



Charisma Audio MC-1

The Charisma Audio MC-1 is a relatively new phono cartridge from a new brand, and having spent a good six weeks in its company, it's fair to say that the Canadian upstart can look forward to a bright future. It oozes class and tactile appeal.

The MC-1 is a low-output moving coil design with a generously proportioned alloy body, and a relatively long, annealed Inox steel cantilever tipped with a nude diamond line-contact stylus. The coils consist of multiple windings of 6N OCC copper, wound around a mild iron cross.

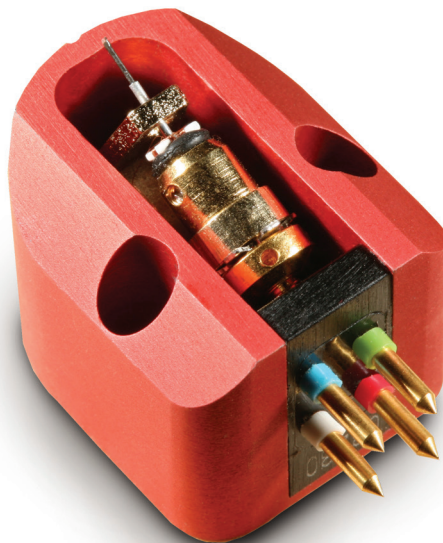
The MC-1's fine workmanship is clearly visible, with the open base of the cartridge affording a nice view of the innards. Given the delicacy of these devices, and the exposed cantilever, the absence of a stylus guard demands some care while mounting the cartridge.

Also worth noting is that the MC-1 is relatively heavy, perhaps requiring a slightly more substantial counterweight than usual in some instances. I had no problems with the two turntable/arm combos used for this review, though: the venerable Linn LP12/Ittok, and Avid's Diva II SP, combined with an SME 309.

Set-up using the latest version of Dr Feickert's protractor was a little more fastidious than with my regular Ortofon Cadenza Black, due to the shape of the cartridge body, which made alignment marks difficult to see. In fact, I reverted back to the previous protractor model to ensure the MC-1 was properly installed.

The review example wasn't brand new, so the recommended 50 hour break-in period wasn't necessary. I did most of my listening with the MC-1 installed on the Linn's Ittok tonearm, running at 1,9 g (exactly as recommended). The phono stage was local whizz Schalk Havenga's splendid and versatile Valve Audio Whisper, feeding an Ayre AX-5 in balanced mode.

I initially opted for a 100 ohm loading, but eventually ran a 500 ohm setting after finding that the lower value resulted in a slightly laid back sound that robbed



the upper trebles of some presence and attack. However, the Diva II SP/SME combo with a Sutherland 20/20 phono stage preferred a 200 ohm setting.

Notable in both cases was the MC-1's penchant for an inviting accessibility that drew me into the music from the word go. There was a real sense of refinement and polish, but without robbing the sound of treble detail or excitement, while the bass was bold, succinct and powerful.

In fact, tonal linearity was superb, with no untoward emphasis, and a smooth, progressive approach that captured the character and presence of the music with pleasing authenticity. The soundstage was ample, with a pervasive sense of space and air, allowing all the contributors to the sonic picture to be rendered with dimensional realism.

On Ryan Adams' fine *Gold*, the emotion of the singer's vocals was almost tactile, while the raw-edged guitar licks, powerhouse percussion and understated, muscular bass filled the room. You could feel as much as hear the energy!

The MC-1 isn't intimidated by scale, and easily reproduced the sheer joy, dynamics and pathos of the vintage Westminster Stereo recording of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 3* performed by the Vienna State Opera Orchestra under Hermann Scherchen. Im-

aging was precise and vivid, allowing the full impact of the orchestra's performance to be enjoyed.

Low surface noise levels, and an ability to track accurately regardless of material, were further highlights of a cartridge that never put a foot wrong. It's the kind of cartridge that reveals without becoming clinically analytical, focusing on the essence, the presence and the ultimate enjoyment of the music.

Yes sir, the MC-1 has real charm and *charisma* – but then, that should have been obvious ... And while not cheap, the retail pricing (even given our weakened currency) reflects decent value, too.

Deon Schoeman

VITAL STATS

Type..... Low-output moving coil
 Stylus type ... Line-contact nude diamond
 Output..... 0,4 mV
 Frequency response 20 Hz - 20 kHz
 Channel separation >30 dB
 Internal impedance 15 ohms
 Recommended load... 100 ohms - 1 kOhm
 Recommended tracking force 1,9 g
 Weight..... 13,6 g

Price R16 000

Verdict

A cartridge that finds a good compromise between airy, revealing trebles and a solid, confident bottom end. The result is an engaging, entertaining performance.

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OUR RATING: 84 / 100

