



# Spin doctor

The entry-level offering of three moving-coil carts, **Neville Roberts** finds the Ionic's performance is anything but entry-level

**A**VID HIFI's high-end three-cartridge lineup of moving-coil offerings consists of the flagship Reference Ruby, the Boron in the middle and the Ionic entry-level cart. All three follow similar design principles and the Ionic retains many of the features of the Reference Ruby. The first thing that strikes me is a similarity in appearance to Van den Hul's Colibri, in as much as I can see the coil assembly and some of the connecting wires. Unlike the Colibri, the magnet assembly is housed inside the body and the front part of the body protects the coils. Another nice feature is the clip-on stylus guard that slides from the front for when not in use. The body of the Ionic is a 5-axis CNC machined body designed to remove unwanted vibrations away from the critical record-stylus interface into the tonearm reducing 'needle-talk'. Both the coils and the cross-shape magnet assemblies are the same as the Ruby and Boron, with a low number of coil windings for very low dynamic inertia.

Initially, AVID employed a cobalt magnet in the design, but finally chose a powerful Alnico magnet that provides a reasonable output level of 0.32mV from this low-output cartridge. Quoted dynamic compliance is 8.5cu, which makes it a relatively low-compliance cart likely to suit tonearms with a high effective mass (25g or more). AVID says that the aluminium cantilever is "extra-long", and it's certainly one of the longest I've come across. This is intended to provide a great tracking ability. After installing the Ionic into my tonearm, setting up the arm with the recommended 2g tracking force, aligning the cartridge using a Baerwald alignment protractor and setting the VTA, I first check the cartridge/tonearm resonance and tracking ability using an Image Hi-Fi Vinyl Essentials test record. The arm/cartridge resonance peak is between the 8Hz and 10Hz test tracks with no resonance showing at all with the 6Hz or 14Hz tracks, which

is spot-on. The tracking ability tests show that the Ionic can track up to 80 microns, which is really excellent for a moving-coil cartridge.

## Sound quality

I connect the output of my record deck to my valve phono stage and start listening with Tchaikovsky's *Capriccio Italien* played by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. This performance is a Telarc LP noted for its exuberant presentation and the kettle drums in the closing section certainly give my bass drivers a good workout. Having said that, the Ionic does not overblow the bass hits on the drums and it all feels well controlled. The soundstage is reasonably wide, but not quite as deep as I'm used to with this recording. However, the overall presentation is very realistic and clear. Next up is a CBS LP of the American saxophonist Branford Marsalis' *Romances For Saxophone*. Listening to Satie's *Gymnopedie No.3* with The English Chamber Orchestra, the haunting sax stands out clearly from the orchestral accompaniment and the performance is very refined.

For some vocals, I turn to Simon & Garfunkel's *The Boxer*. This is a rather bright recording, which is typical of CBS records of the period, and so makes a great test for checking for any edginess to vocals. The Ionic delivers the harmonic vocals as bright but clear, open and not at all harsh. The guitar accompaniment is particularly tuneful. When the rhythmic patting of drums begins, the sound comes across as musical and not just dull thumps.

## Conclusion

The Ionic cartridge is a good all-round performer. Although the cost is at the upper end for an entry-level cartridge, it does seem to take a wide range of musical genres in its stride. Regardless, it will certainly be at home in a decent-quality tonearm ●

### DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
AVID HIFI Ionic  
**ORIGIN**  
UK  
**TYPE**  
Moving-coil cartridge  
**WEIGHT**  
9.1g  
**FEATURES**  
● Aluminium cantilever  
● Elliptical solid diamond stylus  
● Recommended tracking force: 2.0g±0.2g  
**DISTRIBUTOR**  
AVID HIFI  
**WEBSITE**  
avidhifi.com

### Hi-Fi Choice

#### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Refined and realistic performances  
**VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Nothing for an entry-level offering  
**BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WESAY:** Delivers a delightful sound across a wide range of music  
**FEATURES** ★★★★★

#### OVERALL

★★★★★