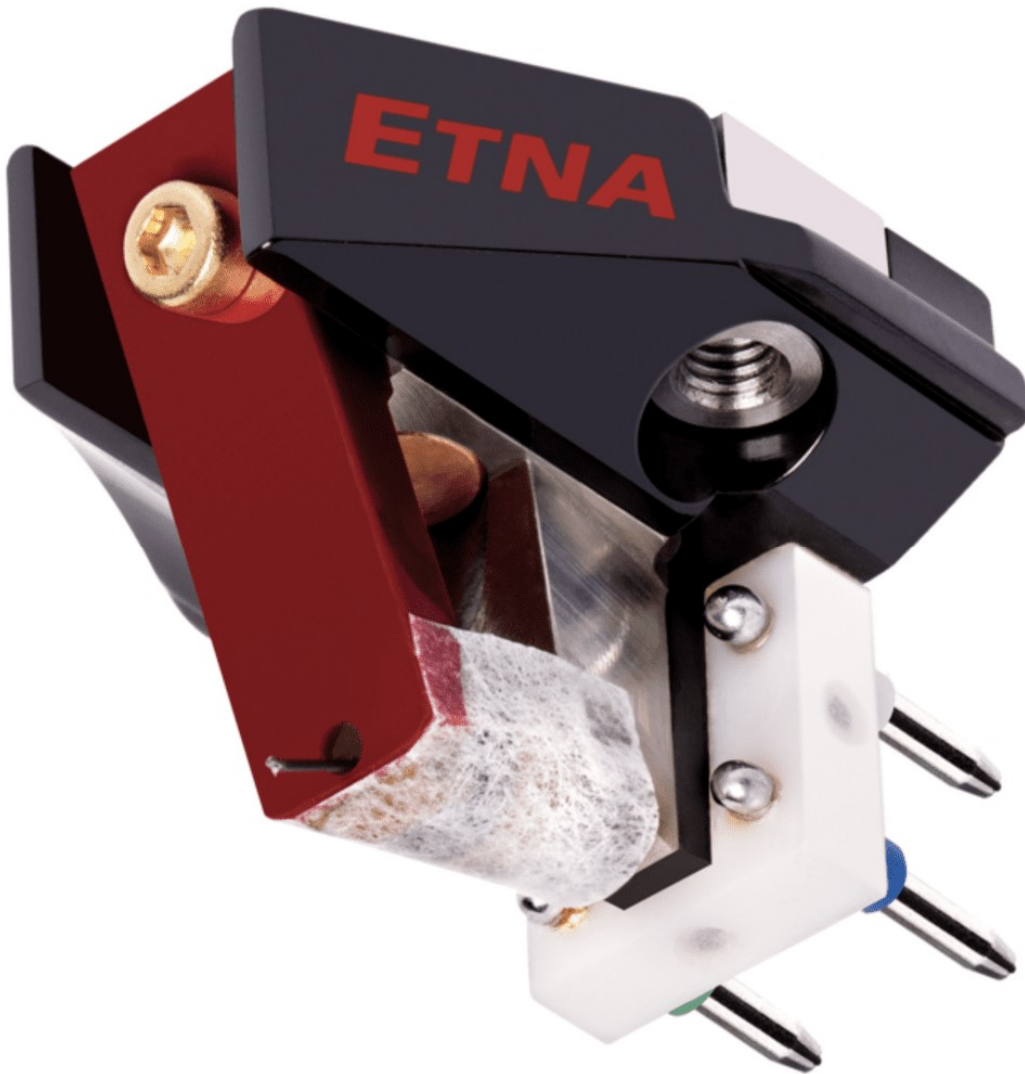


LYRA ETNA TAS

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Lyra Etna Phono Cartridge

- Review by [Alan Taffel](#)
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Thanks to my colleague Jacob Heilbrunn this may be the easiest review I'll ever write. See, Jacob did all the spade work when he reviewed the Lyra Etna SL in Issue 266, a cartridge to which the standard Etna is closely related. Since the two cartridges share so many sonic virtues, all I have to do is crib what Jacob said about the SL.

But first, what's the difference between the two carts? With the SL Jacob reviewed, Lyra set out to lower the coil's mass by using a single layer (thus the SL) of winding rather than the regular Etna's two layers. Lower mass equals lower inertia, which translates to superior transient performance and tracking. As Jacob put it, "The reduced windings and lower internal impedance of the Etna SL are supposed to improve resolution and detail, though a step-up transformer or phono-stage capable of supplying sufficient gain are musts."

And there's a rub. Physics decrees that fewer windings inevitably produce less output, which is why the SL manages to eke out just 0.25mV of signal. That's too low for many phono-stages—including mine—to handle without compromising dynamic range and signal-to-noise ratio. In contrast, the standard Etna produces a generous 0.56mV. Let me assure you that it'll drive anything you put in its path.

Otherwise, the two cartridges are identical. As Jacob noted, the SL—and by extension the non-SL version—"uses a titanium center structure, but it also features an outer body constructed from aircraft-grade aluminum, which is supposed to help reduce vibrations. It's a line-contact stylus with a diamond-coated boron cantilever." So there you have it. Obviously, both versions are made from the highest-grade parts. Further, each unit, regardless of version, is hand-tuned by the same gentleman who tunes every Lyra.

Which Etna is right for you? Lyra's guidance is that most people should buy the standard Etna. The company states that unless the SL model is used under optimal conditions, the standard version will deliver "considerably more energy, resulting in a much higher signal-to-noise ratio." Nonetheless, in a situation like this, where you read about the hopped-up version first, it's only human to wonder what you'd give up by buying the standard-issue cartridge. The latter's higher output is assurance that you're not sacrificing musical energy or dynamics, but what about other factors?

Unfortunately, I can't give you a direct comparison because I had no way of listening to the two cartridges back-to-back. However, I can tell you that everything Jacob wrote about the SL rings true for the standard Etna. For instance, Jacob noted that the SL delivers "transient precision, a blackness to the background, (and) a creaminess to the midrange that seems to suppress noise while widening the dynamic envelope." The SL also offers "(a) layering of the soundstage, (with) each instrument firmly located in its space rather than wavering, thereby adding a notable sense of verisimilitude to the proceedings."

As for the standard Etna, I can only say: "Ditto." Whether listening to classical (the Pentatone *L'Histoire du Soldat*), jazz (Mingus' *Ah Um*) or rock (Nirvana's *Live at the Paramount*), I found transients, dynamics, and soundstaging to be exemplary. Particularly on the live recording, the Etna delivered in spades the verisimilitude Jacob noted. As for dynamics, on music that should "pop" out of the speakers, as when Nils Lofgren uses his acoustic guitar as a percussive instrument by whomping its body in "Blue Skies" (from *Acoustic Live*), the Etna will startle you but good.

I do have a few words of my own regarding how the Etna's character compares with that of its primary rivals. This cartridge comes dazzlingly close to a top Clearaudio in terms of transients, imaging, and resolution, but avoids Clearaudio's tendency toward the analytical. *[Through some pretty good record players—Walker Proscenium V, Acoustic Signature Invictus and Invictus Jr., Clearaudio Master Innovation/TT-1, TW Acoustic Raven Black Night, AMG Viella, etc.—and some pretty fair phonostages from Soullution, Constellation, CH Precision, Zanden, ARC, Walker, etc., the Clearaudio Goldfinger Statement has never sounded “analytical” to me.—JV]* Indeed, I can't imagine anyone describing the Etna as analytical. Rather, like a Benz Micro LP-S, the Etna's sound is warmly seductive. Yet, unlike that Benz, the Lyra has no propensity to sound overly romantic or overripe. Furthermore, the Lyra is significantly more dynamic than the Benz. In sum, the Etna combines the best of the best, while avoiding their respective pitfalls.

But that's a purely sonic analysis. Where the Etna really excels is in conjuring musical magic. Here's Jacob to elaborate further: “It was the ease of listening that I found most riveting. (The) lack of grain endows the Etna with a sense of gliding through the grooves rather than tracking an LP. A sense of space and time is suspended, leaving only music hovering in the air.”

Of course, Newton's laws dictate that the Etna SL will outperform the regular version in key areas. If your system can truly exploit the SL's advantages, that'd be the one to buy. Otherwise, I promise that you can't go wrong with the standard Etna, which retains the SL's mesmerizing qualities in a more versatile package. It's the Etna for the rest of us.

Editor's Note: *After this review was written, Lyra announced a running change to the Atlas, along with the Atlas LS and Etna, called Lambda. The changes are an improved suspension system and damping materials and design. The price remains the same.*

All Atlas and Etna cartridges sent to Lyra for rebuilding will automatically be upgraded to the latest Lambda specification.

Specs & Pricing

Type: Moving coil

Output: 0.56mV

Frequency response: 10Hz–50kHz

Cartridge weight: 9.2g