

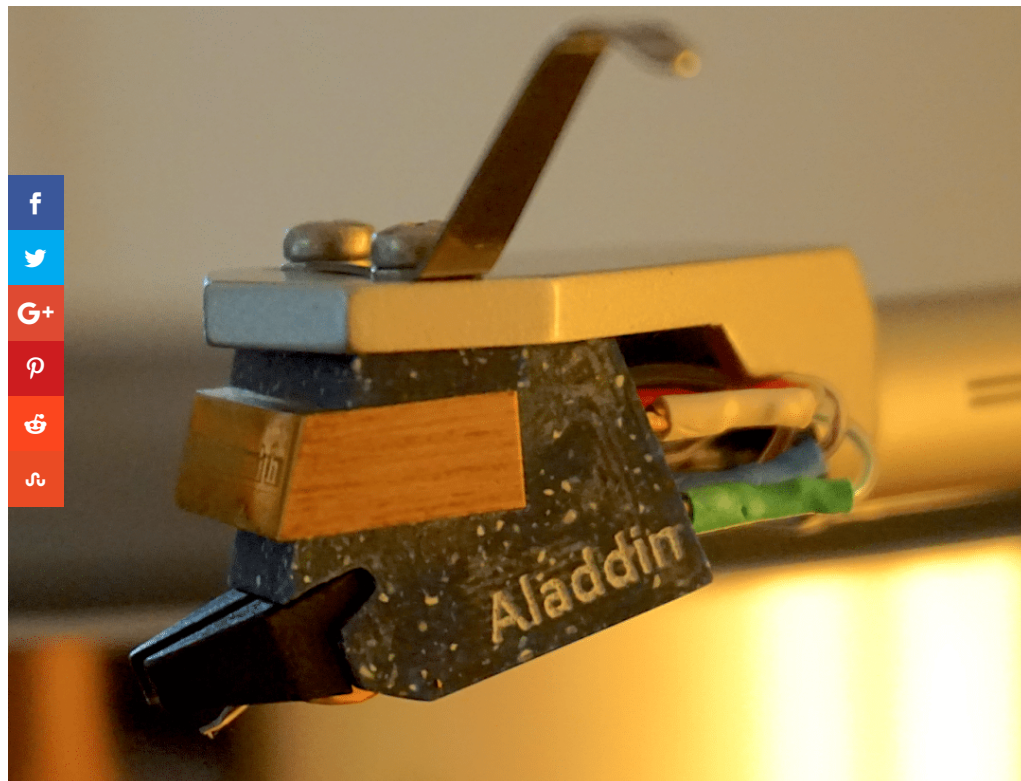
Paul Rigby

(The Audiophile Man)

CARTRIDGE & ARM REVIEW

ALADDIN CARTRIDGE FROM ORIGIN LIVE

Posted on 17th September 2018



Looking for a sonic genie? Give this moving iron a quick rub as Paul Rigby reviews Origin Live's Aladdin

Most vinyl fans are familiar with moving magnet and moving coil cartridges but there's more to hi-fi life than those two stalwarts. The moving iron configuration lies somewhere in between those two classic design fixtures.

This example, a custom-made variant of a Soundsmith design produced for Origin Live, is one of them.

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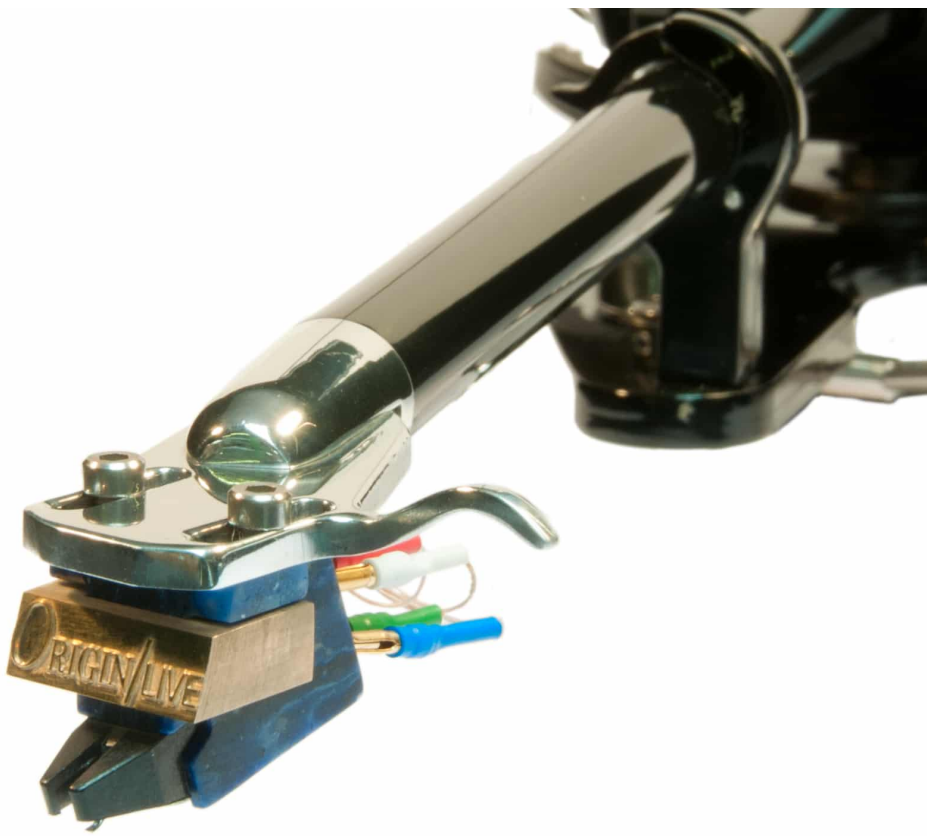
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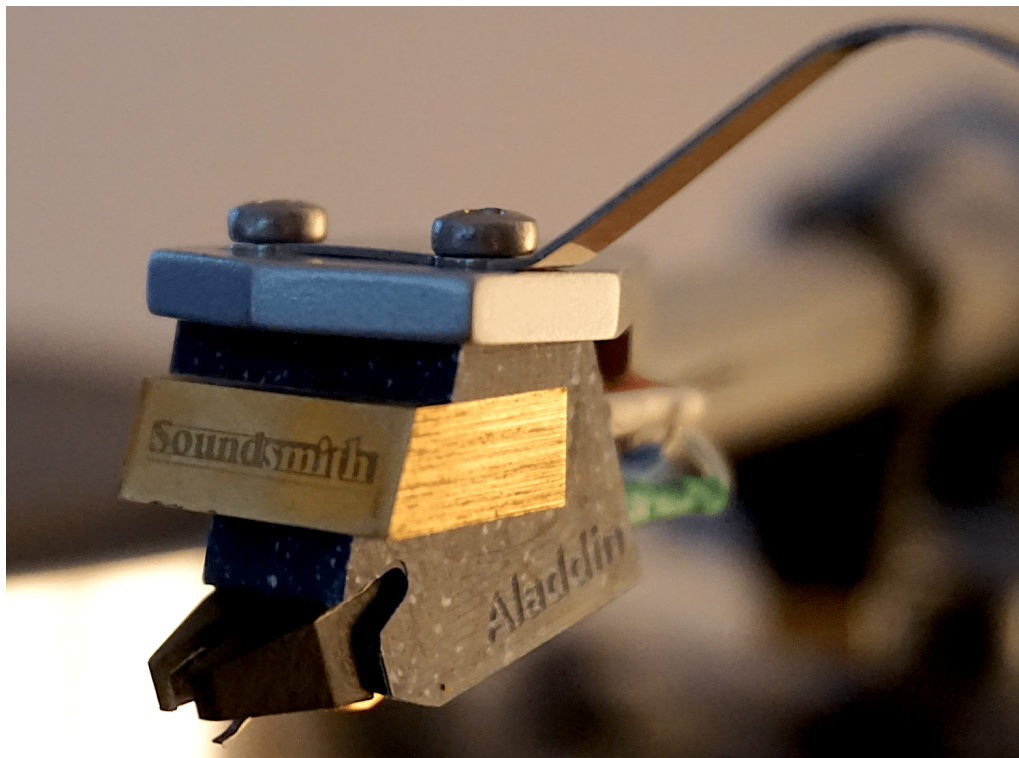
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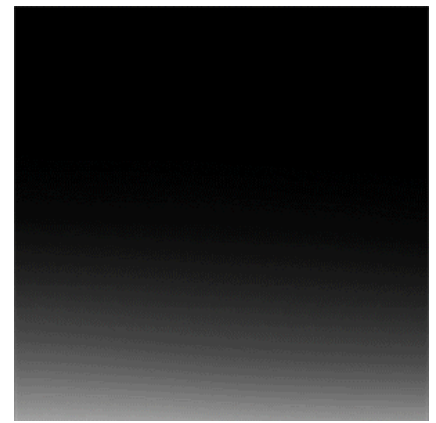
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Dominated by a composite chassis, this 10.27g cartridge is a derivative of the Soundsmith Carmen but adds a rather nifty energy management system found in more expensive Soundsmith cartridges.



Moving iron cartridges are intriguing things. The magnet inside stays still, as does the coil that sits alongside. What moves is the iron bit, fixed to the cantilever. This induces tiny voltages within the coils. The result? Firstly, the output is pretty high so you'd use this cartridge as you would a moving magnet (i.e. 47k Ohms load resistance and 100pF load capacitance).



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The nude elliptical stylus on an aluminium cantilever is reported to be a pretty good tracker too. I was also intrigued to see that the cartridge tracks at just 1.4g.

Two things of note during the installation. Firstly, the cartridge body features a screw thread – hurrah! Hence, there's no need for fiddly screw nuts to come into play. Secondly, be aware that the cartridge pins run at a slight downward angle. You have to slightly alter how you attach the tonearm wires to the rear of the cart because of this. 'In and up', instead of plain and simple 'push on'. I didn't see this initially and wondered why my tonearm wires kept falling off.

First off, I decided to test the cartridge with a moving magnet, a slightly cheaper Goldring that is also a bit of a super-charged MM in approach. Just to see what similarities, if any, can be drawn from the MM technology.

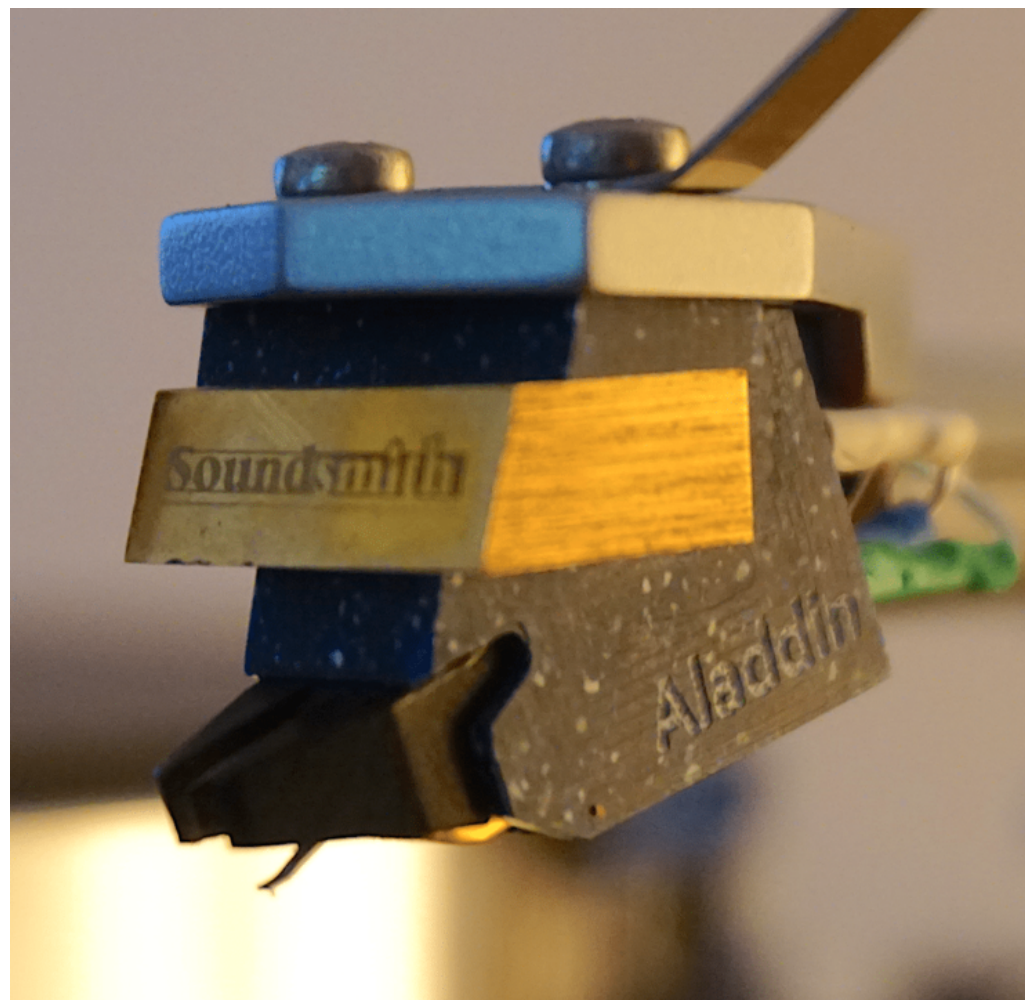
Then I decided to test the Aladdin with a more expensive moving coil, just to see how far the Aladdin could be pushed.

SOUND QUALITY

I began with the Goldring MM cartridge and a copy of Joe Jackson's high energy jazz LP, *Jumpin' Jive* and the track, *Jumpin' with Symphony Sid*. This track is fast paced but packed with organic jazz instruments.

I have heard commentators declare that the Aladdin has 'smooth mids'. On occasion, this pronouncement has been used as if to describe a disability. As if the mids were lacking in detail and mushy too boot. As such, these voices have the wrong end of the stick. The 'smooth' nature of the mids has the effect of softening the midrange detail, yes, but that's the clue to up the gain because, in fact, the cartridge is busy lowering noise. I did this very thing, increasing my pre-amp gain by five clicks. Once done, the Aladdin entered into a new sonic phase.





The effect of this gain increase was to enhance the bass, giving it a greater and more powerful role in the mix, spreading over the lower areas of the soundstage and offering a significant foundation to the song while adding a sense of force from the sax. That is, force from extra breath behind the sax during crescendos, giving that instrument a smooth (yes) but also organic and naturalistic manner.

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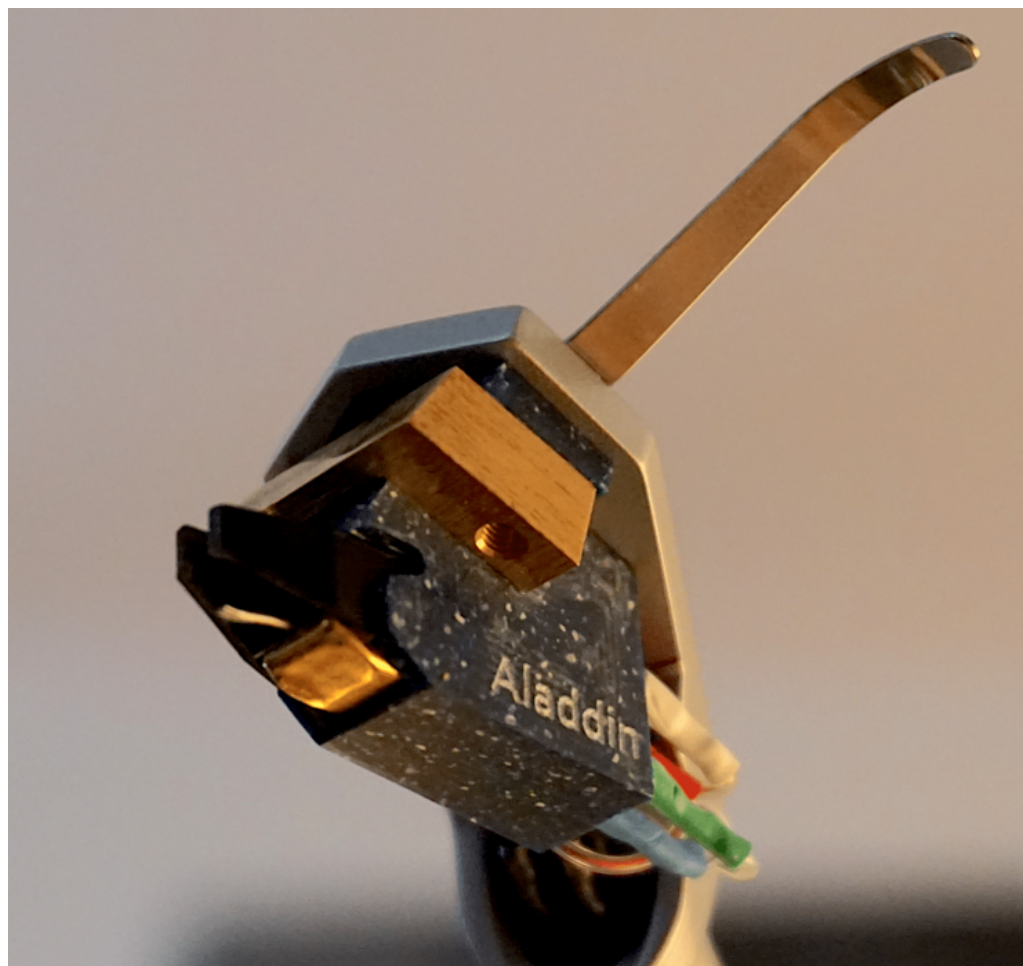
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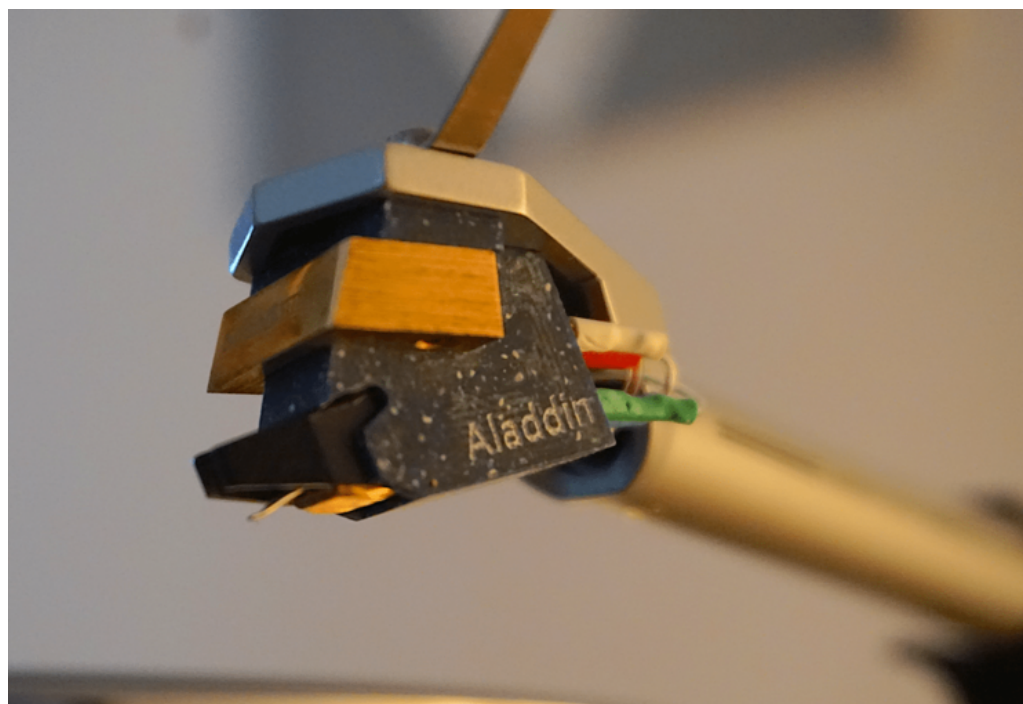
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Treble from the cymbals never lost the effective transient strike but did gain a sense of maturity. That is, the cymbal hits were not something that merely made a noise but reacted like a large piece of metal. The cymbal strike talked a more complex story via the Aladdin. This sense of being 'grown up', when compared to the moving magnet design, continued during the later vocal section. Both emotion and texture during the delivery was heard here but the most important aspect of the vocal performance was the ease and naturalistic flow. There was no apparent effort being made, which gave the impression that the singer was enjoying himself. The song was sung, in fact, with a smile.



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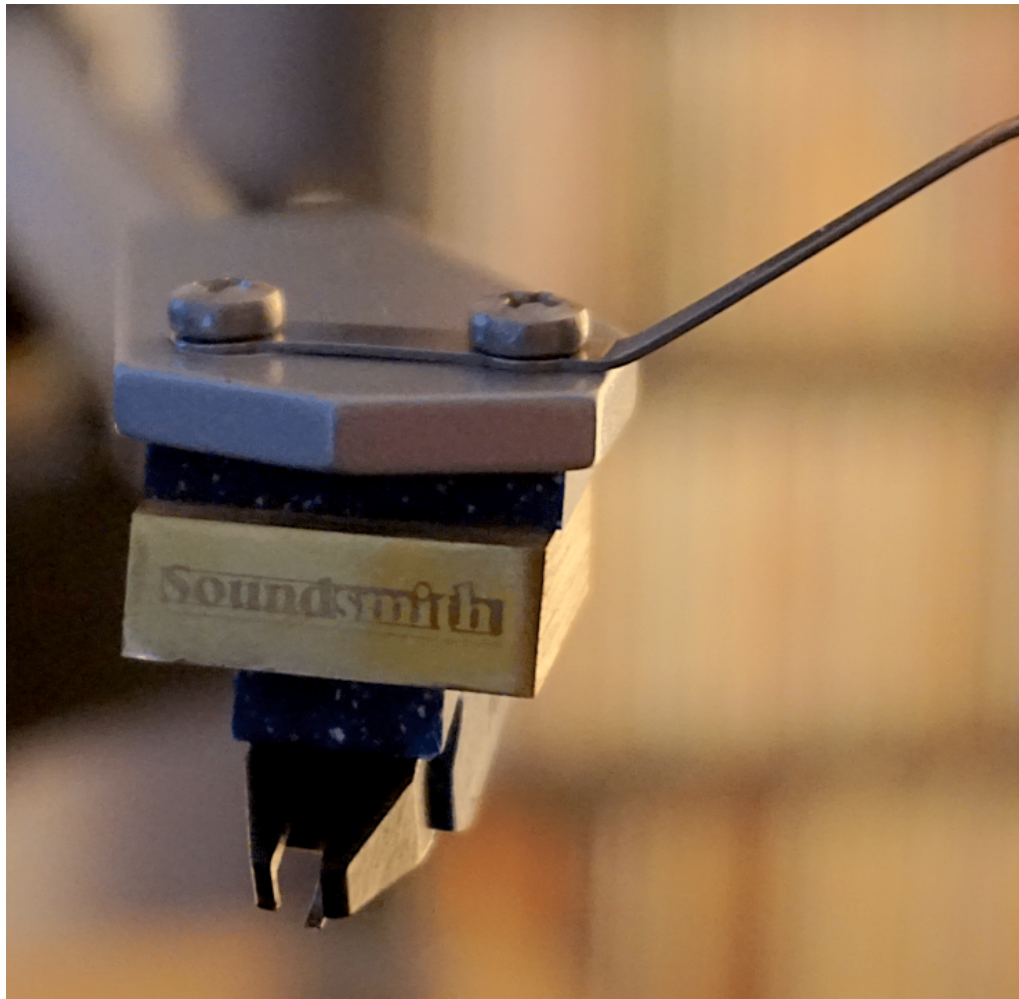


The Funk Firm



Why, Funk (who else?)

I then pushed the MC One moving coil into the picture and played that The Beatles parody LP, the self-titled album from The Rutles and the stone cold classic, Cheese and Onions.



Compared to the moving coil, there might be a slight restriction in dynamic reach from the Aladdin and possibly a touch less precision in the upper mids, especially around the introductory piano, relating to that but there is also so much right with the Aladdin that the cartridge still came disturbingly close to the £1k moving coil design. The sheer insight of the midrange and the associated clarity was a real highlight, here. The percussion detail was excellent, especially as it blended well with the instrumental separation. This air and space around the midrange did wonderful things to the violins and cellos during the mid to later part of the song, allowing the ear to better hear bow strokes over the strings while the normally rather shy electric guitar was easily 'visible' here.

CONCLUSION

In short? A triumph! For the price, the Aladdin performs brilliantly, offering the ear detail and lucidity but doing so with a craft that can be quite stunning. Even when you remove the price as a factor the Aladdin is a real threat to the competition, even to more expensive moving coil designs. And all of this connected to a moving magnet phono amp? Make sure that phono amp is a top quality design, don't skimp here if you want to see the Aladdin perform. Rub the Aladdin's ego by doing that and the sonic treasure will indeed be yours.

ORIGIN LIVE ALADDIN CARTRIDGE

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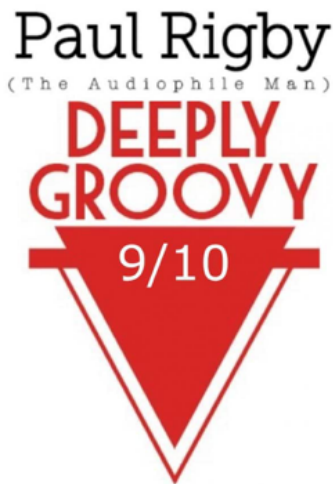
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BAD: nothing

RATING: 9



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REFERENCE

Avid Acutus turntable

SME IV tonearm

[Van den Hul MC One Special cartridge](#)

Goldring 1042 cartridge

Icon PS3 phono amplifier

Aesthetix Calypso pre-amp

Icon Audio MB845 Mk.II monoblock amplifiers

Quad ESL-57 speakers with One Thing upgrade

[Vertex AQ, Gekko, Black Rhodium & Tellurium Q cable](#)

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ORIGIN LIVE

4 Comments



By PAUL RIGBY



PAUL RIGBY

I've been a journalist and editor for 30 years and still retain my good humour. Who'd have thought? I have worked within a range of industries, writing for hundreds of national magazines and newspapers in the UK, Europe and the USA covering: aviation, music, computer technology, computer gaming, hi-fi, mobile technology, home automation, lady's lifestyle, plastic model making, antiques and more. I currently write for national magazines in the subjects of business, music, hi-fi and general technology.

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4 COMMENTS



ANDY DAVISON

18th September 2018 at 11:56 am

Edit Reply

Good to see you are giving the moving iron cartridge the exposure it so deserves, in comparison to moving coils my findings are the apparent loss of detail is not actually a loss, it's the absence of an artefact that is a moving coil trait. One slight issue is the line -"This produces a magnetic field from the coils. " – actually it disturbs the magnetic field and induces a current flow in the coils.



PAUL RIGBY

18th September 2018 at 1:05 pm

Edit Reply

Thanks for your comments, Andy. I hope to feature more Moving Irons in the future. Thanks for your techie clarification too. I'll tweak my text.



JACQUES

23rd September 2018 at 1:40 pm

Edit

Reply

Hi Paul,

Having had an SMMC20EN for some time on a Beogram 4000 turntable—the original design then—I know the sound well. It does exactly what you say, and I must say that midrange is indeed perfectly flat, not at all recessed. Treble is not dull at all, quite unlike the B&O carts of yore.

A thoroughly enjoyable listen, almost CD like.



PAUL RIGBY

23rd September 2018 at 1:45 pm

Edit

Reply

Thanks for your insight and considered thoughts Jacques.

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