



**Qobuz Playlist:** Motörhead, Willie Nelson, Flea, Michael Stipe, Raye & many more

**On the go!** FiiO's new DM15 R2R portable CD player



# Hi-Fi Choice

**PASSION FOR SOUND**

Issue No. 540

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## GRAND PRIX

A favourite refined: Technics' SL-1500CS direct-drive deck is a smooth oscillator

**HEAVY LIFTER**  
Audio Origami's PU8 tonearm

**BUYING GUIDE**  
100+ Essential Components p104



**OLD GOLD**  
NAD's C 3030 retro-styled integrated amp

**COMFORT ZONE**  
Audio-Technica's ATH-ADX7000 open-back headphone

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Rega Reference EBLT turntable upgrade belt

**BUILT BY ARTISANS**  
Analog Relax EX300 MC cartridge

**"LIKE A SWISS ARMY KNIFE!"**



**D'Agostino's ace Pendulum integrated amplifier**

**A CLASSIC EVOLVED**



**PMC's stunning prophecy1 standmount loudspeaker**

**BABY BASS BANGER!**



**Velodyne Acoustics' mighty MiniVee X active subwoofer**





# Taste of the high life



The entry-level cart from AR is intended to give a flavour of its high-end offerings.

**Ed Selley** luxuriates in the experience

**C**onfronted with the phrase ‘entry-level’ and the EX300’s not inconsequential price tag, you might reasonably ask what actually constitutes ‘high end’ for Analog Relax. The reality is that the upper models from the Tokyo-based concern extend well into five figures.

The spec on offer here is relatively conventional. It’s a moving-coil design tipped by a bonded elliptical stylus on an aluminium cantilever. At a point where some very advanced stylus profiles are on sale, this might feel decidedly low tech but Analog Relax argues that yielding the benefits of nude styli requires much higher production tolerances than some companies would have you believe.

The generator section is made of 6N pure copper windings and is unusual in that impedance is quoted as a rather low 15ohm and: “more than 0.5mV” output. This makes the EX300 a solid choice for anyone using a combination of moving-magnet phono stage and external step-up transformer.

The body of the Analog Relax is made from hand-finished walnut and starts life as a solid block, which is then cut to fit the generator and stylus to give the cartridge its distinctive shape before receiving a layer of beeswax to seal it. Despite the use of the word ‘artisan’ which is often enough to give me the jitters on its own, the EX300 is actually entirely undemanding to fit and live with. The pins on the back are well spaced, the body is threaded to allow for use with mounting bolts and there is a large and usefully protective stylus guard supplied as well. Perhaps the only thing to pay attention to is that the EX300 is a relatively tall design and will benefit from adjustable VTA on most turntables – something that is generally present on the sort of designs it will be matched with.

## Sound quality

Mounted on our resident Vertere MG-1 MkII Magic Groove (HFC 501) turntable and running into a Cyrus Phono Signature (HFC 408), the

EX300 throws in a few surprises from the off. Listening to it with other more advanced stylus profiles on hand doesn’t give any indication that it is down on fine detail. The wonderfully intricate *Outerstate* by Kessoncodia is delivered with the articulation and nuance it needs to shine. Some truly forensic testing to specific passages suggests that there are tiny nuances that are harder to discern, but you’d really need to be running side-by-side tests to find them.

The EX300 has a quality with voices and stringed instruments in particular that is deeply impressive. The sublime *Every Day* by the Cinematic Orchestra has a presence and realism that is genuinely spectacular even when the asking price is considered. Everything is presented in a soundstage that – admittedly assisted by the Vertere – is expansive but focused and orderly.

What truly impresses me is that none of these qualities result in the EX300 sounding overly lush or in any way sluggish. It positively tears through the ballistic eponymously titled debut from Charlotte De Witte in a way that you might not generally assume an artisan Japanese cartridge is going to do and nothing I play from the uncivilised end of my record collection results in it sounding unhappy or out of its depth. At my most critical, I would say there are designs on the market that can deliver both a fraction more low-end extension and definition, but fewer of them can match what the EX300 is doing from 100Hz and up.

## Conclusion

Having spent some time with the more expensive EX500, if you like what this entry run of Analog Relax can do, the same qualities are refined and honed as you proceed up the range. This is a fine example of a ‘beyond the numbers’ cartridge that uses high-quality engineering to deliver a captivating performance ●

### DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
Analog Relax EX300

**ORIGIN**  
Japan

**TYPE**  
Moving-coil cartridge

**WEIGHT**  
10g (not including fittings)

**FEATURES**  
● Walnut body  
● Bonded elliptical diamond stylus  
● Aluminium Cantilever

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Absolute Sounds

**WEBSITE**  
analogrelax.com  
absolutesounds.com

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY**  
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Superbly rich and involving sound; well finished; very user-friendly

**VALUE FOR MONEY**  
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Some limits to bass extension; it’s fairly tall

**BUILD QUALITY**  
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** A great introduction to Analog Relax that will delight many

**FEATURES**  
★★★★★

### OVERALL

