

KAB-sourced Stanton 681/D11S

Manufacturer: KAB Electro Acoustics, P.O.Box 2922,
Plainfield, NJ 07062: 908-754-1479 www.kabusa.com

Standard Mount: 1/2" centers
Moving Iron Design
Long Hair Brush
Output 3.5mV at 1 kHz : 5 cm/sec
Channel balance at 1 kHz: 2dB
Channel separation at 1 kHz : >30 dB
Frequency response :10Hz - 22kHz
Stylus type: Hi Polish 0.3 x 2.8 Stereohedron
Stylus construction: Epoxy mount
Cantilever: aluminum
Tracking force: 0.75-1.75 Gr
Recommended load resistance: 47kOhm
Cartridge weight: 6.3 Gram
Price: \$139.95
Stylus: Pickering D11-S

This and the cartridge that follows are an amalgamation of styluses and cartridge bodies by KAB (the folks that did the aforementioned Technics turntable modifications). The Pickering stylus transplant (Pickering and Stanton are different trade names of the same company) works around the lack of availability of the Stanton Stereohedron Stylus. KAB purchased about one hundred of the last available lot of Stereohedron styluses designed for the Pickering version of the 681EEE-S MK 2, named the XV15/757S. The stylus is called a Pickering D11S.

The Stereohedron stylus was derived from the Stanton Quadrahedron stylus designed for playback of recordings at frequencies approaching 50kHz to enable an early version of discrete four-channel sound to be encoded on a compatible vinyl disc. I do not have the exact shape of the Stereohedron, but it may be similar to the Shibata (patent 3774918 November 1973) developed by JVC although I understand the stylus proved problematic and is not used today. The Quadrahedron had a minor radius of 0.1 to track 50kHz in the inner groove while Stereohedron has a larger minor radius of 0.3 This Stereohedron early design is not as radical as the Namiki Micro Line stylus (shown above).

Owners of Stanton 100/981/881 need not run out and order a D11S. It will not work in these cartridges. The 681 and older series are moving iron cartridges in which the magnet and the coils reside in the cartridge. The 881 and newer cartridges use moving magnet

designs. Stanton switched when newer magnet materials allowed for lower tip mass. (Note: some other shops on the internet claim they can source the style, at high prices, but I am skeptical whether they are all new).

My tests between my older 681 EEE MK 1 and the KAB/Stanton 681/D11S identified the D11S stylus as the better tracker, with slightly enhanced detail and reduced harshness (reduced distortion?). Given the \$10 price difference between the new Stanton 681EEE MKIII and the KAB cartridge, the KAB is the way to go but I repeat from my introduction that Stanton did not supply me with test samples of its current 681 MK 3 model.

Why be interested in a cartridge of 1978 vintage compared to the newer designs reviewed in this issue? The Stanton has a warmer sound with a richer bass. It sounds more like the vinyl standards that listeners covet. Kevin Barrett, the guru of KAB, claims the moving iron design adds warmth to the mid-bass registers owing to microphonics that reside in the moving iron system. When the cartridge body is tapped, the internal magnet moves slightly and the fixed coils are energized.

I do not have measurements for the 681EEE-S. I did find a 681EEE MK1 tested in the July 1975 issue

High Fidelity. Frequency response is surprisingly similar to the more expensive designs of ten years hence filling a 3dB strip. The graphs (very compressed vertical axis in the *High Fidelity* tradition provided information but not too much) show a monotonic roll off starting near 2 kHz. More modern cartridges are flatter on top. Channel

separation is 5dB lower than the best from the 1980s until about 12 kHz where it degrades quickly and is near 12dB at 20 kHz. Channel imbalance was much worse. The 1975 cartridge met its 2dB specification, but the newer ones hold to 0.5dB. I confirmed the poorer channel imbalance of this cartridge. Balance was the only test I could do since it is a relative measurement to the channel match I achieved at 1 kHz for all cartridges in this test and my test disk had other frequencies on it. The higher the tone, the lower the level; hence, it is impossible to establish an absolute level in the presence of groove noise.

The Stereohedron's age does show in comparison to the Micro Ridge stylus especially on disks played many times with older cartridges with elliptical or conical styluses. The Stereohedron tracks in closer to the place that the grooves were worn down and misshaped. The Stereohedron does provide some level of improvement on worn records. This does not apply



to all fine line styluses as we will see later.

In spite of the reduced trackability compared with the Microline stylus of the Audio Technica, many readers will remain enamored with the un-CD-like sound of the cartridge. While it clearly tracks better, the slightly cheaper Audio Technica AT440MLa may prove a little aggressive and lean for some. While the AT150MLx is more neutral than the AT440MLa, it is more than twice the retail price of the Stanton. I would even go so far as averring that some will prefer the tonality of the Stanton to the top of the line Audio Technica. Make no mistake, the subjective tonal balance is different and it is a difference that is not clearly explained given the relatively competent measurements of the Stanton as measured by *High Fidelity*. It is likely associated with the frequency response differences between the cartridges. 3dB is a big window; the type of variation of modern speakers when voiced.

I prepared a CD-R comparing the sonics of the Shure V15-VMR and the Stanton. The Stanton beat the dull as dishwasher sound of the Shure V15MR on clean vinyl.

Those motivated to investigate what Stanton's higher-end cartridges sound like with the KAB treatment will hit a roadblock since an extremely limited number of nude Stereohedron styli are available that work in the modern Stanton moving magnet DJ cartridge bodies (picture shown in the Technics SL1200 MKII review). To make the stylus fit, the plastic shield of the stylus is removed to expose the cantilever. This KAB special is only for the most careful among our readers. Quantities are limited and I do not have facile enough fingers to make it a viable option to test.

In summary, only one hundred can discover what a Stanton mid-priced cartridge sounds like. After that, the D11S stylus is history. If you already have a Stanton and like its sound, but need a stylus replacement, now is the time to act.

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