

The Lyra Delos Review

The £1000 *Delos* is a skeletal design, so all its internal workings are on view and it's therefore rather more vulnerable to damage than most. A strong stylus guards slots into machined grooves. It is medium mass and medium priced.



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The healthy 0.6mV specific output will also allow it to be used with most typical phono stages. Lyra asserts that if you use clever engineering, it doesn't necessarily cost an exorbitant amount of money to make a great sounding cartridge. It claims that one of its design tricks is to set the suspension so that when it's working with normal tracking force for playback the signal coils have the same angle as the magnetic circuit. This is achieved by using a new body structure with a pre-angled damping system. It is set up so when tracking force is applied the generator is perfectly aligned. Thus the cartridge signal output is optimised when playing a record.

In this instance, a microridge stylus is mated to a solid boron cantilever, and the body is machined from a solid aluminium billet, with angled sides to help minimise resonance. The coils themselves are wound using 6N copper wire onto a high purity iron former.

The silver-plated connection pins seem to be a slightly smaller diameter than standard, so do make sure the right termination tags are available when mounting the cartridge, and that they are tight. No tags are provided with the cartridge, but it does come with stainless steel Allen bolts of various lengths, together with an appropriate key, so a pair should suit the headshell of the tonearm being used. A useful stylus brush is also included.

The comprehensive instructions include considerable data on cartridge loading and set-up. The cartridge body has tapped mounting holes, which always makes the installation job easier. Despite the non square shape of the cartridge it proved fairly easy to set up, and the downforce was set to 1.75g (recommended 1.7-1.8g). I also found that it really favoured the use of bias, and that best



results were obtained when this was set by ear (as it's quite obvious when it's not correct). During this process we also noticed that needle talk was very low and that the cartridge was very stable in the groove when the set up was just right.

Sound Quality

Sometimes when reviewing a component one has to work hard to judge a product's strengths and weaknesses, but in the case of the *Delos* it proved remarkably easy. It did sound rather dead and unexciting at first, but that was probably because it was a brand new sample. Indeed, Nigel Crump (of UK distributor Symmetry) had asked me to make sure it was run in for several days before I made any serious judgement. This sounded like an onerous task, and I was at the point of leaving it to play quietly on its own while using another turntable for listening, when after just three sides it began bringing the music to life, and the task was quickly transformed into something enjoyable.

Indeed, it worked so well that it just made me want to play more vinyl, and it wasn't long before this cartridge showed itself to be something rather special. Other experienced listeners who were around during this time were quickly attracted to the sound, always asking me why it was so good. Had I said that I was just trying a new £3,000 cartridge, nobody would have been surprised.

It has that great stop/start quality that music needs to sound lifelike, and is so up-beat that it sounds far more like real music than anything I've heard recently. It's like the sections of the orchestra had started to enjoy themselves, and were playing together with the correct accents. And this was often on records I'd previously considered rather mediocre. The *Delos* simply reveals such a wealth of expression, and strings sounded correctly tuned, natural and demonstrated real power and verve.

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Some listeners commented that the bass might be a little lightweight, but to me it sounded like a flat frequency response (unlike most moving-coil cartridges): neutral, yet rich, full-bodied and well focused. The upper frequencies were very revealing too: well structured, with lots of natural detail, and all exactly where they were supposed to be in the mix.

The *Delos* also exhibited excellent control, tracking everything I threw at it without problem. It's punchy, articulate and detailed, with great staging, excellent focus, superb detail and wonderful depth. It seems well suited to any musical genre and has a very modern sound, more like master tape than the classic 'down-tilted' sound that's characteristic of most moving coils. In fact it's so good that it may be the analogue device that drags listeners back from digital to analogue.

In the system I was using, the *Delos* sounded just right, and I had considerable trouble trying to find fault in a sound that was just so wholesome and fun. It really did make the music, from old and new records alike, sound fresh and very interesting.

Conclusions

I found this cartridge so unexpectedly accomplished that I would have trouble faulting it at any price, let alone £1,000. Some really expensive products do seriously impress, and the most recent example that came my way was the £32,000 Thrax *Spartacus* power amplifier. At that sort of price I had every right to expect something special, but when something really is good I'm still surprised. When a relatively inexpensive product that is equally impressive comes along, like the *Delos*, it's an even bigger surprise. During the period it was on loan, it gave several far more costly cartridges a sound beating.

Over the years I've heard various Lyra cartridges in a number of systems, and been impressed, but only now have I managed to spend a protracted period with one in order to assess its abilities properly. If Lyra can do this at £1,000, I begin to wonder what its expensive ones achieve. (I really must find out!) Currently I'm well hooked on this model, which maybe just suits the systems I'm normally using, but I've also tried it elsewhere and been equally amazed. At the time of writing I haven't been able to fault it so it has to carry both Audio Excellence and Best Buy ratings.

Lyra Delos

Type	Low output moving-coil
Output Voltage (at 1kHz, 5cm/sec):	600µV
Channel Balance at 1kHz:	n/a
Channel Separation at 1kHz:	>30dB
Frequency Range (at -3dB):	10 Hz - 50 kHz
Frequency Response 20Hz - 20kHz:	n/a
Compliance, Dynamic, Lateral:	12µm/mN
Stylus Type:	Namiki line contact
Cantilever:	solid Boron
Stylus Tip Radius r / R:	2.5 / 75µm
Tracking Force Range:	1.7 – 1.8 (17-18mN)
Recommended Tracking Force:	1.75g (17.5mN)
Vertical Tracking Angle:	20°
Internal Impedance / DC Resistance:	8.2ohms
Recommended Load Impedance:	91ohms – 47kohms
Cartridge Body Material:	One piece aluminium
Cartridge Colour:	Gold
Cartridge Weight:	7.3g
Dimensions (WxHxL):	19x15x20mm
Price	£1000.00

Overall Conclusions

This current period of increasing popularity may or may not be the swansong of vinyl. Many commentators thought it would disappear without trace long ago, as it's so inconvenient compared to modern digital media. You actually have to move more than a finger to change a track, and some remain surprised that people really want to go through all the rigmarole of physically changing the side every 20 minutes.

A few have always remained loyal to the vinyl medium, but now many other people are either rediscovering or discovering afresh that sufficient magic is cut into those grooves to make the process worthwhile. Luckily there are still plenty of secondhand records around, and some are in surprisingly good condition – even if they look rough, high quality equipment can still extract

sounds of surprising quality from them, and new material is increasingly easily available.

As the march of digital technology seems to encroach on every sphere of life, I think it is wonderful that this antiquated analogue technology can still demand such attention when the highest levels of fidelity are required. Furthermore the record playing equipment continues to improve and not just by small increments either. These three cartridges are a case in point. They are all excellent transducers. Anything that was capable of the performance of which these are capable would have cost a small fortune in the days when vinyl was the only viable music medium. And while some cartridges have now become exceptionally expensive, these on test remain sensibly affordable, in comparative terms anyway.

All three of these cartridges are very well made and superbly finished. They all performed flawlessly on test, and we encountered no tracking problems with any of the music we played.

Audio Technica followed a path to try and capture the ultimate in purity and transparency by engineering a hi-tech moving-coil generator with a non-magnetic core. In many respects this has been a great success, and amazingly the *ART9* is also comfortably the least costly of the three. However, in comparative tests, while very competitive in many areas, giving great detail, fine tonality and elegant soundstaging, it also proved the least dynamic and invigorating, and was more at home with classical than rock material. That said, it still deserves Recommendation for its prodigious abilities.

The Ortofon *Cadenza Bronze* is the most costly and provides an exhilarating hi-fi experience. It is not as tonally accurate as either of the others, but that's not the intention, and it delivers a fast, dynamic and punchy sound with power and verve. While, it has been tuned to be more at home on classical material, I found it very acceptable on all types of music. It's good everywhere, with fine bass, an excellent midrange and an extended grain-free treble. Irrespective of musical genre, the bass always sounds a little off the beat, however, lagging the midrange by enough to be a little disappointing on tracks where timing is critical. However, its attributes are so positive it fully deserves Recommendation.

But the *Lyra Delos* was exceptional in every department, sounding so right and so surefooted in the groove. It makes some of the best music from vinyl I've heard at anywhere near its price, so I'll be very sorry to see it go, and it fully deserves both Audio Excellence and Best Buy ratings.