

GROUPTEST



Sumiko Blue Point Special EVO III

The latest incarnation of this classic high output MC boasts a naked design to get to the heart of the music

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Sumiko Blue Point Special EVO III

ORIGIN
US

TYPE
High output moving coil cartridge

WEIGHT
8.3g

FEATURES

- Quoted output: 2.5mV
- Cantilever: aluminium
- Stylus: fixed/elliptical
- Tracking weight: 2g

SUPPLIED BY
Analogue Seduction

TELEPHONE
01733 350878

WEBSITE
analogueseduction.net; sumikoaudio.net

Californian cartridge maker Sumiko acts as both importer and distributor for some seriously high-end brands including Sonus faber and Audio Research, as well as selling its own range of pick-ups. The EVO III sits atop the company's entry-level Oyster range, with its blue finish distinguishing it from the equally stripped back £595 hand-calibrated Blackbird model that's the starting point in the Reference series. To keep prices down, the BPS gets an aluminium cantilever with a special coating in place of the Blackbird's boron variant.

What clearly sets it apart from every other pick-up on test is its obvious lack of a protective body, leaving its generator exposed to the outside world. Sumiko's reasoning being that the best way to prevent resonance from a cartridge's outer shell entering the replay chain is to do away with the outer shell altogether, an approach that's also adopted by many top-flight cartridges with four-figure price tags.

Looking at the Sumiko's intricate working parts up close reveals a very high standard of craftsmanship, although with its exposed internals seemingly vulnerable to clumsy fingers, you might expect that an iron nerve and expert steady hand are essential to getting it safely set up.

You do need to take extra care, of course, but thanks to its large top and rear plate, you have plenty of surfaces to grip. And while its pre-threaded mounting holes and widely spaced cartridge pins bring some relief, achieving spot on alignment is always going to be a bit of a challenge given the lack of an outer shell to align it by.

Sound quality

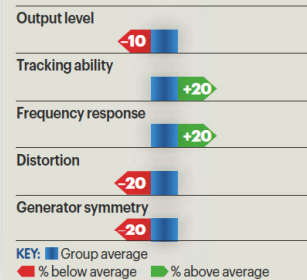
A quick lap of my test music reveals that the Sumiko's tonal balance is more sensitive than most to VTA. With the VPI arm wand parallel to the LP's surface, the treble sounds overly bright, with emphasised sibilance on the REM material that makes the cymbals sound 'spitty'. Dropping the arm pillar so that the arm wand slopes slightly upwards towards the headshell (to make the cantilever's angle of ascent not as steep) pays dividends in calming the top end down. It's still explicitly detailed, meaning I'm able to hear REM at their aggressive best, with guitar riffs ripping free from the soundstage and fired at me centre stage, but the excessive brightness is gone, replaced by a live experience-like energy that's hard to ignore.

In many respects the Sumiko is similar to the Goldring with lightning fast transients, but at the extremes it's less clinical in the midrange and treble and more expressive.

ON TEST

This 'naked' high output MC is packed full of energy and character. Output is healthy for the breed at 2.5mV (re. 5cm/sec) into a standard 47kohm load and while compliance is, as Sumiko specifies, a little on the low side at 15cu and best partnered with medium/heavyweight arms, it still tracks like a dream sailing through the 80um band and incurring just 1.1% THD at +18dB. Distortion looks to be on the high side at 17/15% (L/R) at 10kHz, but this is as much a reflection of the EVO III's exceptional bandwidth (other pick-ups roll-off earlier and so cannot generate the ultrasonic harmonics). Even when well run-in, the EVO III has a powerful presence and treble response (+1dB from 3-10kHz and up to +3dB/20kHz and beyond) that will be noticeable with strong central rather than peripheral stereo images. You can play with the arm pillar height to tweak the elliptical stylus' VTA and ameliorate any excess sizzle! **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



While Barrett's vocal overdubs are easy to distinguish, it's the lilt of his voice and its unique nuances that the BPS turns its attention to, revealing the heart of his performance.

Similarly with the Little Dragon track, the subtleties in the treble sound more enchanting here than with the other five pick-ups.

At the other end of the scale, the bass doesn't quite have the depth or warmth of the Grado or Nagaoka, but still packs a decent thump that's well defined. Imaging is also a key string to its bow, which is made clear by how it builds a tangible orchestral picture during *La Traviata* of impressive scale and depth. ▶

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

LIKE: Detailed and vibrant sound; superb quality engineering

DISLIKE: Open body is not for the heavy handed; very sensitive to VTA

WE SAY: Classic high output MC that's bristling with energy, making it superb value

OVERALL

★★★★★

GROUPTEST

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	Goldring	Grado	Nagaoka	Ortofon	Sumiko
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
	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	Goldring	Grado	Nagaoka	Ortofon	Sumiko
Type	MC (high output)	MM	MI (high output)	Moving permalloy	MC (low output)	MC (high output)
Quoted output	2mV	6.5mV	4.8mV	3mV	0.5mV	2.5mV
Replaceable styl	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Weight	5.7g	8.2g	6.5g	8g	9g	8.3g
Cantilever/stylus	Aluminium/elliptical	Permalloy/2 SD fine line	OTL alloy/elliptical	Boron/superfine ellip.	Aluminium/nude ellip.	Aluminium/elliptical