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ISSN

1465-5950

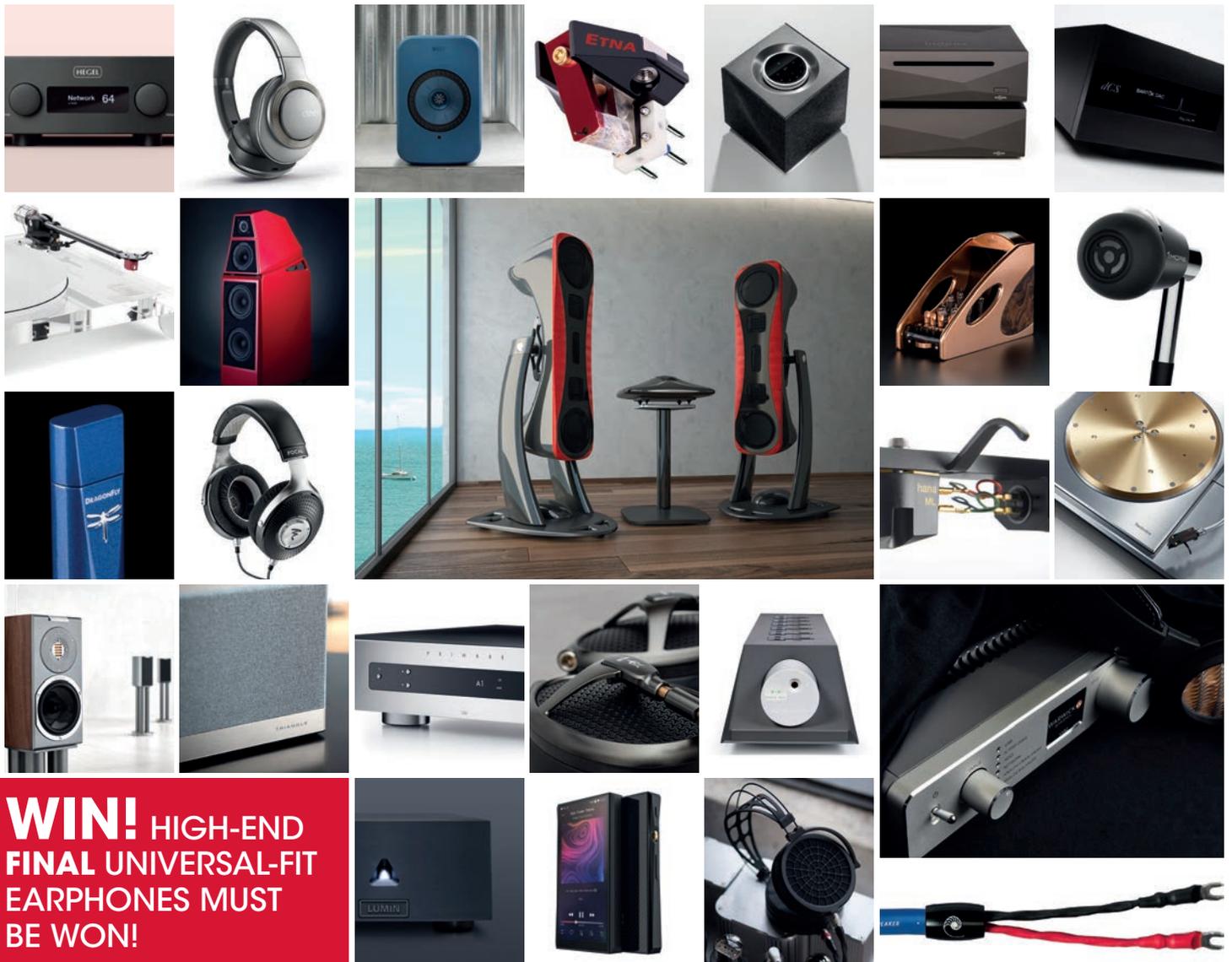


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Lyra Etna SL moving coil cartridge

by Alan Sircom

I had intended this to be a long-winded review, but then realised the shortest, simplest review is all that's needed. The Lyra Etna SL is, quite simply, the best cartridge I have ever used. There may be better cartridges out there (including at least one more from Lyra itself), but I haven't heard them yet. Best of all, one of the Etna SL's strong points is you don't feel the need to hear those products discussed in hushed tones. It's all you need.

The Etna SL is a denuded (bodyless) cartridge based on the company's second from the top Etna moving coil, which is itself based on the range-topping Atlas. The top Lyras are asymmetrically-structured, so that the mounting of the front magnet carrier could be moved out of the way of the mechanical path connecting cantilever to headshell. The differently-shaped structures on the left and right sides limit the formation of standing waves inside the cartridge body itself. Etna (standard or SL) features a yokeless dual magnet system, diamond-coated boron rod cantilever built directly into the titanium body structure, and a Lyra-designed variable-radius line-contact stylus. The Etna SL (or 'single layer') is a custom-ordered variant, with a 0.25mV output, 1.52Ω self-impedance, and a 1.9μH inductance.

What the Etna SL offers that I've simply not heard to anything like the same degree is 'balance'. Some cartridges excel at some things and are simply 'OK' at others. Routinely those considered 'the best' are remarkable at one or two aspects of a performance, and don't mess up the others. The Etna SL is balanced because it excels in all aspects of performance. You get the dynamic fireworks needed to play something exuberant and bombastic (be that *Symphonie Fantastique* or *Frankie Goes To Hollywood's 'Two Tribes' 12"* [ZTT]), you get all the space and air that those audiophile faves demand (yes, I played *Jazz at the Pawnshop* [Proprius]... but I didn't inhale), and you get all the speed and energy required to play the Big Black and Hüsker Dü albums you need to spin as a palette cleanser after listening to *Porn at the Jazz Shop*. You also get all the articulation and transparency needed to listen to the dual harmonies of Silly Sisters, the Black Belt articulation demanded to untangle the brain-wrencher that is 'Murder Mystery' on *The Velvet Underground* [Verve], and the coherence required to really parse Jaco Pastorius' fluid bass lines throughout Joni Mitchell's *Mingus* [Asylum]. But, the Lyra is not filled with suspense and drama unless the music calls for it.

Normally by now, something would have begun to pall next to the other brightly lit parts of the performance, but the Etna SL is not that sort of cartridge. It is the most perfect transmitter of information from the record to the phono stage I have yet encountered.

In short, the Lyra Etna SL just does the LP justice. Any LP. Other words are just filler. The fact it can do justice to records that really don't deserve justice



(why did I buy a Lionel Richie album, and why the hell did I play it, even if it sounded good?) only serves to show why the Lyra Etna SL sets a standard against which all other top-end cartridges should be referenced. It really is that good. If the Atlas and Atlas SL are even better, I will have to turn to a life of crime. +

PRICE AND CONTACT DETAILS

Lyra Etna SL: £6,495

Manufactured by Lyra

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