Nagaoka MP-300	Ortofon Quintet Blue	Sumiko Blue Point Special EVO III
<b>Price</b>	£275	£395	£265	£509	£325	£295
<b>Sound</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Value</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Build</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Features</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Overall</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Key features</b>	Even handed cartridge with a fatigue-free and well mannered nature	Analytical MM that's great with detail, but might be too revealing for some	Wood bodied moving iron bargain with a warm analogue character	Capable all-rounder, but needs to do more with the music for the money	Superb sounding all-rounder that shows analogue at its best. Excellent value	Open-bodied classic that challenges rivals in the musical detail and vitality stakes

### Key features

	Benz Micro MC Silver	Goldring 2500	Grado Reference Platinum 1	Nagaoka MP-300	Ortofon Quintet Blue	Sumiko Blue Point Special EVO III
<b>Type</b>	MC (high output)	MM	MI (high output)	Moving permalloy	MC (low output)	MC (high output)
<b>Quoted output</b>	2mV	6.5mV	4.8mV	3mV	0.5mV	2.5mV
<b>Replaceable styl</b>	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
<b>Weight</b>	5.7g	8.2g	6.5g	8g	9g	8.3g
<b>Cantilever/stylus</b>	Aluminium/elliptical	Permalloy/2 SD fine line	OTL alloy/elliptical	Boron/superfine ellip.	Aluminium/nude ellip.	Aluminium/elliptical