



STRAIGHT SHOOTER

Ortofon has ensured that the Quintet Series as a whole has been specifically designed to be easy to install and happily this is very much the case in practise. The distinctive flat-sided body is easy to line up, while the threaded attachment is simple to mount – something that is helped in no small part by Ortofon supplying a large and sturdy stylus guard. The only caveat to all of this simplicity is that the MC Quintet Black S is likely to require adjustable VTA to be correctly accommodated as it is fairly tall. The weight is also the highest in the group, though not by much, and the relatively high tracking weight does offset this a little. The packaging is about the only area of the Quintet that gives the price away, but even so it's still logical to use and stores the cartridge in a sturdy protective cylinder.

Ortofon MC Quintet Black S £679

Considering the price, this sophisticated offering is a veritable bargain. Maybe it's time to bet on Black...

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Ortofon MC Quintet Black S

ORIGIN
Denmark

TYPE
Moving-coil cartridge

WEIGHT
9g

FEATURES
• ABS/aluminium body
• Sapphire cantilever
• Shibata stylus

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Seemingly with a cartridge at every price imaginable, Ortofon has something for everyone. The MC Quintet

Black S has the highest-spec in the Quintet range, which represents the company's more affordable moving-coil designs – making it one of the more sophisticated models in the test.

The key difference between the Ortofon and the other models here is the cantilever. Anxious to preserve stocks of increasingly hard to obtain boron, the Black S instead uses sapphire with a Shibata stylus. Depending on the importance you assign to styli and cantilevers, this is arguably of a higher specification than the Cadenza Red in the range above. This is mated to coils made from Ortofon's proprietary 'Acurum' wire produced from gold-plated copper. The combination generates an output of 0.3mV, which is the lowest in the test but should still not be an issue for most phono stages.

The body of the Ortofon is made from a combination of ABS plastic and aluminium. In the black finish, it isn't exactly the most exciting-looking cartridge going, but it is well finished and thanks to its straight edges and decent clearance, the MC Quintet Black S should be easy to install in most arms – although thanks to its relatively tall profile and 9g weight, some caveats do apply here (see boxout).

Sound quality

With the correct level set, the Ortofon reveals itself to be a highly distinctive yet talented performer. This most clearly manifests itself as a slightly dark tonal balance that helps it to sound refined and powerful. The result is that it renders the piano in *Hypocrite* with huge power and a real sense of the weight and scale that the instrument is capable of. What is interesting is that the tonal balance doesn't restrict the energy at the top end of the frequency response. When the electronic notes kick in as well, the two very different tonal styles are given the space that they require to sound tonally distinct without affecting the structure of the piece as a whole. This is a very big and effortless-sounding cartridge.

The tonal ability and refined upper registers also ensure that its performance with the Nina Simone piece avoids any of the sense of sharpness that can be present. Vocals are given presence and detail, but without losing their relationship to the supporting musicians. The whole

track feels very immediate and live, which is helped in no small part by the handling of dynamics. This is an area in particular that the Ortofon excels at. The peaks in energy in *Happiness Is Easy* are delivered with an effortlessness that belies how effective the MC Quintet Black S is in these situations. The sense of timing and rhythmic assurance is also extremely good, although this is not the most emotive performer here.

This calm, unflappable and potent presentation comes together to great effect in the final Chemical Brothers track. The heavyweight bassline has plenty of power and impact, but it starts and stops with exceptional precision. This gets the head nodding and draws you into the music. There is another cartridge in the group that manages to deliver these attributes plus a little extra emotional content, but the Ortofon still has to be seen as superb value for money at the price ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

FEATURES

★★★★★

OVERALL

★★★★★

LIKE: Refined, powerful and agile presentation; solid build; excellent value

DISLIKE: Slight lack of emotion; low output

WE SAY: A superbly balanced all-round cartridge at an extremely competitive price point