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AUDIO
FILE

Low/medium output moving-coil pick-up cartridge
 Made by: Lyra Co. Ltd, Tokyo, Japan
 Supplied by: Symmetry, Herts
 Telephone: 01727 865488
 Web: www.lyraaudio.com; www.symmetry-systems.co.uk
 Price: £6495



Lyra Etna SL

Lyra products inhabit a niche within a niche: they are all hand-built, low-volume pick-ups that, for nearly a generation now, have sold largely to devotees of the brand. The company's house sound – if you can call it that – is a tantalising blend of delicacy, subtlety and finesse, with detail and drive aplenty.

Here we sample the £6495 Etna SL (Single Layer), second only to the flagship Atlas. Described as a low impedance, low output moving-coil, it sports an open body, unconventionally shaped coils, asymmetric suspension, exotic cantilever materials and a special Japanese-sourced diamond stylus.

Its medium 9.2g bodyweight and remarkably low 1.72g recommended downforce suggest that it is compatible with most contemporary tonearms.

The Etna SL is assembled onto a solid titanium core, with non-parallel surfaces to inhibit

'The Etna just sounds delighted to get into the groove and play'

internal reflections. Its asymmetric duralumin outer body locks tightly over the core, and along with pressure-fit vibration control rods, is claimed to minimise any structural resonances. The Etna SL attempts to create a seamless connection between the cantilever assembly and tonearm headshell, where any resonance can be better dissipated.

Another distinctive feature involves the way the cantilever assembly is fitted directly into the titanium body structure. Both are shaped so that joining the two together creates a double-knife-edge fulcrum, which focuses pressure on the joint area and achieves a type of 'cold weld', says designer Jonathan Carr.

The coil array itself is X-shaped and employs 6N high-purity copper. While promising improved

channel separation, Lyra's X-core coils are also configured for slightly higher output with less wire in the coils, and improving tracking performance.

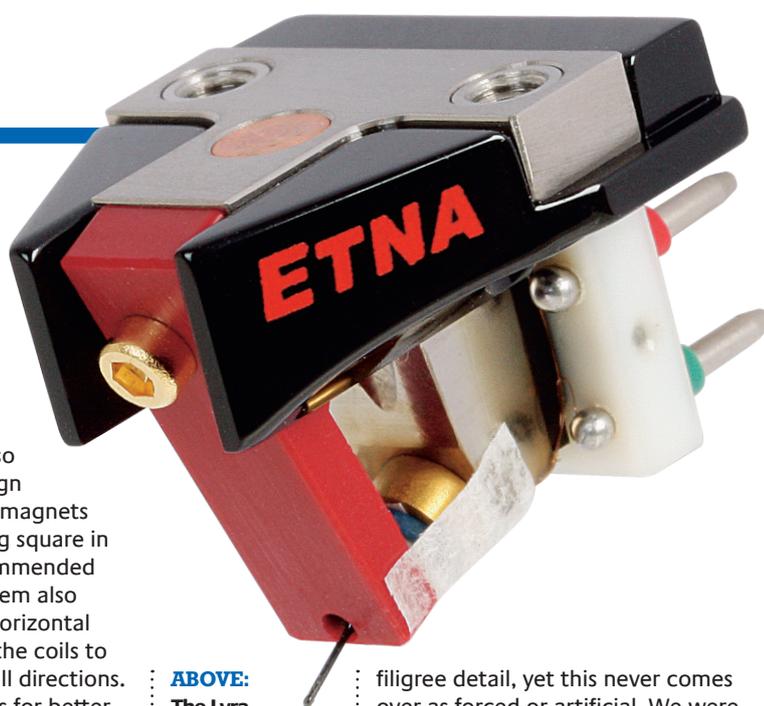
The Etna SL uses Lyra's 'New Angle' system of mechanically pre-biasing these coils so that they accurately align with the front and rear magnets when the stylus is sitting square in the groove at the recommended tracking force. This system also equalises vertical and horizontal compliances, allowing the coils to move equally easily in all directions. This, says Lyra, all makes for better dynamics and tracking.

RIDE OF YOUR LIFE

Once you've installed this skeletal moving-coil into your favoured tonearm, the fun can begin. Just a few minutes from cold, it's obvious that the Etna SL is an exceptional pick-up cartridge – more than just 'great', it is quite remarkable and one of the finest we have heard, with a heady combination of forensic accuracy allied to a wonderful *joie de vivre*. It is not a cold and soulless excavator of detail yet it does this brilliantly!

Tonally, it is pure 'Lyra' – this means it's highly neutral. There's no sense of any added bass warmth, and at the other end things are as pure as the driven snow. Hi-hats, for example, sound absolutely as they should, and are delivered with the certainty that you usually only get from high speed open-reel tape.

Between the frequency extremes, the Etna SL serves up a wide-open window on the world. Haircut 100's 'Kingsize' [*Pelican West*; Arista] is a delicious slice of funk and really well recorded too. The Etna SL in effect 'absents itself' from the proceedings – it's as if just lets you and the music get on with it. It has a wonderfully delicate and detailed sound, bristling with



ABOVE: The Lyra Etna SL cantilever is a diamond-coated boron rod, with a variable-radius 3x70µm line-contact stylus slot-mounted into it. While demanding caution in use, it makes precise cueing very easy

filigree detail, yet this never comes over as forced or artificial. We were simply beguiled by the beautifully etched guitar sound, the eerie smoothness of Nick Heyward's vocals and the cartridge's complete composure even on dynamic peaks.

Drums sounded supple and vibrant, the bursts of brass had a wonderful rawness and rasp, yet guitars were just as warm as the recording engineer intended. This track was a great test of the Etna's mettle: one where it just sounded delighted to have been given the chance to get into the groove.

VERDICT

One of the finest pick-up cartridges we have ever heard, the Lyra Etna SL brings breathtaking delicacy and insight to vinyl LPs. It's absolutely unflappable. On audition, most people lucky enough to afford this moving-coil will adore it. ⬇

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Generator type/weight	Moving-coil / 9.2g
Recommended tracking force	1.68-1.78mN (1.75mN)
Sensitivity/balance (re. 5cm/sec)	285µV / 0.55dB
Compliance (vertical/lateral)	30cu / 35cu
Vertical tracking angle	26 degrees
L/R Tracking ability	>80µm / >80µm
L/R Distortion (-8dB, 20Hz-20kHz)	0.65-9.9% / 0.55-9.5%
L/R Frequency resp. (20Hz-20kHz)	-1.0 to +3.1dB / -1.1 to +5.2dB
Stereo separation (1kHz / 20kHz)	38dB / 28dB