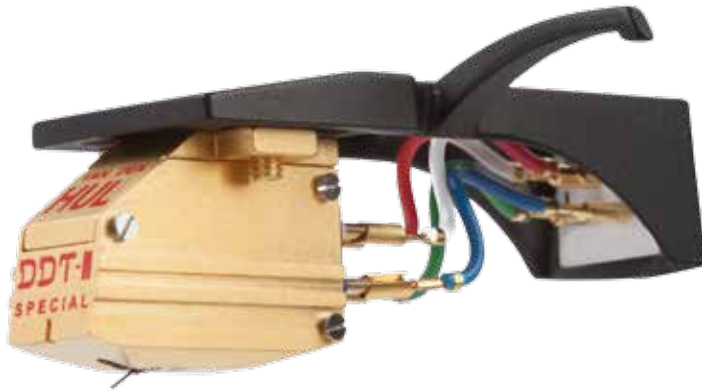




TREAD LIGHTLY

With the Cyrus Phono Signature phono stage used for testing being fairly unconcerned by input levels, the extra voltage of the DDT II over the other models here really isn't an issue and the other load requirements are not difficult. The flat sides, threaded mounts and small but sturdy stylus guard also ensure that it is not hard to accommodate and fit, although the pins on the rear are positioned quite close together. The only slight curiosity worthy of mention is that the fairly light tracking weight of 1.65g and the 8.2g weight require that the counterweight on the SME is slung out quite a long way to balance. Brief mention also has to be made on the packaging, which is simple but elegant – protecting the cartridge well and also coming with some useful tools including a spirit level.

Van den Hul DDT II Special £999

The most affordable cartridge that Van den Hul offers, could this distinctive offering be the Special one?

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Van den Hul
DDT II Special

ORIGIN
Netherlands

TYPE
Moving-coil
cartridge

WEIGHT
8.2g

FEATURES
● Aluminium body
● Boron cantilever
● VDH-1 stylus
● Silver coils

DISTRIBUTOR
Decent Audio

TELEPHONE
05602 054669

WEBSITE
vandenhul.com

By the standards of some of the names Van den Hul uses, DDT is actually fairly normal, standing as it does for “Depth, Detail and Timbre” rather than a peculiar homage to a pesticide. The DDT II Special is an updated version of the original DDT with a thicker frontpole – the section between the stylus and generator – and a smaller magnet to reduce overall mass.

These updates improve what would have already been one of the most sophisticated cartridges here. It uses a specific stylus profile developed by the company mounted on a boron cantilever. The coils are made from silver wire and pair matched for optimal channel balance. This is then encased in an all-metal body that looks and feels a little different to the others on test. It is unquestionably well built, but feels a little more artisanal than mass produced, thanks to the visible screws that hold the sections together.

There is a clear logic to this design, though – the Van den Hul is actually pretty simple to fit although some of its requirements are rather challenging. With 0.65mV at its disposal this is also the most potent cartridge here – to the point where some very sensitive phono stages might be overpowered, although it will provide some useful extra gain for many users.

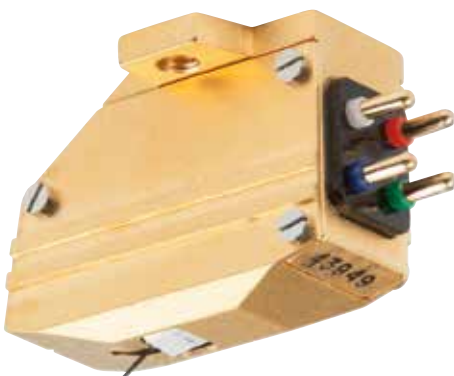
Sound quality

From the opening bars of Jean Marie Blais’ skilful piano work, the DDT II Special shows that its major strength is bridging the gap between accuracy and emotion. The piano is weighty, rich and detailed with a lovely sense of decay to the struck notes. When the supporting electronics begin, the relationship between them is self-explanatory and given all the space it needs to sound convincing. This is aided in no small part by the bass response. The DDT II Special might not go quite as deep as some of the other cartridges in the group, but the speed, detail and integration that the lower registers offer is absolutely superb.

What elevates this worthy list of attributes is the sense of joy that comes with the technical ability. *Do I Move You?* is a convincingly three-dimensional reproduction of the musicians supporting Simone and their instruments sound weighty and believable. They are almost a secondary event to the main vocals, though. More than any other cartridge here, the Van den Hul gives

a little sense of really being there to experience the performance in the flesh. There is a sense that with this slightly forward recording the top end hovers on the edge of being a little bright, but for the most part it gets the balance just right.

To wrap up an impressive set of attributes, the DDT II Special also has impressive timing. It motors through *Happiness Is Easy* with immediacy and attack while still ensuring that Mark Holliss’ haunting vocals remain the focus of your attention. This same skilful balancing act is present with *Wide Open* too. Beck’s vocals are presented with weight, texture and emotion while delivering that potent bassline with a deft combination of impact and agility. This all-round competence gives a best of both worlds for listening and ensures that regardless of what you choose to throw at it, the Van den Hul is very convincing indeed ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

FEATURES

★★★★★

OVERALL

★★★★★

LIKE: Wonderfully accurate yet involving performance; easy to fit and use

DISLIKE: Looks a little home made; can be fractionally bright

WE SAY: Outstanding well-balanced performer that delivers realism with real emotion

