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## V.Y.G.E.R.

Baltic M / SME Model 312 / Sumiko Pearwood

**Y**ou would be forgiven for thinking that \$7,800 is an insane base price to pay for a turntable. I can just hear my father shouting out now: "I've bought cars for less!" Yet the Baltic M is actually one of the lower-priced models from Milan, Italy-based V.Y.G.E.R. — in a range that extends right up to the \$40,000 Indian Signature, a 300-pound, floor-standing behemoth that looks a bit like some giant contraption from a Jules Verne fantasy. Just in case you're wondering, the V.Y.G.E.R. name comes from the word VOYAGER with the O and the A left out, though it's not entirely clear why.

One thing is certain, though: The M in Baltic M stands for magnetic. The suspension for this model consists of a set of opposing magnets set into each footer, sufficient to lift the Baltic's not inconsiderable 55-pound weight so that the turntable is essentially floating on air. The motor sits separately outside of this floating assembly, meaning that the only possible way that motor noise can get to the turntable is through the drive belt. Clever.

The bigger models from V.Y.G.E.R. use a

linear-tracking, air-bearing tonearm of the company's own design. But for the Baltic, V.Y.G.E.R. has turned to one of the most highly respected and long-established British audio manufacturers and mated the turntable with SME's Model 312, the firm's latest 12-inch tonearm. By going with an arm longer than the standard 9 inches, you reduce the amount of tracing error and potential distortion — but not every turntable has the extra real estate needed to make it fit. Fortunately, this isn't a problem for the massive Baltic M.

To round out the package, I mounted a Sumiko Pearwood Celebration II low-output moving-coil phono cartridge (\$2,000). While its shape and wood-clad body bring to mind classic cartridges from the likes of Koetsu and Kiseki, the Pearwood is a bang-up-to-date modern design, boasting an alnico magnet-based generator to deliver a somewhat higher than usual 0.5-millivolt output. Normally, a cartridge of this caliber will use an exotic stylus profile that requires a highly exacting setup to maximize its performance. Sumiko, however, realized that this was unrealistic for most users and instead opted for a

less demanding yet still very high-quality elliptical profile.

### SETUP

With its magnetic suspension, the Baltic M was far less sensitive about its supporting structure than the two smaller turntables in this roundup, but I still used a massive VPI stand to get the best possible performance. As before, I carefully ran in the cartridge and optimized the alignment before doing any critical listening.

### PERFORMANCE

Right from the outset, it was clear that the Baltic M could play music with a sense of scale and dimensionality that the more affordable models could never quite match. With a well-recorded orchestral LP like Erich Gruenberg's fine recording of the Beethoven *Violin Concerto* on Chandos, the soundstage was reproduced with an immense sense of space, yet at the same time the soloist remained focused and well proportioned. There was always a reassuring solidity to the sound, along with an ability to handle really large dynamic swings with ease.

With its highly damped and massive 17-pound platter, partnered by the critically damped SME tonearm, the Baltic M presents music over a spookily quiet background, and this allows you to hear tiny low-level details that would otherwise become buried on a lesser turntable. I think Sumiko's decision to stay away from a finicky stylus for the Pearwood cartridge was a good one, as the amount of fine detail it could extract was never in question. Tracking ability was also exceptional, something that can't be said for some low-output moving-coil cartridges.

### BOTTOM LINE

Overall, the V.Y.G.E.R. Baltic M presents music with a big, powerful, and luxurious sound. Liking it to another sort of voyager, I would call it a Rolls Royce Phantom next to the Roksan Radius5's Lotus Exige and the Pro-Ject Debut III's VW GTI. →

## Snapshot

Stunning industrial design, massive build quality, and big, luxurious sound make this combo a keeper.

Price \$9,800 (as tested)