EAT Jo No8

After wowing the audio community with the Jo No5 moving-coil cartridge, EAT has unleashed the second in the family – the Jo No8. And it’s an even bigger knock-out

Review: Ken Kessler Lab: Paul Miller

Having previously dipped its toe in the water with the ‘Marathon’, EAT decided to take a leap with the Jo No8 moving-coil cartridge [HFN Mar ‘12] – effectively a rebodied-in-vain Japanese design – EAT stunned us with a cartridge that still had the hallmark of its Japanese origin, but was better in every way. The Jo No5 [HFN Dec ‘18] was a rethought revision of the earlier Japanese MC. Starting at the tip [see inset pic], the No5’s Shibata stylus was in place of the No8’s Shibata stylus fitted to a boron cantilever, in place of the No5’s a boron-alloy cantilever. Yet, despite identical shapes. Ultimately? If you loved the No5’s design, you’ll love the No8. But if you preferred the No5’s engineering, it’s hard to love the No8. And one aspect of cartridge set-up which many of you might deal with in near-religious terms, but which I find 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 phone stage, and I long ago gave up slavery following instruction manuals, preferring instead to set the loading to ear. This is especially enjoyable with phono cartridges like the E-Glo that offer continuously variable rotary settings or even a simple fixed value, which enable you to find the best balance between gain and sound quality.

As it turned out, the recommended load of ‘15ohms’ was merely a starting point and I settled on 80ohms most of the time, occasionally adjusting the E-Glo to 1500ohms 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 aim to get the gain right for the No8, and for the No5, though still utterly enjoyable, like eating a greasy burger when on a diet. The No8 added ample control and dynamism 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 No8 placed The Band in the room, across its width and beyond the outer edges of the speakers.

WORTH THE WEIGHT

The tracking force will horrified those who shunned V15s, as the optimum setting for this cartridge is a porky 2.5g. This is in stark contrast to what was recommended for the No5. It didn’t take long to discover that the No8 was less critical about this than the No5, and no mistracking was experienced even at 2g [see PM’s Lab Report, p63]. Again, one’s ears should be the final arbiter, and I did my utmost to test the No8 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, it’s specialised to find accurate settings. I suspect there may even be cartridges as universal as any, the expanding catalogue of turntables, arms, phono stages and its recently-unveiled integrated amplifier.

The Genesis Linn tonearm opted for EAT’s second model, the Jo No8. To come in at a much dearer £2290. Her choice for the leap upward in pricing was obvious, the No5 is so good. The company’s top turntable, the N8 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, it’s specialised to find accurate settings. I suspect there may even be cartridges as universal as any, the expanding catalogue of turntables, arms, phono stages and its recently-unveiled integrated amplifier.

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heroes, from The Glitter Band to Adam & The Ants. It’s all about in-your-face attack, and the EAT No 8 has these grrrrl slapping you upside the head. As transcendent as the No 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 is what it’s all about. The No 8 can fill a room and have you reaching for your air guitar before you can say ‘Cheap An’ Nasty’. But that is to be a snob: this stuff is what it’s all about. The No 8 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 first Koetsu Urushis all those years ago, the No 8, from 20Hz-3kHz at ~8dB re. 5cm/sec [red 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 5 vs N 8) and keeping hold of the maximum +18dB groove modulation (re. 315Hz/5cm/sec) at 1% THD where the N 5 had slipped off into the lead-out groove at its rated 2.4g downforce.

The ‘nude Shibata’ diamond is better cut and aligned too, and we’re no picky about Mr Brier and the first Koetsu Urushis all those years ago, the No 8 is more refined than that in Whitesnake that other pick-ups would 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 No 8 looks as beautiful as it sounds. It is self-evidently an artisan product that narrows the gap between high-end audio and luxury goods. But you’ll be excused for staring at the end of your tonearm for inordinate amounts of time once a Jo No 8 arrives there.

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 No 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 No 8 arrives there.

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

This makes two in a row for EAT, Jo No 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.

Sound Quality: 88%

88%