



Come fly with me

Nick Tate gets into the groove with Ortofon's new Concorde Music Blue moving-magnet phono cartridge

This iconic moving-magnet cartridge has had a weird and wonderful history since it was launched in 1979, and its latest incarnation – the Concorde Music – is surely its best yet. It began life as a product for convenience-conscious audiophiles. With striking styling – reminiscent of the nose section of the supersonic passenger jet of the same name – it plugged directly into tonearms with SME-type bayonet headshell sockets. At this time, most decks were fitted with precisely this, so it made sense to combine headshell and cartridge in one body. Not only did it mean that the geometry would be correct, but its slimline profile made hand-cueing an absolute breeze.

Then, as the fashion for SME-type S-shaped headshells passed into relative obscurity, the Concorde found a new life on the DJ scene. The aforementioned advantages were no less handy for professional disc spinners, meaning that you'd often see pairs of Technics SL-1200MKIIs

sporting Concordes, invariably spec'd out with the cheapest stylus option. The professional audio version has run for decades – despite the increasing 'digitisation' of DJ sound systems, it remains popular.

In the new 2025 Concorde Music series, the venerable Ortofon cartridge gets a third bite of the cherry, so to speak. The new model

There's no mistaking the characteristically light, open and breezy sound

combines all of the convenience of the original hi-fi design with the generator assembly taken from the DJ range and adds further structural improvements, plus a wide range of styli. It's especially timely given the return of the Technics SL-1200G-series turntables. What's not to like about a simple 'plug-and-play' solution?

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Ortofon Concorde Music Blue

ORIGIN
Denmark

TYPE
Moving-magnet phono cartridge

WEIGHT
18g

FEATURES

- Nude elliptical diamond
- Aluminium cantilever
- Quoted output level: 6mV

DISTRIBUTOR
Henley Audio

WEBSITE
ortofon.com
henleyaudio.co.uk

The new range features the body upgrades that were made as part of the Concorde MK II changeover that the Ortofon DJ range went through a few years ago. These include an additional mass ring, top and bottom panels, a sturdier stylus mounting and replaceable finger lifts. Inside, the Concorde Music's generator system is taken from the DJ range, so it outputs an unusually high 6mV – which helps moving-magnet phono inputs with so-so sensitivity. The cartridge's quad-coil generating system has four split pole pins, which are wound with silver-plated oxygen-free copper wire.

In terms of styli, the range starts with the Concorde Music Red (elliptical on an aluminium cantilever), then ascends via the Blue reviewed here (nude elliptical), the Bronze (nude Fine Line), Black (nude Shibata) and flagship Black 250 LVB (nude Shibata, but on a boron



cantilever). Whichever version you buy, you can swap it to any other just by replacing the stylus. Recommended tracking force is 1.8g and dynamic lateral compliance is 15 µm/mN, a medium-ish figure that's ideal for most tonearms. Total weight is 18g, so it should balance in most arms easily. Recommended loading is between 150 and 300 picofarads, at 47kohms. Ortofon claims a frequency range of 20Hz to 20kHz (at +2dB and -1dB respectively).

Sound quality

Fitted to a Technics SL-1200G (HFC 477) turntable, there's no mistaking Ortofon's characteristically light, open and breezy sound. There's a lot of detail emanating from the Concorde Music Blue too – it doesn't machine-gun out at you, but there's still plenty to take in. Rhythmically it sounds crisp and propulsive, and dynamically it is pretty expressive and engaging. It also tracks securely in the groove, with no sense of strain.

All of which makes it absolutely ideal for classic techno such as Bass Construction's *Dance With Power* on 12in. This haunting early-Nineties track isn't a great recording, but still sounds mesmerising. The Ortofon conveys this vibe well, with a strong, architectural bassline, nicely textured synth sounds and crisp hi-hat cymbal work. Likewise, Marc Almond's impassioned vocals on *Jacky* prove great fun to listen to, reminding us of his highly distinctive voice.

The Concorde Music Blue is ever so slightly bass-light in absolute terms, but this lets the cartridge push the music along faster. There's no sense of bottom end overhang, for example.



HOW IT COMPARES

Audio-Technica's VM95SH/H (£215) package combines the VM95SH cartridge and an AT-HS6 headshell in one package – which is in effect equivalent to the Concorde Music Blue, albeit less elegant looking. It's a tried-and-trusted moving-magnet with an exotic Shibata stylus that should have longer playing life than the Ortofon's elliptical one. It has a slightly more subtle and detailed sound, and fractionally lower surface noise too. Like its rival, this is a fun music maker, but lacks the unique feel of the Concorde when hand cueing and its innovative design – which once won a Danish Design Award, by the way.

Midband is pretty smooth and the high treble seems very gently rolled off, so it isn't piercingly bright even with edgy rock tracks like Supertramp's *Oh Darling*. This record is a teensy-bit treble happy, but still the ride cymbals never really grate.

This cartridge makes classical music enormous fun too. A vintage reading of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* (Karajan, Berlin Philharmonic) comes over with power and precision, with decent soundstaging and surprising stage depth. It's not the most dynamic you'll hear in outright terms, yet it's

Rhythmically it's crisp and propulsive, and dynamically it is pretty expressive

on a par with its price rivals. The wiry, breathy timbre of the string section is excellent and reminds us why classical music on vinyl can still sound so special. In absolute terms, this cartridge lacks inner detail and sophistication, but Ortofon's swappable styli allow you to upgrade as and when funds permit.

Conclusion

Ortofon's Concorde Music delivers class-competitive sound, genuine convenience and easy upgradability. The Blue variant tested here is a useful improvement over the entry-level Red, although readers are advised to check out the Bronze too and see which better suits their system. Overall, this is a worthy inheritor of the Concorde mantle and deserves to fly off dealers' shelves ●



Concorde by name, concorde by nature...

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL
★★★★★

LIKE: Crisp, engaging, detailed sound; design

DISLIKE: Nothing at the price

WE SAY: Innovative package with some fine sonics