

Ortofon

2M Black LVB 250 cartridge



MOST SENSIBLE FOLK will have given up on the notion of owning the world's finest moving-coil. Such a thing would be horrendously expensive and, of course, would require an equally esoteric head amplifier to go with it.

But with moving-magnets we're talking well south of £1,000 for something that will work with most existing preamps, integrated amp phono inputs and off-board phono stages. In other words, a top-notch MM gives serious analogue performance on the cheap.

Over the years, there have been many 'best' moving-magnet cartridge designs. At various times, we've had the Shure V15 III, Ortofon VMS30E, A&R P77Mg, Goldring G900 IGC, Technics EPC305, Linn K18, Goldring G1042 and Shure V15VxMR among many others all occupying the top slot in critical acclaim.

A lithe, vibrant, insightful sound far less flat and vague than most MMs

For yours truly that accolade has recently been held by Nagaoka's MP-500 (HFC 467). Now, though, Ortofon's new 2M Black LVB 250 has arrived give to it a run for its money. Announced in 2020 to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the birth of Ludwig van Beethoven, the £830 LVB 250 is the most expensive moving-magnet I've ever come across. It sports a highly polished Shibata stylus for deep groove tracing, a boron cantilever for high strength and low weight, plus a new suspension system using a special Multi Wall Carbon Nano Tubes (MWCNT) nano filler rubber compound.

The new cantilever is a big deal. I've never before heard any cartridge with an aluminium cantilever better one with a boron. It's super-light yet strong and lets the stylus track better and bring home more music with less



resonance to cloud the sound. Better still, owners of existing 2M Bronze and 2M Black (HFC 434) cartridges can upgrade to 2M Black LVB 250 spec just by changing the stylus.

This new cartridge weighs 7.2g and has a quoted dynamic compliance of 22µm/mN, so should work with most modern tonearms. Output voltage is a decent 5mV and a ruler-flat frequency response is quoted of 20Hz to 20kHz, ±1dB. This is an amazing claim, as is its quoted channel balance of less than 1dB at 1kHz. In all key respects, this cartridge is tonearm and phono stage friendly. Recommended load impedance is 47kohm and load capacitance 150 to 300pF. Tracking force is said to be 1.6g, ±0.1g.

Sound quality

As a breed, moving-magnet cartridges tend to sound a bit opaque, cloudy and unresolved. Due to their design compromises, they're good at giving big, broad, brushstrokes but can't drill down into the detail. The 2M Black LVB 250 sidesteps all of these issues, to give a lithe, vibrant, insightful sound that's far less flat and vague than most MMs.

Feed it a well-recorded classic rock track like Peter Gabriel's *Modern Love*,

and the music shimmers with detail. It's as if it's tracing the groove far better, fully getting to grips with what's going on. There's more texture, atmosphere and perspective; you get a better sense of the dry-sounding recording studio, and a more intricate feel for the great man's grainy vocals.

Kate Bush's *Breathing* sounds more animated than any other moving-magnet cartridge I've heard it with. It's hard to believe it isn't a £2,000 moving-coil I'm hearing. I also love the 'walk around' soundstage, as some hi-fi hacks once called this sort of widescreen recording.

The bass is dry and taut but tuneful, which makes this cartridge a blast with banging dance music; I have Goldie's *Timeless* turned up to eleven – or so it seems – and the 2M Black LVB 250 sounds super-stable and planted, yet fiercely fast and dynamic too.

Conclusion

The rival Nagaoka MP-500 is perhaps a tad sweeter and more romantic sounding, but the Ortofon 2M Black LVB 250 offers amazing insight, detail and grip, making it an absolute must-audition cart. **DP**

DETAILS

PRICE
£830
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OUR VERDICT

