

# HIFICRITIC



AUDIO REVIEW JOURNAL

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A classic US high end given the Colloms twice over

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## Koetsu Urushi Sky Blue

After using a very early *Red* (Rosewood) *Signature* for many years, a year ago I was mightily taken by the blazing performance of a current production *Red T* in our last cartridge group test. Sadly, changes in the exchange rate have subsequently seen the price of a *Red T* rise to £1,990. Koetsu's least costly Black has a current price of £1,600, and a number of more expensive models include a current *Red Signature*, and the multi-coloured *Urushi* range.

Here we're assessing a brand new £3,700 *Urushi* called the *Sky Blue*, with blue lacquer finish over a narrower, dense composite body. High tensile threaded inserts are part of the metal back plate, so no fiddly nuts are required.

This latest *Urushi* uses an Alnico magnet, producing a healthy claimed 0.4mV output from low resistance coil windings. These are PCOC copper wire, rather than the alternative copper-and-silver wire found in the *Urushi Vermillion*. The cantilever is a long grain boron rod, and the stylus is a top quality elliptical with low tip mass. It weighs 10g and comes simply packed in a fragrant sandalwood box, but with no instructions.

This new cartridge needed running in. It actually sounded good right out of the box, but as 30 or so hours progressed, the sound became more focused and flowing, and transparency improved. Alignment was trouble free, and it was quite obvious when all was square and true – and not just visually, as this cartridge was accurately built relative to the external geometry. I left the Superline input loading at 1 kohm, but this cartridge was little affected by loading, except that clarity was reduced by the residual sound of the additional loading resistor. Downforce was fine at 2g, while this and the VTA can be adjusted to optimise the system tonal balance. Enough downforce for stable low noise tracking is a prerequisite, and when this is



achieved incidental groove noise is really low. Its open sounding top end means there's no need to lift the back of the arm at all, indeed it might benefit from being lowered a couple of millimetres below the horizontal.

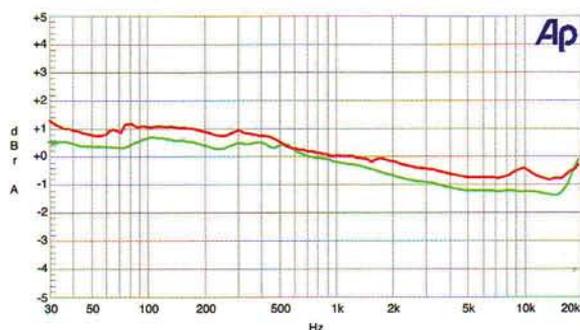
### Sound Quality

The difference in fundamental character between the *Blue Sky* and the *Red T* came as quite a surprise. The latter sounds strong, rich, even slightly 'bloomed' in the midrange, and has by comparison an identifiable tinge of congestion, but also delivers a massively confident and dynamic sound coupled with fine rhythm. To our ears the *Sky Blue* sounded slightly lighter and leaner at first, with a suggestion of less attack and power in the bass. But that impression was very quickly dispelled as we came to realise that this cartridge really hit the spot, substantially improving on the *Red T* in terms of natural openness, coupled with a more accurate tonal balance.

We have heard similar 'character' before, often accompanied by a clear shift in overall tonal balance, an uptilted, brighter frequency response which may tend to

**Absolute Sounds**  
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Price: £3,700

Koetsu Blue Cartridge  
L&R frequency response



Manufacturer: Koetsu	Model: Urushi Sky Blue (SN 60428)	Price (UK): £ 3,700
Type: low o/p moving coil	Specified Output: 0.4mV	Impedance: 3 ohms
Cantilever: long grain boron rod	Stylus type: nude elliptical	Enclosed body type
Cartridge weight: 10g	recommended downforce: 2g	Loading: 100+ ohms
Output 3.45cm/s: 0.3mV	frequency response 50Hz-10kHz	+/-0.8dB
Channel Balance: 0.38dB	frequency response 30Hz-20kHz	+/-1.1 dB
Separation:	34dB typically, 50Hz to 8kHz	20dB at 20kHz
Distortion:	300Hz lateral +9dB: 0.4 %	300Hz vertical +6dB: 1.9 %
Trackability, 300Hz:	300Hz lateral +15dB 2.5g	300Hz vertical +12dB: 1g
Supertrack Test:	+18dB lateral	Failed at 3.5g
Stylus finish and alignment:	Finish excellent	Alignment excellent
LF resonance, 15g test arm:	Frequency: 10.5Hz	Rise: 15dB
Suggested arm type:	effective mass: 9-16g	Damping needed?: optional