

OF THE YEAR AWARDS

• PHONO CARTRIDGE OF THE YEAR



Audio Technica AT150MLX

\$449

The high-output Audio Technica AT150MLX is a moving magnet that might make you forget the latest in *haute couture* moving coils. Its sonics are relaxed and composed, its midrange dark and weighty, its overall tonal balance perfectly suited to opulent instrumental timbres. It may not match the low-level delicacy and whip-snap speed of some moving coils, but over the longer haul it will convey a level of musical authenticity that's tough to beat. *NG* (216)



Benz LP S-MR

\$5000

The bane of most moving-coil cartridges has always been the brilliance range, where a resonant peak typically causes them to sound a bit grainy, aggressive, and brighter-than-life. Thanks to a patented cantilever-damping system, the Benz LP S-MR does not suffer from this problem, making it one of the very few mc's with truly natural-sounding treble. When you add lower noise top-to-bottom, superb transient speed, and world-class low-level resolution (thanks to the Benz's micro-ridge stylus) to the package, you get what is, in JV's (and HP's) view, one of the most neutral, lifelike, and least-mechanical-sounding "statement-quality" moving coils on today's market—and at \$5k, perhaps, *the* best buy. *JV* (214)



Clearaudio Goldfinger Statement

\$15,000

Over the last decade or so, Clearaudio has been gradually moving away from a cool, crystalline, hyper-analytical presentation (the very quintessence of what used to be known as "the German sound") to a warmer, more natural balance. With its latest flagship moving coil, the \$15k Goldfinger Statement, the company has brought off the audio equivalent of a "180." By tripling the number of magnets in its patented "Ring" configuration to twelve and thinning down the 24k-gold wire in its coils by 30%, Clearaudio has succeeded in producing its richest, most seductively beautiful, most naturally balanced mc ever, without losing a jot of the phenomenal resolution, transient speed, soundstage width and depth, bass definition, and dynamic impact that have made Clearaudio's previous Insiders and Goldfingers famous. Simply put, the Goldfinger Statement is the best cartridge Clearaudio has yet made—and, in JV's view, the best moving coil (a lot of) money can currently buy. *JV* (214)

