

Review of EAT' cartridge Jo N°5, by Ken Kessler, 02/2020 on :



EAT Jo N°8 Cartridge



After wowing the audio community with the Jo N°5 moving-coil cartridge, EAT has unleashed the second in the family – the Jo N°8. And it's an even bigger knock-out

Having previously dipped its toe in the water with the Yosegi moving-coil cartridge [HFN Mar '12] – effectively a rebodied-in-wood Japanese design – EAT stunned us last year with the Jo N°5 [HFN Dec '18], selling at a sane £799. There's no shortage of amazing moving-coil cartridges on the market, but this was blatantly head-and-shoulders above the pack. It heralded a new range of MCs to complement EAT's expanding catalogue of turntables, arms, phono stages and its recently-unveiled integrated amplifier.

Company boss Jozefina Lichtenegger opted for EAT's second model, the Jo N°8, to come in at a much dearer £2290. Her choice for the leap upward in pricing was based on customer demand. The lower segment of the price range for EAT's seven turntables, three tonearms and three phono stages is already addressed by the N°5, so the N°8 targets a substantially dearer market position.

Good Egg

When we spoke about this, she did hint that there could be models to fill in the gap between the N°5 and N°8 in the future, and I suspect there may even be cartridges above the N°8 in the pipeline. When you consider that the company's top turntable, arm and phono stage will set you back more than £15,000, there's clearly some 'headroom' above the N°8.

Jozefina did, however, face a challenge, simply because the N°5 is so good. The second of the egg-shaped cartridges would have to feature superior parts, while the testing and selection regimes are even more critical. Although the cartridges are as universal as any, the N°8 is evidently optimised for EAT's new flagship F-N°te tonearm, together with the company's recommended Graham and Ortofon tonearms.

That said, I did my utmost to test the N°8 with equipment that closely matches the design and testing regime that defined its sound at the factory. I used the Graham Phantom tonearm, which the company often fits to its upper-range turntables such as the Forte, on the TechDAS Air Force III Premium [HFN Jun '19]. As the cartridge is massive, at 25.1mm at its widest point, 28.3mm deep and 19.2mm tall, I can imagine there may be arms with fixed headshells and no slots for fore-and-aft movement that might prove a tight fit.



Because the wooden shell encloses an aluminium core, those with a screw-tightening fetish will be happy to note that this cartridge can be fixed without the worry of, say, Denon 103s or other designs with 'soft' bodies, which can be damaged by too much force. Well-spaced, colour-coded pins (Koetsu: please take note!) also aid installation. And, while the curvy, bulging body of this cartridge is not as helpful as the parallel sides of blocky shapes for alignment, the prow of the N°8 is flattened and thus easy enough to use as a guide if viewed from overhead.

One aspect of cartridge set-up which many of you might deal with in near-religious terms, but which I find about as worthy of ignoring as wine-to-food pairing (yes, I drink red with everything), is impedance setting. I used this with EAT's flagship E-Glo phono stage, and I long ago gave up slavishly following instruction manuals, preferring instead to set the loading by ear. This is especially enjoyable with phono stages like the E-Glo that offer continuously variable rotary settings or even a surfeit of fixed values, which enable you to find the best balance between gain and sound quality.

As it turned out, the recommended load of '>15ohm' was merely a starting point and I settled on 80ohm most of the time, occasionally adjusting the EAT E-Glo to 150ohm or even a shade more. The listening sessions also benefited from the flexibility afforded by the bargain-priced Pro-Ject Tube Box DS2 phono amp for just this reason. Yes, you really should set the values according to what you hear rather than what you read. And while the Tube Box DS2 doesn't quite expose all that the N°8 can deliver via the E-Glo, it still impresses.

Worth The Weight

The tracking force will horrify those weaned on Shure V15s, as the optimum setting for this cartridge is a porky 2.3g, which is but a scant 0.1g less than that recommended for the N°5. It didn't take long to discover that the N°8 was less critical about this than the N°5, and no mistracking was experienced even at 2g. Again, one's ears should be the final arbiter, and I did my listening at 2.15g.

Completing the review system were the Audio Research REF 6/REF 75SE pre/power amp combination [HFN May '16], Wilson Audio Sasha DAW speakers [HFN Mar '19] and Transparent cables throughout. As for reference cartridges, these included a Koetsu Urushi, TechDAS TDC01 Ti [HFN Sep '14] and DS Audio Master 1 [HFN Dec '17].



Crisp 'N' Dry

Let's put it this way: I've never seen any visitors to my listening room react so favourably, so quickly to a cartridge – even more so than when they heard the N°5. I had a N°5 in use when the N°8 arrived, so all was conveniently primed for the comparisons. In a way, this plays into EAT's master plan because the creation of an upgrade path seems preordained. Although the N°5 remains my sub-£1000 fave, maintaining its peerless value, the N°8 ups the ante by a huge amount.

It warranted a debut blast with a familiar LP, so I dug out my preferred bass showcase, The Band's eponymous second LP [Capitol STAO-132]. But it's not so much the phenomenal bass guitar of Rick Danko that shows you what the music's foundation can be, as Levon Helm's drumming. 'Up On Cripple Creek' was fat and fulsome via the N°5, though still utterly enjoyable, like eating a greasy burger when on a diet. The N°8 added ample control and dryness to increase the realism of the bass drum – skins and all – while precision and detail were amped up audibly.

Extension was identical, but the snap, in particular on the snare, was tighter, faster, more crisp. What knocked me out, however, was the twang of the mock-Jew's Harp (generated, I believe, on a Lowrey organ). It seemed to float in its own space, prominent, clear and palpable. The N°8 placed The Band in the room, across its width and beyond the outer edges of the speakers.

Of late, jazz has been seducing me, thanks to a CD of Thelonius Monk at Newport in 1967, and open-reel tapes from Wes Montgomery and Gerry Mulligan. The timely arrival of Monk's Dream [Mobile Fidelity One-Step UD1S 2-011] provided me with an exemplar of spatial concerns, in a virgin pressing. The EAT N°8's refinement over the N°5 meant expanding a soundstage that was already vast. Each instrument occupied what I can only imagine was the correct positioning at the recording site. This enhanced the concept of the Monk's quartet as a cohesive group, at the same time highlighting each player.

As for the sound of each instrument, it was chill-after-chill, those fleeting moments where the reproduction is so realistic and authentic that you know your system is working at its peak. I suppose this brief auditory thrill is not unlike the transitory joy of a perfect downshift, that first whiff of a properly decanted wine or popping Beluga against the roof of one's mouth.



Ready To Rock

Ah, you're thinking: a One-Step LP makes any system sound better. True, but we're beyond all that because seasoned audiophiles who know their set-ups can audition a new component even with less regal pressings or recordings. Hence my decision to follow Monk with albums from The Runaways and Whitesnake.

Queens Of Noise [Sundazed/Modern Harmonic MH-8094] was The Runaways' second LP, and it realised all that their debut promised. While mainly inspired by the glam rock that emanated from the UK in the early-to-mid-1970s, honed by punk and referencing US ex-pat Suzi Quattro, The Runaways swiftly developed an identity powered in no small part by bad-ass rocker Joan Jett. It was here that the N°8 showed its proficiency with transient speed and recovery, power and weight.

You can't get away from the screechiness of the vocals that marked the band's sound – street attitude, yadayadayada – but the near-militaristic drumming, the brightness (in a good way) that was characteristic of all of their heroes, from The Glitter Band to Adam & The Ants. It's all about in-your-face attack, and the EAT N°8 has these grrrrls slapping you upside the head. As transcendent as the N°8 is with subtle material like Monk, it knows how to rock. The only criticism is that it leans to the warm, which may be too much with, say, single-ended triode amps.

Whitesnake, of course, represents the heavy-metal-via-stadium, power ballad excess of the big hair bands, but only the churlish would deny their sense of majesty. The 30th anniversary reissue of Slip Of The Tongue [Rhino 5409784019029], though not their best, is a time capsule of the genre's overblown self-importance, like Prog Rock without the intellectual pretence. But that is to be a snob: this stuff can fill a room and have you reaching for your air guitar before you can say 'Cheap An' Nasty'.



Then again, this LP featured the magnificent Steve Vai, and guitar is what it's all about. The N°8 seems to know this. Coverdale's singing, a paradigm of Plant/Tyler/Roth crotch-rock grandeur, comes through with all the macho swagger that contrasts so comically with the jail-bait insolence of The Runaways. Despite the meters barely flickering when the level is cranked up to 11, the N°8 finds minuscule details in Whitesnake that other pick-ups would leave buried, like pirates' treasure beneath the sand.

Taste Of Luxury

How much will you love this? Like the N°5, you'll probably be so charmed by it that you'll even pay the extra £100 for the optional deluxe wooden box. As was said about Mr Brier and the first Koetsu Urushis all those years ago, the N°8 looks as beautiful as it sounds.

It is self-evidently an artisan product that narrows the gap between high-end audio and luxury objects per se. And you'll be excused for staring at the end of your tonearm for inordinate amounts of time once a Jo N°8 arrives there.

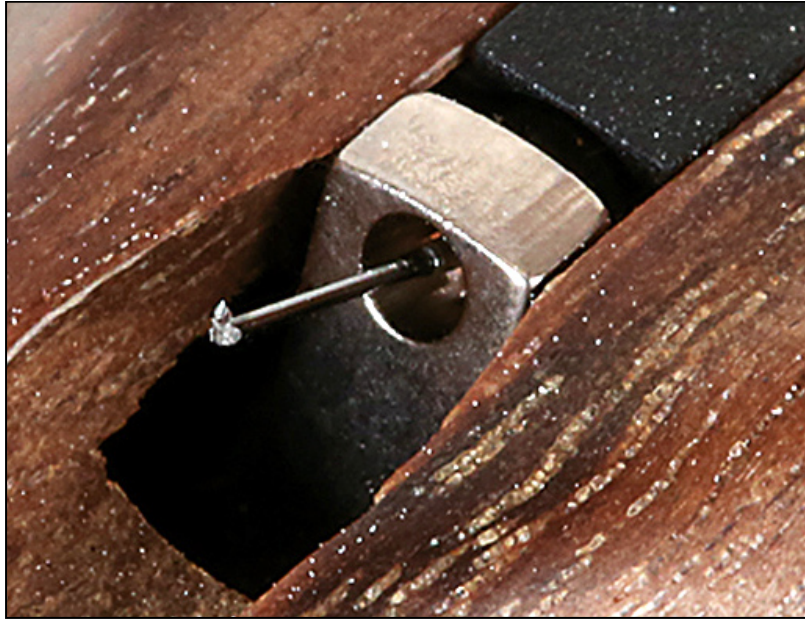
Hi-Fi News Verdict

This makes two in a row for EAT, Jo N°8 achieving at its price what the N°5 did at £799 while adding subtle refinement in precisely the areas where the latter needs it. Aside from the bulk, which applies to both Jo MCs, this cartridge is a dream to set up, it's immediately captivating and so musical that I was distracted from my cache of tapes and the latest episode of Elementary. This is a future classic.

By The Numbers

At more than double the price of the Jo N°5, the N°8 is a text-book case of expanding a range. Obviously, every cartridge family should show an elevation in parts quality appropriate to price increases, so the N°8 offers more than just a solid chestnut body in place of its sister's mint green polyamide shell. I am no clairvoyant, but I wrote that the N°5's body recalled the legendary Mr Brier. The new cartridge confirms it for the N°8 is almost a dead-ringer for the earlier Japanese MC.

Starting at the tip, the N°8 uses a nude Shibata stylus fitted to a boron cantilever, in place of the N°5's nude Fine Line on an alloy cantilever. The fourth material change is the use of '8-Nines' copper wire instead of 4N. Then come the factory specs, and all are superior. Editor **PM**'s measurements provide independent verification – but the gains include a wider range of acceptable tracking forces, higher compliance, better separation and it tracks better. The new model is lighter, too, at 12.5g vs 15g, despite identical shapes. Ultimately? If you loved the N°5, you'll adore the N°8.



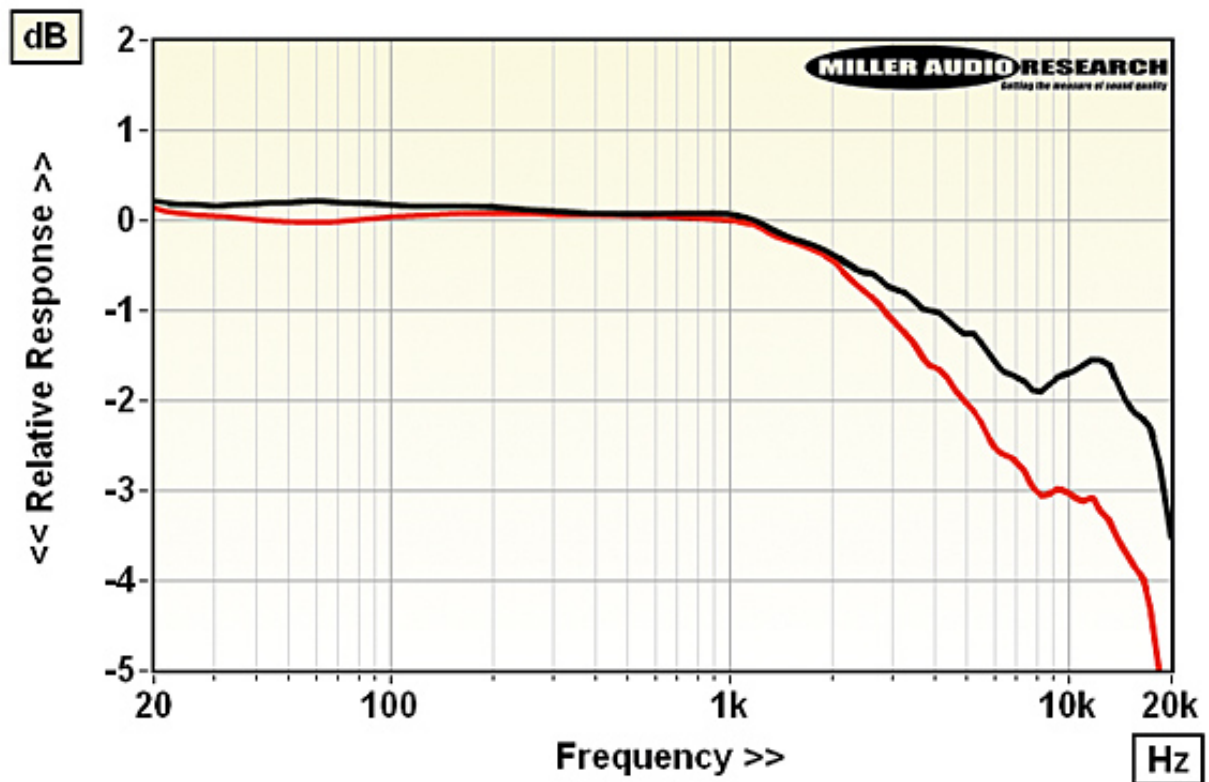
EAT Jo N°8 Cartridge Lab Report

Lab Report

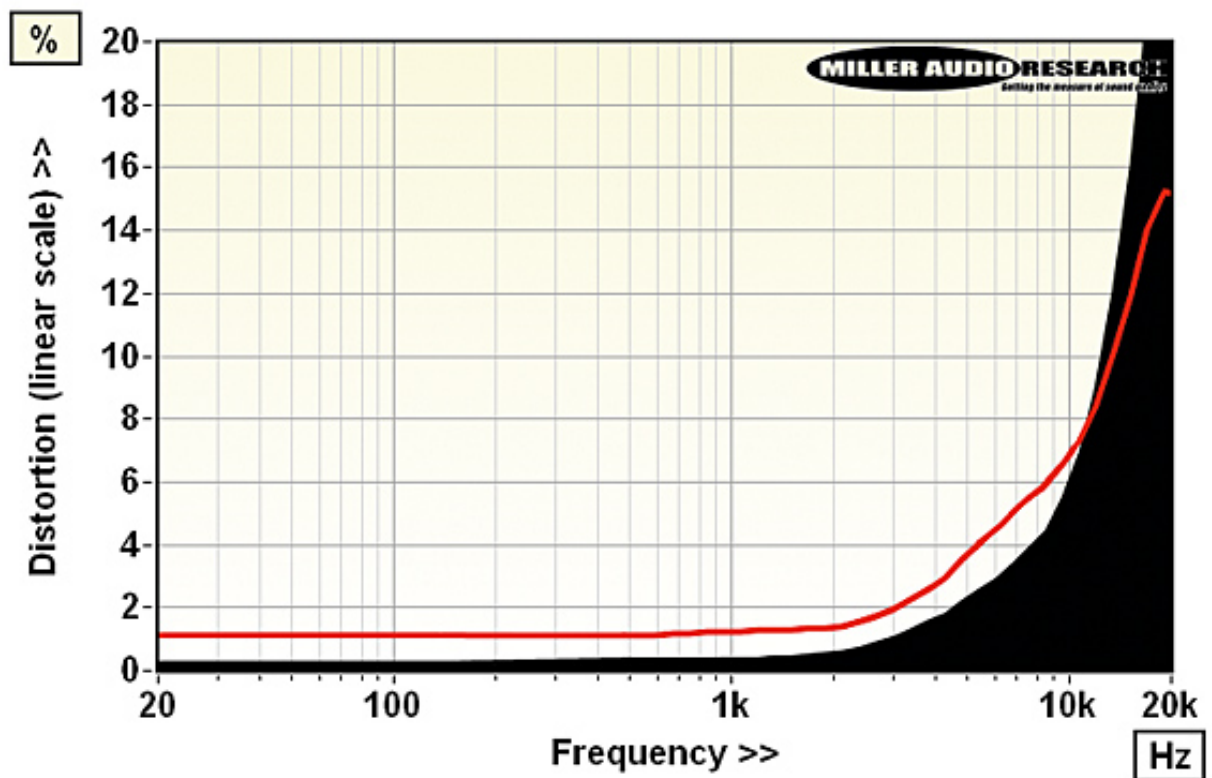
While the alloy frame, yoke, magnets and mounting plate of the N°8 all resemble those of the N°5 [HFN Dec '18] the revisions to the cantilever, diamond, copper windings, chestnut body material and – importantly – the polymer suspension have all made their mark. Output is a dB or so lower than the N°5 at $385\mu\text{V}$ (re. 1kHz/5cm/sec) while channel balance is tighter at 0.26dB and separation wider at 35dB through the midrange. The N°8 is also a slightly higher compliance design than the N°5 (15cu vs. 12cu) and some 2.5g lighter in weight, so therefore better suited to lower mass tonearms. Moreover it's a better tracker, even at the lower recommended 2.3g downforce. In practice the N°8 offers some $10\mu\text{m}$ 'headroom' over the N°5, achieving $>80\mu\text{m}/75\mu\text{m}$ via the left/right channels, respectively, and keeping hold of the maximum +18dB groove modulation (re. 315Hz/5cm/sec) at 1% THD where the N°5 had skipped off into the lead-out groove at its rated 2.4g downforce.

The 'nude Shibata' diamond is better cut and aligned too, so the N°8's VTA is far more accurate at 22° than the N°5's 28° . However, the N°8's body is very tall, so most tonearms will need to be raised at the rear to optimise VTA and frequency response. The latter mirrors that of the N°5 with a 'mild' mid/presence and slightly 'brighter' aspect to central images [black trace, Graph 1] than those at the periphery of the soundstage [red trace]. Generator symmetry is improved, however, and this is not only reflected in the reduced vertical distortion of $<2\%$ vs. $<3\%$ (N°8 vs N°5, from 20Hz-3kHz at -8dB re. 5cm/sec) [red trace, Graph 2] but also in the matching trend of THD vs. frequency between lateral and vertical cuts [black vs. red traces, Graph 2].

PM



Frequency response curves (-8dB re. 5cm/sec) lateral (L+R, black) versus vertical (L-R, red)



Lateral (L+R, black infill) and vertical (L-R, red) tracing and generator distortion (2nd-4th harmonics) vs. frequency from 20Hz-20kHz (-8dB re. 5cm/sec)