



£767 ☎ 01903 814321 🌐 www.sme.ltd.uk

## SME SERIES 309



The quality of engineering that goes into SME products is in a different league – it is simply astonishing that this arm costs so little when one looks at the competition. One of the nicest of many great features on the 309 is the sled-style arm base, and this combined with the gauge supplied makes cartridge set-up child's play. The headshell features holes rather than slots so you bolt the cartridge in, attach the headshell and then use the supplied tool to adjust the position of the whole arm in order to align the cartridge. This is as easy and accurate as the process gets.

The instructions that come with this arm are the most comprehensive in the business – a 24-page illustrated booklet tells you everything you need to know from drilling out an armboard to installing the cartridge.

The arm itself is a work of art in cast magnesium and steel. Roller bearings support the tapered arm tube which finishes in a sled for the underslung counterweight. This is adjusted and locked by Allen bolts which allow for precise downforce setting.

The 309's build quality is reflected in the sound it produces, which is calm, strong and unusually well extended in the bass. Even with the Ricci piece for piano and violin it was clear that bass performance had stepped up a grade. You can hear it in the extra space and image depth, and the improved solidity of individual sounds. Higher registers benefit from the arm's relaxed nature and there's no hint of midrange exaggeration or curtailment of treble.

Bass on Joni Mitchell's *Court And Spark* was gorgeous – clear and rich, with quieter

instruments equally well served. The 309 also invigorated the Peace Orchestra, pushing out the image both back and sideways, letting you revel in the rhythmic variations and phasey effects. And it continued to dig the detail with Elbow, delivering the drum sound with clarity and following the groove with a rare fluidity.

### VERDICT

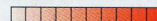
SOUND >> 92%



FEATURES >> 98%



BUILD >> 98%



VALUE >> 90%



#### CONCLUSION

Phenomenal build quality is reflected in the assured yet highly resolved sound it elicits – you won't find a better tonearm for less.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE

>> **95%**

#### HOW THE TESTS WERE DONE

Each of these arms was fitted with a Reson Recca (MM) cartridge and set up aboard a Michell Orbe SE turntable. We used a Polarix Plus alignment protractor, Mana spirit level and Shure downforce gauge. Phono amplification was courtesy of a Trichord Delphini

which fed a Bryston BP25 preamp and Gamut D200 power amp prior to Living Voice Avatar OBX-R speakers. We played several LPs including audiophile pressings (Joni Mitchell's *Court And Spark* on DCC). Supports and cables were by Townshend and Living Voice.