the ear
HI-FI MUSIC GEAR

hardware review

Dynavector DV-10X5 MkII Low

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Readers might have the feeling that they have read about this cartridge before on The Ear, in fact quite recently. They are not wholly wrong. There are now two versions of the Dynavector DV-10X5 MkII. In April last year my colleague Chris Kelly wrote about his time with the high output version of the DV-10X5 MkII, itself a refresh of an original Dynavector design that, Chris noted, dates from 1978. It speaks volumes that the first 10X5 was regarded both by retailers and customers as a sweet spot of value in its price band, and that it sold so successfully for so long. Eventually though, time caught up with it and Dynavector decided that a refresh was in order.

The MKII high output version that Chris reviewed retains the distinctive red body of the original 10X5, but now sports a hardened aluminium cantilever and nude diamond Shibata III line contact stylus for, says Dynavector, better tracking. Inside, magnetic flux dumping, patented soft magnetism and powerful neodymium magnets found further up the Dynavector range are employed, along with upgraded wiring. The cartridge weighs 7.5g, achieves channel separation of 25dB, channel balance of 1.0dB, has a compliance of 12mm/N, tracks at a recommended 1.8 to 2.2g, and has an output of 2.8mV.

The newly-launched low output DV-10X5 MkII, subject of this review, looks identical to its high output sibling, apart from the word Low printed on the front of the mounting flange. It is the same price, has the same red body, the same cantilever and stylus – in fact it *is* physically identical in every respect, apart from having fewer turns of the fine wire that forms the moving coils.

Difference: DV 10X5 high and low

The result of this seemingly modest difference is two-fold; the output is around a fifth that of the high output version at just 0.5mV, making a moving coil phono stage or step-up transformer necessary, and the sonic performance is superior, more extended, airier, with an ability to resolve additional textural detail.

If that reads like a particularly confident judgement, that's because it is. When the Editor invited me to review the DV-10X5 MK II Low Output cartridge he was unaware that I own a high

output version. I bought it last year as an affordable spare in case of damage to my regular Soundsmith Paua II moving iron cartridge, and for those times when a review amplifier or phono stage needs more millivolts than the Paua II produces.

It was therefore possible to conduct back-to-back tests with the two versions of the Dynavector cartridge and form a particularly clear view of their merits, almost, but not quite, unpolluted by the vagaries of audio memory, since the swap from one cartridge to the other took around 10 minutes. I installed both the cartridges in turn on an Audio Note Arm Three/II, mounted on an Audio Note TT Three turntable powered by the company's PSU4. The high output signal was fed into the moving magnet input of a PS Audio Stellar phono stage while the low output signal entered via the Stellar's higher-gain moving coil inputs.

I hope those already familiar with the basics of cartridge design will forgive this, but the obvious question on the lips of the neophyte at this moment is: "Why bother with a low output version?"

Why have a low output moving coil

The answer is: tracking. Soundsmith's Peter Lederman cleverly uses the term 'analogue jitter' to describe the way a poorly tracking stylus can bounce from side to side, not making consistent contact with the groove as it passes and therefore missing some of the information encoded therein.

Influences on tracking ability include a number ofi nterrelated factors including stylus shape, compliance, overall cartridge weight and effective stylus tip mass, the latter directly influenced by the weight at the opposite end of the cantilever which, in the case of a moving coil cartridge, is the windings of fine wire that oscillate in the field produced by fixed magnets. The heavier the coils assembly, the greater the effective tip mass and the lower the ability of the stylus to faithfully trace the groove. Reduce the weight of the coils by using fewer turns of wire, output goes down and tracking ability, all other things being equal, goes up. We might hear more musical detail from the groove. Because the two MK II Dynavectors are otherwise identical, they provided a rare opportunity to hear what happens when coil mass (and thereby effective tip mass) is reduced.

A side note of context is required here. If a buyer wants a moving coil cartridge with enough output to feed a moving magnet phono stage, the high output DV-10X5 is among a very few contenders at that price point able to deliver properly rounded and satisfying sonic results. It is a horse designed for a particular course, and a fine horse it is too, comparatively low cost, but by no means a disgrace to its more costly Dynavector stablemates.

Fewer coils = more detail

However, in my vinyl rig, the low output DV-10X5 MkII, with its lighter coils, showed that less mass really does translate into enhanced musical detail. I played Siesta, the Miles Davis/Marcus Miller collaboration soundtrack to the 1987 film of the same name. Miller produced

Siesta and played most of the instruments on the recording, apart, of course, from the trumpet blown expressively and distinctively by Davis. The recording is a sonically dense soundscape constructed of multiple short, some might say disjointed, pieces that perhaps not surprisingly make best sense when heard while watching the movie. Miller uses a battery of stringed, blown and struck instruments to build the supporting structure for Davis, with the result that at times Siesta comes across more as a high-fi demonstration recording than a soundtrack. By all means blame me if Siesta is now played in every other room at the coming Bristol Hi-Fi Show.

The point here is there is enough going on in the complex mix to allow the low output Dynavector to show its enhanced resolving power. Tiny dynamic events such as the gentlest of insistent cymbal taps and vanishingly breathy flute puffs were muted when transcribed by the high output 10X5 while the low output version brought them more to the fore to claim our attention. The album's third track, Augustine, co-composed by Davis and Miller, features trumpet and clarinet weaving a duet around each other. The low output 10X5 rendered the trumpet and clarinet with appropriate weight and glow, but also showed more clearly that the track is recorded with heavy use of post-echo; an effect which the high output version acknowledged, but dialled back somewhat. I wondered ifi t might trade a little tonal warmth for these gains, but no, at least in the context of my review system, and given a loading of 100 Ohms by the Stellar phono stage, the low output version mirrored the vivid, rich musicality ofi ts high output sibling.

If these listening observations sound arcane, I guess to an extent they are, but then again that's the reality of many audiophile judgements. Are we merely given a satisfying sense of a performance with timing, tonal texture, dynamic contrast and energy pretty much intact? Or is it closer to ten tenths with a sense of the acoustic of the space in which the recording was made, the whispered interaction between performers, trails of notes that we fancy linger more naturally rather than being foreshortened? And so on.

Dynavector DV-10X5 MkII Low conclusion

Ifi t's not obvious by now, I found that the DV-10X5 MkII Low Output is as musically satisfying as its high output stablemate. But then it goes on to give a little more still – the closer to ten tenths that we audiophiles crave. That it does so for the same money as the high output version makes it a no-brainer, as long as we have a quality moving coil phono stage to hand. Highly recommended.