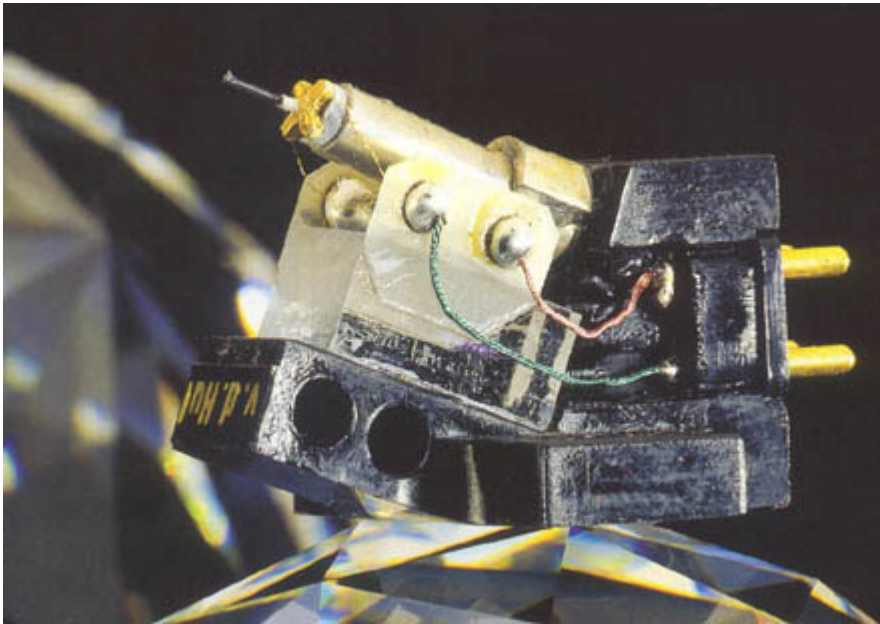


Van den Hul The Colibri Special X

*Original text by Dirk Sommer, Photos: Rolf Winter
Image HiFi 6/2000 (Translation from German)*



Tirelessly Aalt Jouk van den Hul keeps ensuring that things don't become boring to the analog fan: He either subjects his successful systems to a permanent upgrade or surprises with completely new approaches — like now with The Colibri

Since closed cartridge housings have gotten out of fashion the sight of a classic Moving Coil cartridge will be familiar to most analog fans. The Colibri however does not at all correspond to this familiar picture: The front-pole is missing! And the rear-pole likewise! Therefore the magnet can't be situated in between, placed above the coil unit and its suspension wire holding tube. The magnet here sits behind the suspension tube. The simplification of the magnetic circuit is intended to achieve less distortion and noise. Leaving out the front-pole allows use of a distinctly shorter cantilever; The moved mass decreases, therefore the stylus, cantilever and coil unit should be able to follow the deflections of the groove faster and more accurately. When looking at the Colibri's technical data one feels carried back for decades: At the end of the '70s lightweight high compliance phono cartridges were full in trend. Think for instance of the legendary AKG P8ES or the ATR version based on it. But at that time also the appropriate light tonearms were available, as for example the SME Series III, the Mayware Formula IV and the Hadcock GH 228, which is now again available by the way. Nevertheless it wouldn't make a sense to test a system in an arm that one was familiar with 20 years ago — and that would have almost caused a single point suspension phobia. The effective mass of almost all other current tonearms is situated around the upper boundary of what the Dutch cartridge-specialist recommends for his bird of paradise (*).

(* Remark: The Colibri is currently available in a number of versions with different output and system weight. Latter also enables the use of heavier tonearms. For more details about all available versions please refer to [our product information about The COLIBRI](#). —A.J. van den Hul B.V.

A reader had warned me; With the Colibri one sometimes even would need to fit the headshell with small sheets of lead in order to get the tonearm in balance — this extra increases the mass and therefore might not be directly beneficial. Therefore I try it with the Immedia, which tracking force can be adjusted, however only after I have freed the counterweight from its two outer disks.

No matter whether the construction height of the Colibri or the low tracking weight is to blame: The arm/system combination tends to totter easily around the bearing point, which with the Immedia after all is situated exactly at record level. This however can be dealt with by a very moderate damping — in the playing position only a small part of the tonearm bearing house dips into the oil bath. And already the Colibri feels itself ear-pleasingly well in the Immedia, this except for a slight roughness in the high tone area, which however is caused by missing play-in time. As warming up there is an abundance of old Tom Waits and Ry Cooder records, and those come over energy-loaded and extremely finely resolved. Gradually the high tone

information not only becomes clearly more supple, but also shines in increasingly fuller tonal color. The bass extends enormously deeply down and distinguishes itself through speed and precision.

With Dick Schorys impulse fireworks “Duel On The Skins” amid the maddest spectacle for the first time I notice a melody instrument resounding — and I’ve really often heard this record. Short cable changing proves: The Insider in the Breuer does not by any means withhold this information from me, but has never before lifted it above my threshold of perception. The Clearaudio as a whole sounds somewhat rounder, earthier, while the Colibri fascinates with an almost unbelievable abundance of detail and airyness — and that without even the slightest touch of coldness. As said, even in non played-in state, listening for hours to the not exactly audiophile rock records turned into pure pleasure.

In exchange the Colibri with its low output voltage puts quite high demands on the input stage. So, for example with the Antares the noise floor still clearly lies below the groove noise, though can nevertheless be heard when the arm is raised and the volume control is set at high level. Here the Lukaschek PP-1 is slightly more quiet and with its somewhat more full-bodied and warmer tuning it also tonally harmonizes very well with the Colibri. With the Antares on the other hand the soundstage seems to be a touch more generously dimensioned. Absolutely astonishing what these in their characteristics quite different and in comparison to the price of the system still extremely affordable phono preamplifiers are able to achieve: It therefore quite makes sense to invest into a cartridge like the Colibri — all the more since Mr. van den Hul also calculates the cost for a needle exchange extremely moderately — and to use your head with the purchase of the phono preamplifier. On the other hand, it would be a pity for instance to do without the subtlest dynamics and the last breath of spatial extension which the Phono 1 renders audible thanks to its excellent signal-to-noise ratio.

image x-tract

The demands to the phono preamplifier, the tonearm and the buyer’s finances already make it clear: The Colibri is a system for the engaged, experienced analog fan. Only he will recognize what special place the Colibri takes because of its “overfoaming” temperament and its simply immense love for detail and accuracy. To me the Colibri ranks among the three, four best phono cartridges — no, not of the world, the galaxy or the universe, but staying right at home: that I had the pleasure to be able to listen to.

Test system components		image information	
Turntable:	Audiolabor Konstant with tube power supply and heating	Phono cartridge Van den Hul The Colibri Special X	
Phono Cartridge:	Clearaudio Insider	Operating principle:	Moving Coil
Tonearm:	Breuer type 8, Immedia RPM 2	Static compliance:	35 mm/N
Phono preamp:	Progressive Audio Phono 1, Omtec Antares i, Lukaschek PP-1	Recommended tracking force:	13.5 - 15 mN
Preamplifier:	Brinkmann prototype	Recommended load impedance:	500 Ohm
Power amplifier:	Higher Fidelity 138	Stylus shape:	van den Hul 1S
Loudspeakers:	Trenner & Friedl Gordon	Output voltage:	0.23 mV at 5.7 cm/s eff.
Cabling:	Ortofon TSW 5000 Silver, Sun Wire, Flatline SPM, Audioplan Powercord S	System weight:	3.25 g
Accessories:	Sun multi-way mains outlet blocks, Audioplan Powerstar, Acapella bases and blocks, Clearaudio Magix ² , Pagode racks	Price:	See Advisory Retail Pricelist
		Warranty:	12 Months
		Manufacturer’s remark:	This review discusses a previous low output version of The Colibri. The Colibri is currently available in a number of versions with different output and system weight; Please refer to our product information about The COLIBRI . — A.J. van den Hul B.V.