

A TRUE GOLDEN BOY

Few cartridge manufacturers can claim to have made such a rapid start on the German market as Skyanalog. And the next coup of the specialists from the Far East is already here: a veritable reference MC.





Teammates

Turntable:

- TechDAS Air Force III

Tonearms:

- Reed 1X
- Reed 3P

Phono preamp:

- Clearaudio Balance Reference Phono

Preamplifier:

- NEM PRA-5

Active crossover:

- JBL 5235

Power amplifier:

- Pure Dynamics Class-A Monos
- Yamaha P-2200

Loudspeaker:

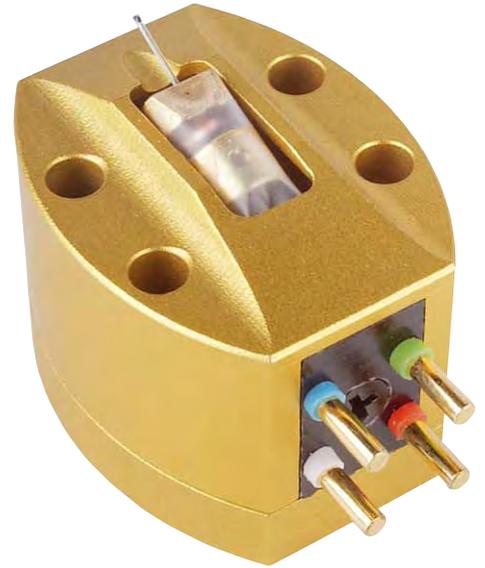
- JBL 4355

Competitors

Pickup Cartridges:

- Benz LP-S
- Skyanalog G1

And it makes no secret of its claim: It is also appropriately called „Reference.“ Sometimes just „Ref“; Skyanalog doesn't seem quite sure yet. What they want to tell us with this, however, is entirely out of the question: This is it, the culmination of all the experience gained in cartridge construction to date, the big one, the one at the top of the price list. And the price list notes 2950 EUR. Now, that's certainly a lot of money for a wear part like an MC cartridge, but it fits into the structure of the manufacturer's other products. The G3 model below it – which has already given us a brilliant performance – currently costs 2100 EUR. And in this environment, it is almost reassuring that the manufacturer has refrained from arbitrarily gold-plating the prestigious in-house reference model in terms of price.



Solid metal housing, refined generator: Skyanalog has put much effort into the Reference

Body

The body of the top model, on the other hand, is gold-plated. It is made of a rigid aluminum alloy, just like the housings of the models on this side. Its design is part of the sound-wise progress the manufacturer claims to have achieved compared to the smaller models. The aluminum armor consists of two parts that are quadruple-bolted together, and surprisingly, I managed to resist the temptation to disassemble it. At 12 grams, the Skyanalog Reference's weight is modest. The manufacturer could improve the finish a bit, as there are still some machining traces on the case. However, this may also be because we are dealing with a very early model. On the side facing the headshell, the body bears its origin („Made in China“), not without pride, and a serial number is also immortalized here.



Packaging? Befitting its status: solid oak

JARVIS COCKER CHILLY GONZALES ROOM 29



What we played

Jarvis Cocker / Chilly Gonzales
Room 29

Walcott / Cherry / Vasconcelos
Codona II

Hubbard / Turrentine
Concert

Tool
Fear Innoculum

*The sapphire stylus cantilever
is equipped with a sharp
micro ridge diamond*



Tracking system

Let's get to the „business end“ of the Reference. And here you can undoubtedly see that we are dealing with a cartridge with high standards: A milky-white stylus cantilever, which is made of sapphire, just like the G3, protrudes from the body. This mineral has a Mohs hardness of nine and is only surpassed by diamond. Hardness is essential for a stylus cantilever since it should transmit the deflections of the diamond to the coils to be moved without delay or distortion. In the Reference, a micro-ridge diamond with rounding radii of five and 80 micrometers sits at the front end of the sapphire rod, which is even sharper than in the G3. We are pleased that the stylus cantilever sticks straight out of the generator. The cleanly bonded diamond also sits perfectly perpendicular to the sapphire rod, so azimuth problems are not expected.

Generator

Skyanalog builds the Reference from selected generator components. This is the only way to achieve consistent quality across the series and ensure channel uniformity. The manufacturer specifies an output voltage of 0.35 millivolts at a speed of 3.54 cm/s, which should amount to just under 0.5 millivolts at the more common 5 cm/s – so enough output voltage is available. The internal resistance of eight ohms fits. Obviously, a bit more wire is wound onto the pure iron carrier than in the extreme MCs, which have a much lower resistance.

Mechanicals

With needle compliance of 12 $\mu\text{m/mN}$, the rigidity of the suspension is in the medium-hard range, which should ensure compatibility with many tonearms. The recommended tracking force is 17 millinewton.

Installation

The installation of the Far Eastern gem in the Reed 1X turned out to be unproblematic. The housing's straight front edge is ideally suited for cranking adjustment; the diameter of the color-coded connector pins is in the upper range of the ordinary so that proper contact is guaranteed even with connector plugs „with a history.“

Sound

Let's start very slow and relaxed. In this case, Jarvis Cocker and Chilly Gonzales were responsible for that, trying to impress with their famous hotel room recording „Room 29“. Which went quite thoroughly wrong at the beginning: Fresh from the factory, the Skyanalog Reference sounds rather unimaginative and bitey. After it had passed the ten-hour mark, a completely different picture revealed itself. First, I increased the termination impedance from 100 to 500 ohms because the scratchiness in the presence region had disappeared. And my dear friends, the Reference now shined: Super-smooth piano notes with a lot of texture, an incredibly realistic voice reproduction with just the right amount of „hotel room mustiness.“ Finely pronounced sibilants, everything perfectly positioned in the center - awe-inspiring. This is definitely on par with the Benz LPS used for comparison. The latter sounds perhaps a touch more precise but doesn't quite have the warm commitment of the Skyanalog. The Reference plowed through the dense soundscapes of the ECM classic „Codona II“ similarly easily. Here, Nana Vasconcelo's diverse percussion repertoire seemed a bit too chubby, which I easily corrected with a slight VTA adjustment; the 1X now plays just under two millimeters higher at the rear. The Reference's super-fine and dignified character remains unaffected. This is a true connoisseur MC and not one of those super-precise resolution monsters. The pace sometimes reminds me a bit of the big Ortofon MCs with Replikant 100 diamond, and I mean that as a big compliment.

Holger Barske

Skyanalog Reference



- Price
- Distribution
- Phone
- Internet
- Warranty
- Weight

2,950 Euro
TCG GmbH, Nordhorn
+49 5921 7884927
tcg-gmbh.de.de
2 years
approx. 12 kg

lp Skyanalog
Reference

International 3/23

» The big Skyanalog rightly bears the name Reference: It sounds immensely fine, soulful, and emotional and reproduces moods and voices with dedication and a perfect sense of proportion. An excellent cartridge!