

EAT Jo No 5 MC Cartridge

by Alan Sircom



The phono cartridge is perhaps the nearest thing audio gets to fine jewellery. And yes, I include cables in that. You see, although cables can sometimes be glitzy, beautifully presented, and extraordinarily expensive, it's the cartridge that has a diamond on the end, and many companies will try everything in their power to remind you of that. Which might not be the only reason why really top-notch cartridges come wrapped in rare and highly polished woods or stones (they also make a difference in sonic terms), but it helps. Would Koetsu be the legend were it not packaged in an exquisite sandalwood box and had a body that looks like a Christmas present? While we sometimes down-play this ("just the music, ma'am"), now and again it's good to bask in a bit of 'luxe'.

The EAT Jo No 5 is at the affordable end of 'luxe' but its distinctive body shape and colour make it one of the more immediately identifiable products out there. It has what the Italians call *sprezzatura* – seemingly effortless style. OK, so granted it's bubble-gum green *sprezzatura*, but it still works. This is no shrinking violet of a cartridge and if you put it on an arm, there will be comments.

Fortunately, there's a handy back-story explaining the Jo No 5. If you can get past the colour, look at the shape. Then look at the shape of the stylus guard. These are complex 3D forms that until recently could only be made by hand at great cost. The clue is in the term '3D', as the bodyshell is 3D printed. If we are being technical about such things, it's a sintered aluminium process, which means the body is grown ▶

“The shape isn’t just for show; it’s usefully and inherently non-resonant in construction, especially set against the slab-sided competition.”

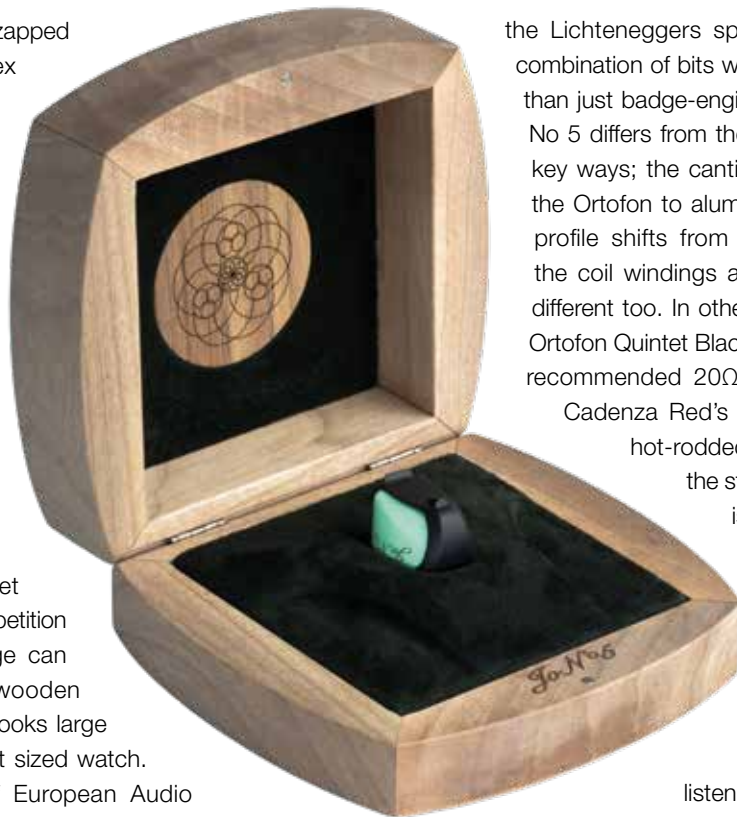
► out of aluminium powder zapped with a laser in a complex pattern. OK, so there’s ‘complex’ and ‘complex’ (I’ve seen sintered aluminium works that look like MC Escher’s impossible drawings), but this cartridge uses a surprisingly complex shape that would have been painfully expensive a few years ago.

The shape isn’t just for show; it’s usefully and inherently non-resonant in construction, especially set against the slab-sided competition at the price. The cartridge can be supplied in a fine wooden presentation case, which looks large enough to house a decent sized watch.

Jozefina Lichtenegger of European Audio Team even crafted a strictly limited edition 24-ct gold locket for the cartridge, although this is more about bragging rights than a real-world way of moving a cartridge from arm to arm. Unless you go for the gold locket option, the EAT Jo No 5 moving coil cartridge costs very slightly less than £1,000.

A grand for a custom cartridge that isn’t from one of the bigger names in cartridge making is all but unheard of, so how did Jozefina do it? Although she makes a lot of turntables, arms, phono stages, and has a good line in high-grade valves, to date the Jo No 5 is the company’s second moving coil design. The cost of the equipment needed to make such products requires a certain size of company (or single-minded dedication to cartridges alone that only obsessive Japanese brands can muster... but even those guys charge a lot for each cartridge they lovingly produce).

The secret is the cartridge is heavily based upon an Ortofon design, specifically the Quintet range, and comes up somewhere between the Quintet Black and Bronze;



the Lichteneggars spent time making sure the combination of bits went into the Jo No 5, rather than just badge-engineering an Ortofon. The Jo No 5 differs from the Quintet models in several key ways; the cantilever moves from Boron in the Ortofon to aluminium in the Jo. The stylus profile shifts from Shibata to Fine Line and the coil windings and suspension are slightly different too. In other words, it’s kind of like an Ortofon Quintet Black (similar 0.3mV output and recommended 20Ω loading) with an Ortofon

Cadenza Red’s stylus and cantilever. This hot-rodged Ortofon is then placed in the standard Quintet body, which is then additionally shelled in the minty-greenness of the EAT outer shell.

The changes made to the Ortofon base are all as a result of listening tests, but naturally these would be listening tests in EAT’s own arms and turntables. EAT selects and rejects cartridges that don’t make the grade. I didn’t use the EAT Jo No 5 with one of EAT’s arms; I used it in a Kuzma 4point9 tonearm on a Kuzma Stabi SD (with the new thicker platter) and on a similarly 3D printed JMW tonearm on a VPI Prime. Of the two, the Kuzma was a better match (I suspect the comparatively lower compliance of the EAT worked in this combination’s favour).

The EAT’s Ortofon backbone makes it easy to match to most phono stages with a relatively straightforward ‘MC’ selector button, but the better the accuracy of the cartridge matching, the better the performance. I used it with the phono stage of the Devlalet Expert Pro 140, but also tried it through a yet-to-be-upgraded RCM Audio TheRIAA and in both cases it lived up to the measured statistics, but more importantly shone like a little musical gem.

I have to make a bit of a confession; although there’s something wonderful about really good high-end cartridges, there’s a part of me that remains rightly paranoid about them. ►

“The Jo No 5 will bring a lump to your throat and send a shiver down your spine when Billie sings ‘I’m a Fool to Want You.’”

- ▶ I’ve trashed a few in my time (sorry Benz-Micro... my Gullwing SLR was a remarkable cartridge, but not entirely cat-proof), and I am more in my comfort zone when playing a cartridge that doesn’t cost as much as nice car. The problem is you have to compromise in sonic terms. And that’s why the Jo No 5 is so damn good; the compromises you need to make do not seem so harsh or as obvious as with many cartridges in this price point. OK, you can’t pretend it’s a top-of-the-line Koetsu (the bright green body is a bit of a giveaway), but it does a pretty good job at convincing you it is not just another £1,000 cartridge.

Curiously, the Jo No 5 sounds very un-Ortofon in its tonality, and in some respects closer to those big-hitters like Koetsu and Kiseki. It’s got the same sense of energy and vibrance, the same richness and depth to the sound, and even some of the ‘shimmer’ of the very best. I pulled out my usual LP suspects – Beck’s *Sea Change* [Mobile Fidelity], the overture to *The Pirates of Penzance* [Decca SXL], even some of the audiophile standards like *We Get Requests* by the Oscar Peterson Trio [Verve] and realised I was not putting a single word to paper. I was just sitting there enjoying the music... except when I started playing *Lady in Satin* [Columbia]. This was Billie Holliday’s penultimate album, and the drink and drugs really had her in thrall. You can hear all that, and it is one of the most powerful recordings of the human voice as a result. On the Jo No 5, that power is both mesmerising and punishing to hear. It’s like you can hear her physically disintegrating with each passing moment. That’s a property that doesn’t normally happen at this level of cartridge (she just sounds drunk and that’s difficult enough, but on a really good vinyl replay system it’s so very much more poignant). I don’t use this as a regular test disc in the same way as I wouldn’t use an album of people sobbing to evaluate dynamic range; when it works, it’s almost too emotive and painful to hear. The Jo No 5 will bring a lump to your throat and a shiver down your spine when Billie sings ‘I’m a Fool to Want You’.

That alone would be enough to recommend the Jo No 5, but as I played a wide variety of pieces of music, the same shimmering, emotive qualities kept coming to the fore. Albums

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Low-output moving-coil cartridge

Output Level: 0.3mV (3.54cm/1kHz)

Internal Impedance: 6 Ohms

Compliance: 15µm/nM

Mass: 15g

Stylus Profile: Nude Fine Line

Tracking Force range: 2.1–2.5g

Price: £999

Manufactured by: EAT

URL: europeanaudioteam.com

Distributed by: Absolute Sounds

URL: absolutesounds.com

Tel: +44(0)20 8971 3909

you know backwards like Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony [Klieber, DG] take on an air of excitement like you are hearing them anew. Rock has a driving edge, even managing to cut through the compression on early Led Zep albums [Atlantic] to get to the energy of the performance. But then it’s back to the tough stuff, the music that puts you through the emotional wringer, like *Post To Wire* by Richmond Fontaine [El Cortez]. I sat through all sixteen tracks of almost optimistic music from this normally murder-ballad oriented band. Then I played it again from beginning to end. Just one word on the notepad – goddamn!

If you listen closely, it’s not hard to find the limitations. The stereo separation is great, but the image solidity less so. There is a spot too much warmth at times. It’s not the most pacy, rhythm king cartridge on the planet, but for the most part, you won’t give a damn because you’ll be too busy enjoying the music. Quite simply, the EAT Jo No 5 is the best £5,000 cartridge you can buy for £1,000. +