



Pick-up artist

Nick Tate samples the latest version of Ortofon's legendary Stereo Pick-Up phono cartridge, the GTX E

Invented in 1948 by Ortofon in Denmark, the world's first moving-coil cartridge was called the Mono-A. It was replaced in 1958 by the 'Stereo Pick-Up' or SPU, which appeared just months after the first stereo microgroove LPs hit the shops. Its famously warm sound formed the basis of many serious early systems.

Fast forward to 2025, and Robert Gudmandsen's iconic design lives on in the shape of the SPU GTX E. The original was conceived as a pro-audio, broadcast solution, complete with an integral headshell. The original SPU's headshell was made of Bakelite, but now it's stronger, lighter glass-fibre reinforced plastic.

This unusual cartridge comes with a built-in Lundahl step-up transformer, so there's no need for a purpose-built high-gain MC phono stage. This makes the SPU an unusually heavy cartridge that needs a high effective mass tonearm to work properly. It has a claimed 4mV output, recommended load impedance is 47k ohm and load capacitance is from 150 to 600pF. Compliance remains low at 10µm/mN and the recommended tracking weight is a serious 4g. This means most modern tonearms cannot even balance the SPU GTX E, let alone track it optimally. Ideally, you're looking at arms with an effective

mass of 14 to 25g, such as the SME 3009/3012 Series I or II, Ortofon's RS-309D, the Fidelity Research FR-64S or FR-66S. I opt to use Jelco's TK-850L in 12in form fitted to a Michell GyroDec with bespoke arm adaptor and extra balance weight. Prospective purchasers should check compatibility with Ortofon or their local distributor.

Sound quality

This new GTX E version retains the SPU's distinctively rich, smooth and beguiling tonal character, yet there's a good deal of musical drive too. Cue up some classic Sixties rock in the shape of *My Back Pages* by The Byrds for example, and you're greeted by a wide and welcoming soundstage that



DETAILS

PRODUCT
Ortofon SPU GTX E

ORIGIN
Denmark

TYPE
High-output moving-coil cartridge

WEIGHT
38g

FEATURES
• Elliptical stylus
• Aluminium cantilever
• Claimed frequency response: 20Hz-20kHz (±3dB)

DISTRIBUTOR
Henley Audio

WEBSITE
ortofon.com
henleyaudio.co.uk



paints the music in big, bold strokes. Instruments sit strongly in their respective locations, with a confident central vocal that sounds authentic throughout. Tonally there's an enjoyably fulsome bass and the midband is well balanced. Rhythmically it's pleasingly fluid, with a big-hearted music-making style.

With immaculately recorded Eighties pop, you begin to detect a slight lack of finesse and insight. ABC's *The Night You Murdered Love* is great fun, as the SPU GTX E gets into the groove and serves up powerful dynamics from the track's punchy drum work. Yet it doesn't have the delicacy of more conventional modern rivals like Ortofon's own MC X40 (£875), for example. Anita Baker's delicate soulful *Sweet Love* is better carried by the latter, which has more detail and polish.

The power pop of Rick Springfield's *Jesse's Girl* is where the SPU GTX E seems happiest. A surprisingly secure tracker even on dynamic peaks, it loves large-scale recordings that let it punch its way through the mix. Once again, vocal treatment is intimate and expressive, and this is allied to explosive guitar playing. Treble is good by traditional SPU standards. Crisp but not coarse, it is nicely etched – although extension is limited compared with the aforementioned MC X40. The result is an engaging and enveloping performance that really hits the heartstrings.

Conclusion

No one – least of all Ortofon – claims the SPU GTX E to be a state-of-the-art modern moving-coil cartridge, but that's rather missing the point. This is an impressive evolution of a much-loved iconic design that is nearly 70 years old now. Its charming sound is different to anything else currently on sale. So, if you've got a tonearm that can balance and track it, this is well worth an audition ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Warm, enjoyable, expansive sound

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** It's too heavy for most tonearms

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** A legendary, but very niche, MC

TRACKING ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★