

# Group test verdict

Having had a wonderful time taking all six cartridges for a spin, a conflicted **Neville Roberts** sums up his experience as he struggles to find a winner

**TRYING TO ARRIVE** at a winner was always going to be difficult. Each cartridge has its own special character and personal preference is inevitably going to be a factor in assessments, as with most things hi-fi, but here is my run-down on these six delights.

The Nagaoka treats me to a really natural-sounding presentation across all of the musical choices. It offers a great sense of realism and is a joy to audition. Although it's the lowest-priced cartridge in the group and the cantilever is a bit delicate, it more than holds its own musically among strong competition.

The Sumiko is very easy on the ear and relaxing to listen to. It takes the dynamics of a large orchestra in its stride and demonstrates a wonderful tracking ability. Bass response is beefy, powerful and punchy, but some may prefer a slightly brighter presentation overall.

As its name suggests, the MoFi MasterTracker is another great tracking cart. It gives a smooth presentation without the edginess often associated with MM designs. Also, the music is delightfully detailed and clear, although the extreme top end feels a little rolled-off at times.

Living up to its name in equal measure, the Goldring delivers a heroic performance with great clarity, detail and timing. It presents a neutral tonal balance across all types of music. On the down side, stereo imaging is a tad 'left and right' in comparison with the others.

With its rustic wooden body, the Grado offers a bright performance across the full musical spectrum, coupled with a well-controlled and punchy bass response. On the downside, it's difficult to see the stylus tip for cuing without bending down to look sideways at it.



**WINNER**

The Vertere Sabre has me captivated right from the first piece that I spin. It presents a totally believable sound, whether playing a solo instrument or a full orchestra. Bass is tight and punchy, and the midrange and top-end clear, refined and totally captivating.



Make/model	Goldring Eroica HX	Grado Timbre Sonata3	MoFi Electronics MasterTracker	Nagaoka JT-80BK	Sumiko Amethyst	Vertere Sabre
<b>Price</b>	£600	£630	£800	£500	£630	£900
<b>Sound</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Value</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Build</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Features</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Overall</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
	An easy way to experience some of the delights of an MC cartridge	Once set up correctly, you can expect to enjoy a bright top end and punchy bass	A great tracking cartridge that delivers music that flows beautifully	A cartridge that offers a joyfully realistic and refined sound	A relaxed-sounding cartridge that can be listened to for hours on end	A wonderful cart that delivers across the full spectrum of musical requirements
<b>Website</b>	goldring.co.uk	gradolabs.com	mofielectronics.com	nagaoka.co.jp	sumikophonocartridges.com	vertereacoustics.com

Key features						
Type	Moving coil	Moving iron	Moving magnet	Moving magnet	Moving magnet	Moving magnet
<b>Removable stylus</b>	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Cantilever</b>	Aluminium	Aluminium	Tapered design	Boron	Aluminium	Aluminium
<b>Tracking force</b>	1.5g-2g	1.6g-1.9g	1.8g-2.2g	1.3g-1.8g	1.8g-2.2g	1.9g-2.1g
<b>Compliance</b>	25mm/N	20µm/mN	10x10 <sup>6</sup> cm/dyne	7.3x10 <sup>6</sup> cm/dyne	12x10 <sup>6</sup> cm/dyne	10x10 <sup>6</sup> cm/dyne

**TRY WITH THESE**

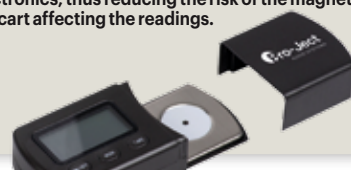
**CARTRIDGE CLEANER:**  
Lyra SPT Stylus Performance Treatment **£45**

By using the accompanying brush with its super-soft bristles, a very small amount of the cleaning fluid can be applied to the stylus tip only – not the cantilever assembly – as the fluid should not come into contact with any other part of the cartridge.



**TRACKING FORCE GAUGE:**  
Pro-Ject Measure it E **£30**

The Measure it E is a highly accurate electronic balance that is designed for measuring stylus tracking forces up to 5g in 0.002g increments. Make sure the stylus support platform is located away from the sensitive electronics, thus reducing the risk of the magnets in the cart affecting the readings.



**ANTI-STATIC GUN:**  
Milty Zerostat 3 **£50 HFC 411**

Static charge is the sworn enemy of good sound reproduction and can be induced simply by sliding a record in or out of a sleeve. Charges can also build up during playing, and when they discharge, they result in an audible click.





# Vertere Sabre £900

Introducing the premium moving-magnet cartridge offered by Touraj Moghaddam's company

**DETAILS**

- PRODUCT**  
Vertere Sabre
- ORIGIN**  
High-output, moving-magnet cartridge
- TYPE**  
UK
- WEIGHT**  
10.3g
- FEATURES**
  - Aluminium body
  - Stylus tip: elliptical diamond
  - Tracking force: 1.9g-2.1g
- DISTRIBUTOR**  
Vertere Ltd.

**U**K's Vertere manufactures three phono cartridges – its top-of-the-range Mystic moving coil (HFC 499), the entry-level Magneto moving magnet and the premium moving-magnet Sabre before you here. According to the company's CEO and Founder, Touraj Moghaddam, the aim of the company's products is to bring the performance of audio systems at home as close as possible to the original master in order to reproduce what the musicians, mastering and cutting engineers intend for us to hear. The Sabre has been designed with this aim firmly in mind. Moghaddam has been designing turntables since 1984, but it wasn't until the birth of Vertere that he started creating his reference tonearms to assist him. He says that this approach helped him to identify the weakest links in a system and

therefore determine how the company should develop its products moving into the future.

The Sabre's body is precision-machined from solid aluminium alloy with its final mass tuned to the generator. This design, according to Vertere, is intended to control unwanted mechanical vibrations and provide the best physical support for the generator mechanism. The cartridge employs an Alnico magnet, which has a strong magnetism-to-size

## The soundstage has superb depth and width, and appears startlingly real

ratio and offers a stable and long-term magnetic field.

The generator is fixed to the body with four spike screws that have been carefully positioned and tightened for best rigidity and performance. The top of the body has three contact areas to provide the best physical coupling of the Sabre to the headshell. Also, there is a ridge machined on its top front to assist with precise alignment.

The cantilever and suspension are individually positioned and aligned at Vertere, with the aim of maximising musical performance. However, this means the stylus assembly is not user-replaceable. The elliptical diamond stylus tip is bonded to an

aluminium tube cantilever and has been designed to give good tracking ability and a low surface noise without compromising on high frequency response. Below 15Hz to over 25kHz is quoted, which the company credits to the cartridge having a low mass moving magnet and a healthy output of 4.0mV.

### Sound quality

Starting off with the Don Rendell and Ian Carr Quintet's *Blue Mosque*, the music comes across with fantastic clarity. The brass instruments have a great presence with no sense of harshness. In particular, the sax on the left has an amazing authenticity. The performance is startlingly real and the three-dimensional soundstage has superb depth and width. In fact, my loudspeakers seem to disappear altogether as the source of the music and the soundstage extends beyond the constraints of the two cabinets.

With JS Bach's *Partita No. 1*, the performance comes over as extremely refined. As with *Blue Mosque*, the presence of the instrument is scarily real and, if I close my eyes, I can easily believe that Pinnock is playing in front of me. The harpsichord has lashings of detail and clarity.

The Sabre seems equally at home with Lyn Stanley's vocals on *The Way You Look Tonight*. Of particular note is the bass on this 45rpm LP, which is really tight and punchy.

Listening to *Capriccio Espagnol*, the exciting opening movement is powerful, spacious and open. In fact, it is everything I have come to expect from this audiophile recording from Chasing The Dragon. Like the Bach *Partita*, the full orchestra comes across as very refined, and the playing by the NSO seems effortless from start to finish.

There is little to complain about with Vertere's Sabre. It seems to encapsulate many of the top qualities I associate with moving-coil carts ●



**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

<b>SOUND QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>LIKE:</b> Refined and authoritative sound quality at home across a wide range of music
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ★★★★★	<b>DISLIKE:</b> Nothing
<b>BUILD QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>WE SAY:</b> A wonderful MM cartridge that seems to deliver across the full spectrum of requirements
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	
<b>OVERALL</b> ★★★★★	