

VAN DEN HUL DDT-II SPECIAL

A Dutch manufacturer and one of the only European specialists in MC-only phono cartridges. Entirely hand-assembled by the master Aalt Jouk Van den Hul in person, each cartridge is measured and calibrated before being installed in a small wooden box with contents reflecting the specific properties of the model (data sheet and installation instructions) and... with a spirit level; all of which validated and certified by the signature of A. J. The DDT-II Special uses silver-wire coils driven by a boron cantilever and ending in a diamond stylus with a VDH type-1 tip developed in 1973. Its stand-out feature? Maintaining a constant contact radius, irrespective of stylus depth in the groove, to render high frequencies accurately at all times. The 'Special' label, meanwhile, reflects the revamping of the magnetic circuit from the previous DDT-II version.

Using a thicker frontpole and an additional magnet helped focus the magnetic field around the coils within a narrower area, generating an intensified and more powerful magnetic flux, alongside increased resolution and output voltage. The DDT acronym stands for Depth, Detail and Timbre. Although VDH state that impedance adaptation can accommodate load impedance between 100 Ohm and 47 Kilohm, listeners are best off sticking to the recommended 200 Ohm.

Right from the start, the clearness of the DDT-II Special and the dynamic output it delivers really hit you, with its incredible precision (abundant atmospheric details on the live "Sara") and a wide harmonic analysis. It boasts an extended bassline (exceptionally clear electric bass), tones that "ring out" (excellent phrasing and vocals from Barbara that really make their presence felt), but does lack a bit of depth. The sound stage is notably suffused with an airy expansiveness, the sound image is bright (giving even the mono recording of *Tosca* the 'big-screen' effect).

TIMBRES: ★★★★★

DYNAMIC: ★★★★★

SOUND STAGE: ★★★★★

TRANSPARENCY: ★★★★★



Origin: The Netherlands
Price: 999 Euro
Type: Medium-level MC
Frequency range: 5 Hz - 50 kHz
Output voltage: 0.65 mV (1 kHz, 5 cm/s)
Recommended load impedance: 200 Ohm

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VAN DEN HUL THE CRIMSON

The Crimson MC is one of the Van den Hul “must-haves”. 100% hand-made, like all the company’s products, this cartridge comes in light wood, dark wood or red varieties (XGW version). On request, a polycarbonate body (XGP version) can also be supplied as well as a special edition Crimson XGA now available, which features a titanium and amber body (the ‘A’ in XGA). And it’s the letters in the name of each model which shed light on their construction. The ‘X’ denotes a cross-coil structure within an ultra-powerful samarium/cobalt magnet, while the ‘G’ indicates the pure gold wire used for the coils. “Customised” versions can be produced in response to specific customer requests, e.g. using another type of conductor for the coils, varying their positioning or even providing a higher output voltage. The wooden body of the ‘W’ versions comes complete with threaded inserts fractionally misaligned with the normalised centre distance, to mount the cartridge body under stress. The boron cantilever accommodates a VDH-1S-type diamond stylus which features a narrower lateral radius than that of the VDH-1 profile. It takes three weeks to produce a Crimson cartridge, each of which comes with a 200 hour service check-up, free of charge (for the original owner).

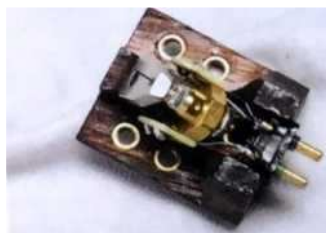
While the DDT-II Special bowled us over with its vim and unfettered musicality, the Crimson unquestionably raises the bar even higher in terms of the development of notes (remarkable legato of Barney Wilen’s tenor saxophone on “Vamp”), the overwhelmingly tangible tonal texture of Barbara, virtually at your fingertips) and the dynamic vocal variety of Giuseppe di Stefano in *Tosca*. The sound stage unfolds in a spatially unhindered manner and delivers an impressive breadth of image stability (a studio-like feel with faultless localisation of instruments on “Hot Stuff” by the Stones).

TIMBRES: ★★★★★★

DYNAMIC: ★★★★★★

SOUND STAGE: ★★★★★★

TRANSPARENCY: ★★★★★★



Origin: The Netherlands

Price: 4080 Euro

Type: Medium-level MC

Frequency range: 5 Hz - 55 kHz

Output voltage: 0.65 mV (1 kHz, 5 cm/s)

Recommended load impedance:
from 25 to 200 Ohm