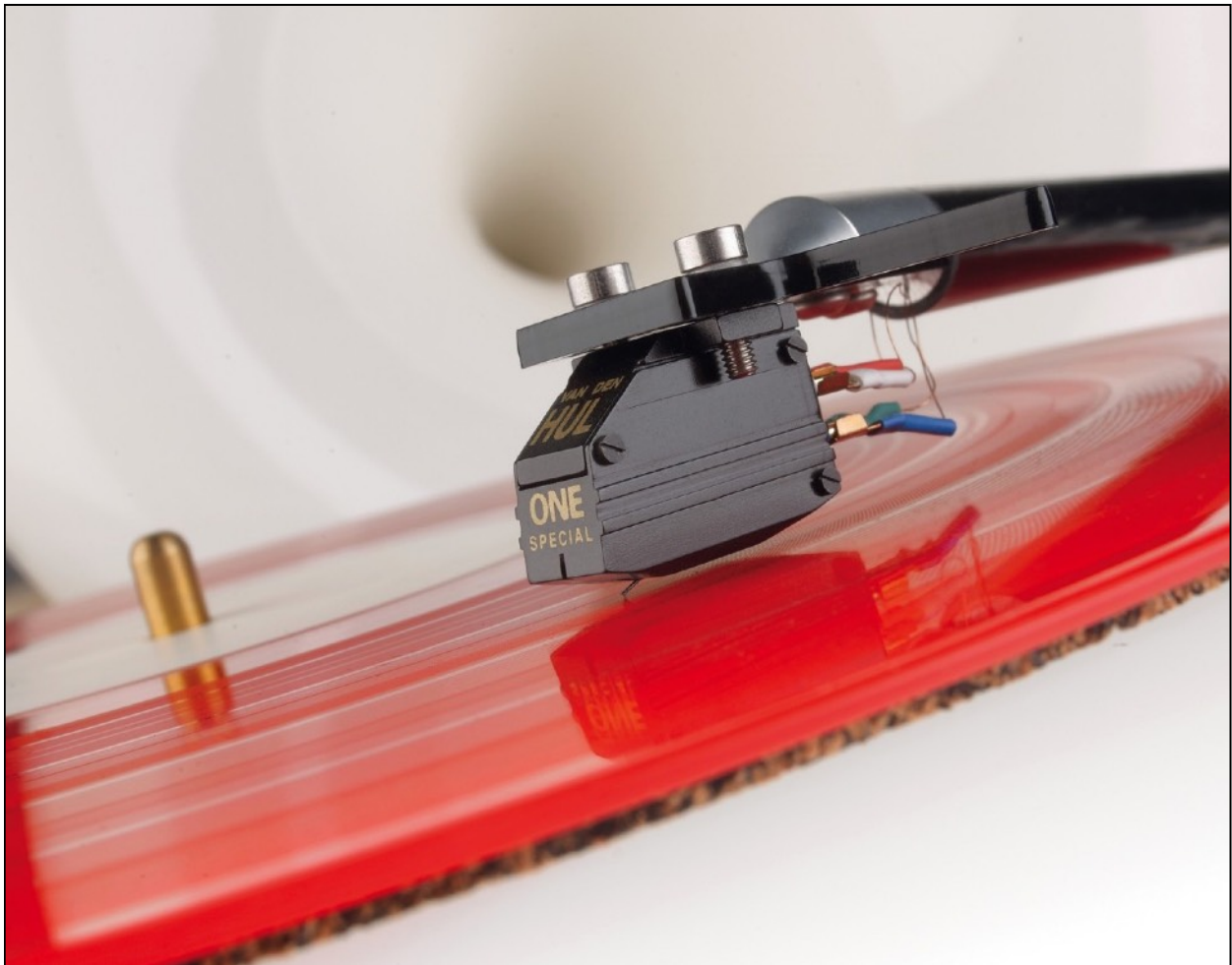


The Midnight Special



How nice: once again a Van den Hul pickup in the test. And someone with whom I enjoyed listening to music well beyond normal working hours - the ideal case in my job.

There is a running gag in the LP editorial office: When a Japanese engineer has reached retirement age, he goes back to his apprenticeship and then

goes into business for himself as a cartridge maker. Well, this does not only have to apply to the Far Eastern masters of the small scanning needles: Arlt van den Hul - you have to let it melt in your mouth, turned eighty in 2017. And he still insists on taking the entire production and even the service of pickups into his own hands. Because routine cannot be replaced by anything - and so it is still breathtaking the number of strokes with which the old master can carry out service work. And he still produces an impressive variety of his own designs by hand. But it is also crucial to always have access to the required components. And that is perhaps the secret of van den Hul: From a huge pool of different designs of individual parts, he can build an almost infinite number of variants of his pickups: From the carrier on which the generator is mounted to the magnets and coils to the needle carrier and Diamonds, to name just a few, van den Hul can combine almost anything and thus produce an individual pickup.



But let's get to our current test model MC One Special: As always, you can find the handwritten recommendations for the terminating impedance and the output voltage on the lid of the wooden box. Here we find a very healthy 0.75 millivolts, which should please most phono preamps. With a specified compliance of 35, the DDT is at the level of most other van den Huls in terms of needle compliance, so that with a total weight of nine grams it can be operated on light and medium-weight arms. You are right with a tracking force of just under 1.5 grams. The diamond with the sharp vdH-I needle cut sits on the boron needle carrier, which is no longer as extreme as the original version, which was feared at the time, thanks to polished edges. But: A sharp needle grind means no danger to the vinyl, as long as you pay attention to a clean adjustment and the correct support force. Because here the pressure that the needle exerts on the flank of the groove is even smaller, because the sides of the diamond have a significantly larger contact surface with the groove due to the deeper immersion, for example a spherical needle that only rests in two points. Incidentally, the MC One Special is a selected version of the MC 10, which has proven particularly good channel equality and low crosstalk in the measurement laboratory.



There is an offshoot, the MC Two, which is largely identical in construction, but is designed as a high output MC. What they all have in common is the metal body that Van den Hul uses in his "smaller" systems up to the Frog series - it is only in the high-end systems that he uses the open design, where you can marvel at the inner workings of the pickups. The system reacts very well to the setting of the terminating resistor: The tuning described below is achieved with an impedance value of 100 ohms (which can even be fallen below), while an increase to 200 ohms or even 500 ohms makes the very high tones appear a little more prominent leaves, while the fundamental and midrange appear a bit slimmer. Another field for the sound setting is the Vertical Tracking Angle (VTA), which can be set with the height adjustment of the tonearm on the base. Since the MC One reacts extremely sensitively here with its sharp needle cut, you should practice self-discipline here, otherwise the sound balance will "tip" into unpleasantness and it would be a real shame if such an excellent system had to give way.



Conveniently, the MC One Special was part of an overall package with the excellent Soulines Elgar DCX, which Stefan Becker from BT sales made available to me for a while - you can find the test of the drive with the new one-point tonearm from Edwards in the last issue the LP. With an alignment of the arm parallel to the plate, the MC One plays extremely neutral, precise and well balanced with a remarkably good fine resolution of the finest structures. By that I mean finely dynamic events in which the van den Hul always "hangs on the gas" as well as the reproduction of less prominent components of the overall sound - instruments in the background or fine reverb information that the sharp needle works out beautifully. This is also good for the spatial representation, which is implemented precisely and stably. The transmission of the room acoustics from the recording room to the listening room, including the staggering of instruments and voices next to and behind one another, is impressive again and again. In addition to the sovereign bass range, the combination offers a neutral mid-range with excellent fine-dynamic resolution. The MC One Special makes music with a large overview and dynamic calm and strength.

There is no preference for individual music styles here, opulent classical recordings turn out to be as impressive to the MC One as the intimate basic mood of productions in which a single voice is the focus, such as the spoken word recordings by Kate Tempest, in which it is with the van the Hul gives you goose bumps guarantee. His tonally, as I said, absolutely neutral tuning helps him, which offers full power in the bass and fundamental ranges, while the upper mids and highs act precisely and radiantly. Dynamic capability and detail resolution are almost at the level of the really big Van den Huls, so that one can clearly speak of a best buy in the middle price range.

Conclusion

The van den Hul MC One Special is probably the most balanced and complete in the affordable range of the old master's systems. Clearly a system to enjoy!