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EAT Yosegi (£1550)

EAT's first cartridge, a pretty moving coil design, is offered as an option with the recently-reviewed E-Flat turntable – but it is a viable contender on its own?

Review: **Ken Kessler** Lab: **Paul Miller**

A few lessons learned: EAT's Yosegi cartridge arrived hot on the heels of two reviews that amplified and then clarified the experience. The first review was of EAT's E-Flat turntable [HFN Jan '12], with which this MC is offered as an option. It was held back from that review to ensure that the E-Flat was judged on its own merits, with no restriction as to cartridge choice, while also providing the same independence for the Yosegi itself.

As for the second review that helped to put this in the correct context, it was that of the Air Tight PC-3 MC cartridge, at almost exactly twice the price [HFN Feb '12]. One of the main points of that review was to determine if such cartridges were worth elevated prices, while asking if the price hierarchies reflected the values. The law of diminishing returns makes value-for-money a moot point above a certain price level; the Yosegi has the benefit of costing 'only' £1550.

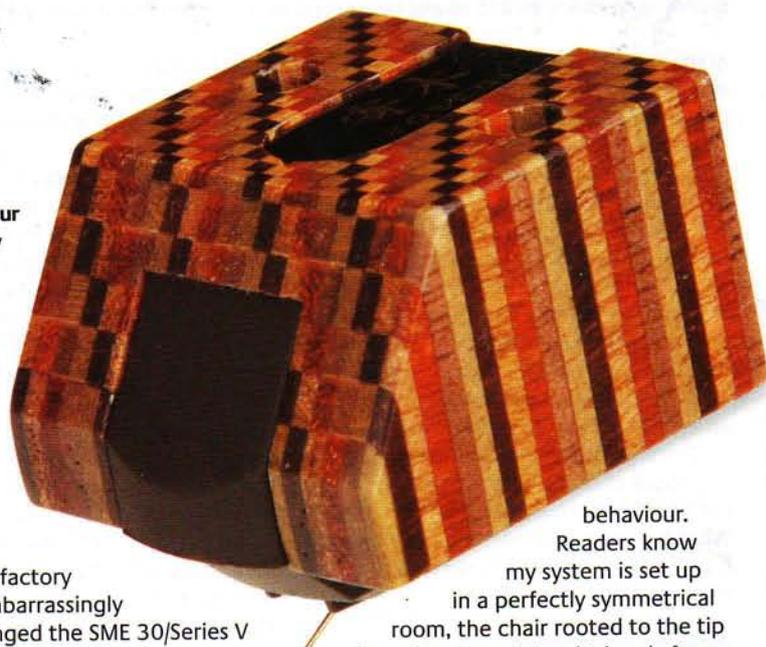
Having confirmed that it is based on an Audio-Technica design, and probably one likely to cost a lot less than £1550, it was mildly reassuring to learn that the Yosegi is more than an A-T rebodied with lavish woodwork. According to EAT, the Yosegi is retuned into a unique design, not offered to others using A-T 'motors'. (It is worth noting that this practice, of smaller brands using an established MC as the basis for another, is identical to watch companies that buy in movements: a practical rather than an enterprising solution.)

RIGHT: Like fine furniture of the Art Deco or Arts and Crafts movements, intricate woodwork imparts an air of elegance and glamour to something so tiny

Aside from the lavish bodywork, little about the Yosegi inspires 'oohs' or 'aahs'. For some, such normalcy can be reassuring, making it easy to install and match. Nothing about its factory specs – almost embarrassingly common – challenged the SME 30/Series V front-end, nor the Audio Research PH5 or Air Tight's phono stages: 0.4mV output voltage, internal impedance of 12ohms, medium compliance and a tracking force range of 1.8g-2.2g. At exactly 5.6g, less than half that of the Air Tight PC-3, the Yosegi should suit a wide choice of arms.

FAZED BY SUNDAZED

For those scratching their heads at my continued use of mono, it was a good thing I listened to a bunch of Sundazed single-channel LPs: the balance shifted enough to one side to suggest less-than-perfect



behaviour. Readers know my system is set up in a perfectly symmetrical room, the chair rooted to the tip of an almost equilateral triangle [see HFN Mar '11]. Thus, any off-centre mono is vividly and painfully obvious.

For those who prefer visual clues, I had to dial in balance adjustment two 'notches' to the right on my Audio Research Ref 5's scale, which probably corresponds to 2dB. The sound snapped into centre position. Should you ask, the anti-skate was not applied incorrectly, nor was the LP at fault. This is doubtless a quality control issue rather than an inherent design matter.

Once that was addressed, I reverted to stereo, detecting a slight lack of desirable sizzle in Stevie Wonder's *Hotter Than July*, especially after the lively performance of the Air Tight. It wasn't sound to be damned with the epithet 'dull', but neither would it ever excite sibilance. For those with sharp-sounding systems, it might even be a boon: it's independent of cartridge loading, the most neutral being 100ohms.

Vocals, on the other hand, were deliriously authentic, especially deep male voices such as Wilson Pickett's, heard to good effect on 'Mustang Sally'. This may have been emphasised by the Yosegi's slightly reticent treble, but it certainly wasn't so extreme as to suggest that a low

THOSE CLEVER JAPANESE

Koetsu started it with the use of *urushi* lacquer. Ever since, it's been *de rigueur* to find an obscure art form to dress up cartridges emanating from Japan. The results can be exquisite. *Yosegi-zaiku* parquetry, from the Edo Period, uses various woods to define colours, enhanced by grain structure and texture. The technique is often used for 'secret boxes', as seen in the recent HSBC ad, where a grandfather shows his grand-daughter how to save her coins and then retrieve them. The technique is used for the box that houses the Yosegi. I cannot attest to any sonic properties, but the colours certainly make the Yosegi visually arresting. If you fancy a go, some of the woods include walnut for purple, cedar for red and mulberry for yellow. Cut into tiny rods, glue together to form patterns, add a glaze and you can rebody the MC of your choice. Now where's that Decca...

EAT YOSEGI (£1550)

Forced to hazard a guess, I'd say the Yosegi was a variant of Audio-Technica's AT-OC9 III with the latter's aluminium mounting block replaced by a sleeve of traditional Japanese parquetry. Output levels are nearly identical at 400µV (re. 5cm/sec) although our Yosegi suffered a potentially audible 1.5dB channel imbalance in favour of the left. In terms of output, crosstalk and tracking, the right channel was the weaker here although it very nearly tracked the 80µm test groove while clearing the +15dB/300Hz selection with just 0.3% distortion on both left and right channels. Otherwise, the L/R channels were unusually well-matched, distortion versus frequency following exactly the same trend (a gentle increase from 0.5 to 9% with lateral modulations and a 1 to 4% increase with vertical modulations). In the context of stereo this simply means that low frequency distortion will be highest at the periphery of the soundstage, presence/vocal distortion more obvious in the centre [see Graph 2, below].

Much the same trend was observed with the sum and difference frequency response trends [see Graph 1] which have the same 'shape' as the A-T but with a more obviously rolled-off high treble. Once again, in-phase vocals will have greater prominence than instruments to the left or right of the stage. Compliance shows the familiar A-T asymmetry but is 'stiffer' here – useful with higher effective mass tonearms with its lighter 5.5g cartridge bodyweight. Readers may view a comprehensive QC Suite test report for EAT's Yosegi by navigating to www.hifinews.com and clicking on the red 'Download' button. PM

pass filter was in play – the sound was best described, from LP to LP, as 'rich' rather than 'analytical'.

HEART-STOPPING

Where the Yosegi excelled was in stage depth, enhancing the 3D nature of the soundstage and of studio-generated stereo in general, though it was not as wide as the stage laid out by the best Denons. Image positioning sounded natural and unforced, with centrally-located vocalists just in front of the speaker line, implying a faintly forward sound, but not so aggressive as to be a deal-breaker.

With the husky vocals of mid-period Dusty Springfield, the Yosegi respected the textures and captured the signature breathing that made this singer so downright sexy. Backed by the best R&B musicians on

earth, *Dusty In Memphis* is a classic on every level [see p79] and the Yosegi flowed with its Deep South funk rhythms. The

brass section in 'Son Of A Preacher Man' floated just off-centre, the heart-stopping female chorus stage-left, sounding as angelic as if one awoke in a gospel-fed congregation.

It's the little stuff that does it: handclaps were crisp, never sounding like the proverbial bowl of Kellogg's Rice Krispies. The cheesy organ – a Farfisa? – in the background of the Blues Magoos' '(We Ain't Got) Nothin' Yet' rode above the snappy bass playing, nasal



ABOVE: Within beats a heart from Audio-Technica; underside is pretty too
BELOW LEFT: Parallel sides and good view of stylus makes for easy set-up

vocals sprawled across the room. It managed to sound as tacky as an AM radio hit should, even when played through a system that sniffily prefers purist perfection. Aaah, the joys of punky, sassy garage rock...

Subtlety will out, however, when assessing the rarefied components of high-end audio. The mournful

harmonica of the Beau Brummels' 'Laugh.Laugh' was emphasised as a stark harbinger of heartbreak-turned-to-

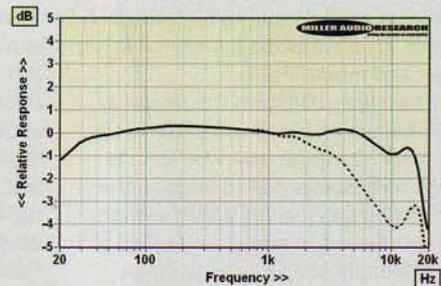
'The track managed to sound as tacky as an AM radio hit should'

bitterness. This mid-1960s Top 40 classic, recorded in blissfully wide stereo, was portrayed with delicacy and elegance, though some might argue it seemed a touch muted. It's of the era in recording that often suggests a bottom octave had been chopped off as part of some bizarre studio ritual, conceived to add punch to 45rpm singles. ☺

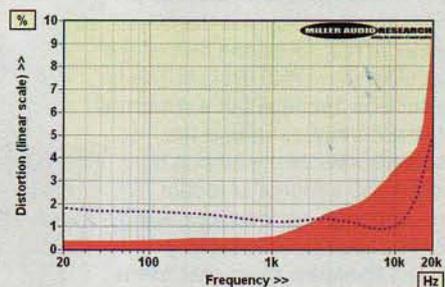
HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

There is an upside to the so-so showing of the Yosegi cartridge. By reviewing the E-Flat turntable on its own terms, with other cartridges, we heard it at its full potential, and it proved spectacular. That deck deserves, for not much more outlay, the entry-level Koetsu Black. Though Yosegi just may be the prettiest cartridge in the market, it shows that beauty is, indeed, skin-deep. Or in this case, veneer-deep.

Sound Quality: 74%



ABOVE: Frequency response curves (–8dB re. 5cm/sec) lateral (L+R, solid) versus vertical (L–R, dashed)



ABOVE: Lateral (L+R, solid) and vertical (L–R, dashed) tracing and generator distortion (2nd-4th harmonics) vs. frequency from 50Hz-20kHz (–8dB re. 5cm/sec)

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Generator type/weight	Moving coil / 5.5g
Recommended tracking force	1.8-2.2mN (2.0mN)
Sensitivity/balance (re. 5cm/sec)	401µV / 1.47dB
Compliance (vertical/lateral)	12cu / 26cu
Vertical tracking angle	24 degrees
L/R Tracking ability	>80µm / 75µm
L/R Distortion (–8dB, 20Hz-20kHz)	0.43-9.9% / 0.35-9.1%
L/R Frequency resp. (20Hz-20kHz)	+0.3 to –4.2dB / +0.3 to –1.9dB
Stereo separation (1kHz / 20kHz)	30dB / 22dB