



**IN SIGHT**

- 1 Non-resonant plastic shell
- 2 Aluminum cantilever
- 3 Elliptical stylus

# Sumiko Moonstone £325

The sonic performance of a moving coil with the power of a moving magnet is the claim, but does it ring true?

**DETAILS**

**PRODUCT**  
Sumiko Moonstone

**ORIGIN**  
Japan

**TYPE**  
Moving-magnet cartridge

**WEIGHT**  
6.5g

**FEATURES**

- Elliptical stylus
- Aluminium cantilever
- Quoted frequency response: 12-33,000Hz

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Henley Audio Ltd.

**TELEPHONE**  
01235 511166

**WEBSITE**  
sumikoaudio.net

**S**umiko is now American owned and part of the McIntosh group, selling a range of moving-magnet and moving-coil cartridges made in Japan. It has built a strong following over the past four decades, offering something just a little different in flavour to the mainstream cartridge brands. The alluringly named Moonstone is a premium-priced member of the company's entry-level Oyster series, sharing a body with the Rainier and Olympia models that can be upgraded by changing the stylus. It's a tapered shape that's made of non-resonant plastic; this conceals and protects the generator assembly inside that the manufacturer says uses copper wire. That red stylus assembly is removable and houses an aluminium cantilever that's tipped by an elliptical profile diamond stylus.

The Sumiko proves the easiest to fit in the group, thanks to its excellent and commendably simple stylus

guard. It should balance out in most tonearms, given its middling 6.5g weight. Compliance isn't extreme one way or another, nor is its loading; the manufacturer recommends a load capacitance of 100pF to 200pF and a load impedance of 47k ohm. Quoted output level is a little on the low side by the standards of the group at 3mV @1kHz, which isn't much more than the Dynavector high-output moving coil. To my ear, I think this cartridge tracks very securely at its recommended 2g pressure, although there's 0.2g either way to play with, should you so wish.

### Sound quality

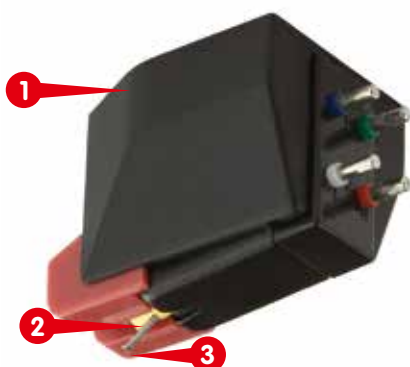
Talk to your friends down the pub about your passion for black plastic and many well wax lyrical (if you'll pardon the pun) about its 'romantic' sound. There are some in this group, like the Ortofon and Rega, that simply do not fit this description. Others like the Nagaoka and Dynavector partially qualify, whereas the Grado and this Sumiko are wearing the T-shirt and signing autographs, so to speak. The latter two share a similar sound, with the Moonstone being even more of a trip down memory lane. In short, it's big, warm and soft – a sort of comfort blanket of an MM cartridge, compared with the Ortofon's light sabre.

It's the smooth tonality that comes before all else. Cue up the forward and intense-sounding Bodines track and suddenly it's less John Peel and more Terry Wogan. That's not necessarily a bad thing, it's just not strictly neutral; it actually makes

middling recordings such as this more listenable and – dare I say it – more enjoyable in a way. The Sumiko is a sort of 'effects pedal' of a cartridge, imbuing everything it plays with a sepia-tinted hue that's really rather nice. Trouble is, when you want it to really emote, to capture belting guitar solos or crunchy bass guitar work, it's a bit too cuddly. *Expressions* comes over as wide and spacious, with a nice drop back to the soundstage that the Grado fails to muster, yet still it lacks a certain rhythmic tension that makes it so hypnotic via a great pick-up cartridge. To an extent, this can be ameliorated by clever choice of turntable and tonearm; for example, it calms and soothes slightly forward Technics SL-1200 very nicely.

## The Moonstone imbues everything with a sepia-tinted hue that's really nice

I find the cartridge's naturally soft and sweet demeanour takes some of the energetic edge off *Field Work* too, which is a good thing when all is said and done, considering how it's mixed. Yet at the same time, the *Pastoral Symphony* loses some of its immediacy and insight. It delivers a more resolved sound than the Grado, but still has a slightly glossy string sound that makes things seem too processed for my tastes. Overall, this may not be perfect, but it does a lot right at its modest price and really makes any vinyl system sound nice ●



## HIFIChoice

### OUR VERDICT

<b>SOUND QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>LIKE:</b> Rich, expansive, romantic sound
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ★★★★★	<b>DISLIKE:</b> Lack of detail and insight
<b>BUILD QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>WESAY:</b> This charming MM offers great value for money
<b>EASE OF SETUP</b> ★★★★★	

### OVERALL

