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& Record Review

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# Goldring Ethos SE

The Ethos MC has waved the flag for UK pick-up brand Goldring for over five years, and now the design has been given the 'SE treatment' with silver wiring and more...

Review: **Adam Smith** Lab: **Paul Miller**

Everyone loves a special edition because, unlike a *limited* edition, it's usually the forerunner of trickledown into the standard range. The hi-fi industry is a fertile ground for such bounty and the latest manufacturer to come up with a tempting morsel is Goldring, its new Ethos SE moving-coil taking its place at the top of the range, priced at £1299. Historically, while this is a big ticket for Goldring it is still rather more affordable than many a premium pick-up from the artisan suppliers based outside of the UK.

To create the 'special' within the Ethos SE, Goldring started with the standard Ethos and worked its magic both internally and externally. The most obvious difference is on the outside, for while the Ethos SE's body is still made from aircraft-grade 6082-T6 aluminium, this has been black anodised to distinguish it from the clear anodisation of the standard model.

## GENERATIONAL TALENT

At the business end, the SE's aluminium cantilever and nude Vital line-contact

**BELOW:** The cartridge and its matching matt black headshell bolts are presented in a fully recyclable, multi-layer pop-up cardboard box



diamond stylus tip, measuring 35x8µm, are carried over from the Ethos. Internally, Goldring's hand-built 'GOL-1' generator assembly was first seen on 1988's Excel pick-up [HFN Feb '89] but has undergone a series of improvements in the meantime. It is conceptually the same design, but as the current production supervisor at Goldring also worked on its original incarnation, there is perfect continuity here!

## HOT STUFF

Tweaks have been applied to elevate its performance for this SE version. It still uses a cross-shaped generator manufactured from Swedish iron, but with the pole shoes heated at a high temperature in a dry hydrogen atmosphere, preventing oxidation during the heating process, and then progressively cooled. This is said to enhance the magnetic properties rather than the more usual mechanical properties of the steel. It's expensive, though, and reserved for the Ethos SE. The claimed outcome is both a flattening and extension of the frequency response [see PM's Lab Report, p59].

The final big change between the Ethos and Ethos SE is the switch from standard copper wire to 4N silver for the latter's coil windings. These are lower in resistance and

**LEFT:** The new SE version of the Ethos is immediately distinguishable from the original model by its all-black anodised body colour

with fewer windings used, so the moving mass of the coil assembly is lower.

As a result, Goldring states a reduction in stylus tip mass from 0.37mg to 0.34mg compared to the regular Ethos, promising an improved transient response and, again, a wider frequency range. That said, the company does quietly gloss over the concomitant downside, namely a reduction in output level from 0.5mV to 0.35mV. Still, this remains a perfectly reasonable MC output level and nothing that a likely partnering phono stage will balk at.

## LIFE BEGINS AT 40

Moreover, unlike some other MCs, the Ethos SE seems refreshingly agnostic to the loading offered by the phono preamp. Yes, the coil change has lowered the internal resistance of Goldring's cartridge to 3.8ohm and using the 'rule of 10 times' this suggests an optimum loading of 40ohm.

Yet the manufacturer recommends 100ohm, which is the typical 'standard', along with 47kohm for MM, on most non-adjustable MM/MC stages. Moreover, as editor PM's investigation into loading the Ethos SE shows [see boxout, p57], changes to this load value appear to make surprisingly little difference to the cartridge's frequency response.

The Ethos SE comes double-boxed in typically high-quality Goldring packaging. As a nice touch, the webpage for this model even lists every packing item plus recommendations for its correct recycling. Two different lengths of allen bolts are provided for mounting the cartridge, along with the matching allen key. The Ethos SE's body has threaded holes for easy fitment, and these are tapped all the way through

*'It's blessed with timing snappier than a Savile Row suit'*



the mounting flanges. A manual, inspection certificate and a miniature Goldring history brochure are also included.

## GOING WITH THE FLOW

I installed the Ethos SE into an SME 309 tonearm on my Michell Gyro SE turntable and had an original non-SE Ethos model to hand by way of comparison. Connected to a MoFi Masterphono [HFN Dec '23] with the load set to 100ohm, I soon found that a slight decrease to 1.6g from the nominal recommended 1.75g tracking force paid dividends by removing an ever-so-slight leadenness from the bass registers.

Otherwise, changes to both loading and VTA made very little subjective difference to the cartridge's performance. Certainly, if you fancy trying an MC but are wary of getting too deep into the precision alignment and finicky loading that many require, the Ethos SE could be your salvation.

Still taking care with setup, the Ethos SE rewarded with a highly enjoyable sound. It has a very impressive sense of uniformity across the board and doesn't seem inclined to wow you in any particular area. It's not one of those spiky cartridges that almost scream 'look at me!', instead taking a measured approach to vinyl replay that makes it a thoroughly gratifying yet undemanding listening companion.

Compared to the standard Ethos, the SE brings about some quite surprising changes. Goldring's new pick-up might initially seem a little reticent and subdued,

but in time you appreciate this is a reflection of a more natural, flowing presentation.

## GRAND UNVEILING

I've always liked the basic Ethos and still do, but the SE is a bit more poised and sophisticated. Main vocalists seem to have taken a small step back from the microphone, occupying a more expansive sense of space and revealing more of a performance's ambience. Yukimi Nagano's

**ABOVE:** The Ethos SE's 'GOL-1' mechanism is fitted into a milled 6082-T6 aircraft-grade aluminium-magnesium alloy body shell for a total weight of 7.7g. The lugs are threaded

**LEFT:** Micrograph reveals the 35x8µm (0.3mm) 'Vital' line-contact stylus mounted – very cleanly – through the end of a crimped alloy cantilever

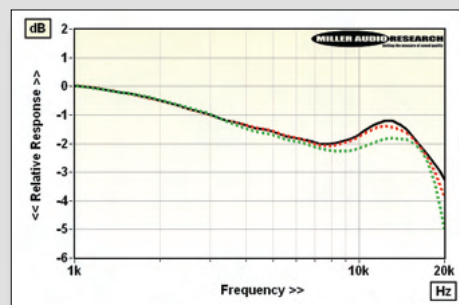
vocals on 'Come To Me' from Koop's *Koop Islands* LP [Compost Records 234-1] were breathy and vivid, but also benefited from a grand sense of air and scale. They soared from the loudspeakers with joy and power but no artificial edginess. ➞

## LOADED QUESTION

The effect of cartridge loading – the impedance being 'driven' by the pick-up – is a topic of some debate among audiophiles, particularly when it comes to moving-coils. These are not sensitive to parallel capacitance in the fashion of high-impedance/high-output MMs but enthusiasts do report audible differences from attempts to best match the source impedance of the MC with the input impedance of the phono preamp. As a rule of thumb the load is usually specified as ~10x the coil impedance, so the Ethos SE's 3.8ohm coil resistance and 3.5µH inductance, equating to an impedance of a little over 3.8ohm/1kHz, might suggest a 40ohm load. Goldring recommends a 100ohm load for its new flagship and, coincidentally or not, this turns out to offer the 'flattest' HF response – there's no difference in bass response – and lowest HF distortion.

In practice, the differences are not huge, and there's no avoiding what looks like the alloy cantilever's bending mode at ~13kHz. Into a high 1kohm load, the Ethos SE shows the

greatest treble loss, reaching -5.1dB/20kHz [dashed green trace, inset Graph] while a very low 10ohm load [dashed red trace] offers a +0.5dB boost at resonance and a roll-off of -3.9dB/20kHz. The optimum response is obtained into 100ohm [solid black trace] which is precisely what Goldring suggests. Other factors, including the effect of loading on the electromagnetic damping of the mechanism, may also come into play, so loading versus a tilting of the response is likely to be only one piece of the equation here. PM

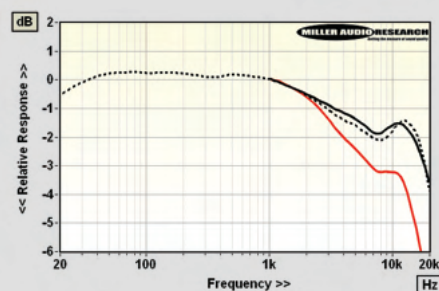


## LAB REPORT

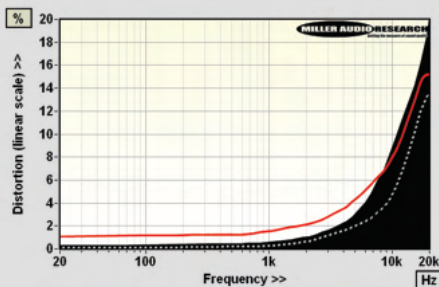
### GOLDRING ETHOS SE

As we had not previously reviewed the 'copper-coiled' Ethos, direct comparisons with this new 'silver-coiled' SE model are not possible. Silver offers the advantage of higher conductivity over copper, and the prospect of fewer turns (assisting a lower moving mass and reduced inertia), for the same output. In practice the coil resistance is reduced from 40ohm to 3.8ohm (SE) and while the magnetic circuit has witnessed improvement, the Ethos's output – according to Goldring – has actually fallen from 0.5mV to 0.35mV. In practice it is lower still at 307µV (re. 1kHz/5cm/sec into 100ohm), requiring the services of a superior MC phono stage. Also, the rated 28cu compliance is closer to a stiffer 20cu under *dynamic* conditions, a figure more in keeping with its use in medium effective mass tonearms. The diamond's alignment is better than suggested (VTA is 22° rather than 24°) but secure tracking is not quite at the rated 90µm, at least at the median 1.75g downforce (a 1.5-2.0g range is suggested). The Ethos SE tracks the +15dB groove (re. 0dB at 315Hz/5cm/sec), to within <0.4% THD, but lets slip at +18dB to the tune of ~8% THD.

Goldring offers no frequency response for the Ethos SE [see boxout, p57] but the balance is clearly on the 'rich' side with a gently downtilted presence and treble amounting to -3dB/20kHz with stereo cuts [dashed trace, Graph 1] and an asymmetric -3.6dB/-7.2dB with lateral [black]/vertical [red] cuts, respectively. Central (vocal) performers will be strongly represented... Bandwidth is still very good, however, because the pattern of distortion versus frequency climbs strongly up to 20kHz where it reaches 12-13% (-8dB re. 5cm/sec, 20Hz-20kHz) with stereo cuts [dashed trace, Graph 2]. PM



ABOVE: Freq. resp. curves (-8dB re. 5cm/sec) lateral (L+R, black) vs. vertical (L-R, red) vs. stereo (dashed)



ABOVE: Lateral (L+R, black), vertical (L-R, red), stereo (dashed) tracing and generator distortion (2nd-4th harms) vs. freq. from 20Hz-20kHz (-8dB re. 5cm/sec)

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Generator type/weight	Moving-Coil / 7.7g
Recommended tracking force	15-20mN (18mN)
Sensitivity/balance (re. 5cm/sec)	307µV / 0.55dB
Compliance (vertical/lateral)	20cu / 22cu
Vertical tracking angle	22 degrees
L/R Tracking ability	75µm / 75µm
L/R Distortion (-8dB, 20Hz-20kHz)	1.1-12.5% / 0.15-13.5%
L/R Frequency resp. (20Hz-20kHz)	+0.25 to -6.0dB / +0.3 to -3.9dB
Stereo separation (1kHz / 20kHz)	30dB / 24dB

A slightly falling response at the pick-up's top end [see Lab Report, right] could suggest that the Ethos SE will sound soft or lacking bite. And, yes, cymbals miss out on the ultimate metallic zing offered by a cartridge with a bit more energy in this region. The Ethos SE fights back superbly, however, with a level of detail retrieval that doesn't leave you feeling short-changed. The quiet, jangling guitar and percussion effects backing Fabienne Delsol on 'I'm Gonna Haunt You' [Killing Eve Season Two OST, Heavenly Recordings HVNLP175] were strong and well-placed behind the vocals and the bassline.

#### DEEP DISH

Ah, yes, bass. Fans of deep, low-end grunt will bond with the Ethos SE's rich rendering of bass guitar and drums. Aided by secure tracking, this MC delivers solid, detailed lows blessed with timing snappier than a Savile Row suit. So whether it was pounding out the thundering beat underpinning the Deep Dish mix of De'lacey's 'Hideaway' 12in single [Deconstruction 74321 561051], or capturing the inflections of the rather more sophisticated bassline behind the title track of Jalen Ngonda's *Come Around And Love Me* [Daptone Recordings DAP-076], the Ethos SE's unflappable confidence repeatedly won the day.

Confidence is king here, for the Ethos SE is reliably unflustered by any genre of groove passing under its stylus tip. Often, cartridges that have prominent strengths find you leafing through your record

**ABOVE:** The bodyshape is square enough to facilitate alignment by eye while the rounded front improves the cantilever's visibility for easy cueing

collection looking for particular types of music to play. That's not the case here – whatever LP I lifted from my rack, it did a fine job getting the best from it. From the subtleties of jazz, via the crescendos of a storming classical performance and right to the muddy but marvellously enthusiastic thrash of Biffy Clyro's 'Tiny Indoor Fireworks' [A Celebration Of Endings; Warner Records 0190295282097], this pick-up proved unerringly positive.

#### NEW ROMANTIC

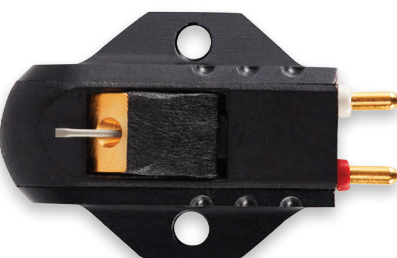
Few cartridges are without a 'voice' of their own, and while Goldring's Ethos SE does err slightly towards the softer side of neutral, this never leaves it sounding ruinously laidback or soporific. It strikes a very fine balance between discovering bags of detail without hammering the message into your ears.

People often talk in clichés about vinyl's romantic 'warmth', which can be irksome because the format is about so much more than that. On the other hand, listening to the Ethos SE, you can perhaps appreciate their point of view... ☺

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

The Goldring Ethos SE is a hugely enjoyable cartridge. Building on the strengths of the Ethos, it adds an extra level of sophistication, and serves it up with a better sense of atmosphere and scale. Add in ease of setup and its indifference to VTA and loading changes, and you have an absolute winner. For a range-topping design that costs less than some spend on cables, this is a veritable audiophile bargain.

Sound Quality: 87%



**ABOVE:** The short alloy cantilever is visible protruding through a hole in the Ethos SE's front polshoe. A wrap prevents the ingress of dust and dirt