



Rega Planar 3 £880



Originally launched at a time when UK shoppers were panic buying bread, the 3 has seen some changes

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
Rega Planar 3/Exact
- ORIGIN**
UK
- TYPE**
Belt-drive turntable
- WEIGHT**
6kg
- DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
447 x 117 x 360mm
- FEATURES**
 - 33 & 45rpm
 - RB330 tonearm
 - Exact MM cart
- DISTRIBUTOR**
Rega Research Ltd.

There will be some reading this for whom the Rega Planar 3 was the first 'proper' turntable they owned. Launched in 1978, it hit the sweet spot between high-end decks and budget ones perfectly. Indeed it was so successful that there was once a waiting list to buy one. These days, the formula remains much the same, although the deck itself is way better in terms of design.

Although basically an inexpensive, minimalist vinyl spinner with no independently sprung sub-chassis or other such fanciful features, it combines a suite of clever touches to deliver a sound that's beyond most people's idea of an affordable turntable. Its belt-drive system has been improved incrementally over the years to deliver surprisingly low wow

and flutter. An aluminium motor pulley helps with this, as opposed to the plastic one that the company used to employ. A new 24V motor is also fitted, with the option of a Neo II external power supply, for further improvements to speed stability.

Rega has specified its tapered aluminium RB330 tonearm, which is a direct descendent of the company's classic RB300 of 1983. It has a calibrated tracking weight display, which is pretty accurate, so there's no need for fiddly stylus gauges. There's a brace bar that runs between it and the centre of the deck to combat resonances in what is a pretty light plinth. Setting up the Planar 3 is straightforward, not least because a Rega Exact moving-magnet cartridge comes fitted and pre-aligned, complete with Rega's excellent three-point mounting system. Still, it's not absolute-beginner territory, as you do have to screw on the counterweight. Generally the finish is excellent and this feels like a class product, rather than a budget one. As ever, the Planar 3 sounds best without its dust cover fitted, perfectly level on a light shelf or coffee table.

Sound quality

The latest Planar 3 is comfortably the best-sounding turntable in this group by some distance; the only decks here to rival it are the Edwards Audio and Roksan offerings, though these provide a different sound rather than

a superior one. Key to the Rega's performance is its sense of tidiness, order and poise, plus super forensic detail retrieval and vanishingly low surface noise. It comes across as a much more expensive deck than it really has any right to.

Not everyone will like to hear records in this way; it might be too analytical or 'hi-fi' for some, yet the Planar really gets the basics right. The Kraftwerk track, for example, is a revelation; I've heard poorly setup Linn LP12s do worse. Through a good system, you can hear right into the recording and get vast amounts of information out. Yet this deck never machine-guns detail out at you, being composed at all times.

Its slightly cerebral character falls behind just a touch with the louche jazz of Dave Brubeck, however. While it does all the right things and offers up an expansive and tidily organised soundstage, it doesn't quite have the swing of the Roksan or even the Edwards Audio. It sounds more controlled than any other deck in the group and at times that's highly satisfying, but at others you wish it would let its hair down a bit.

All the same, it's a hoot with a well recorded rock track like *Don't Stop*, giving a very smooth but nuanced

The latest Planar 3 is comfortably the best-sounding turntable here

sound to all the instruments and speeding along with lots of gusto – staying calm and composed on the dynamic climaxes. Bass is taut, tight and strong, but not bloated; treble is very sweet and crisp yet not rounded off. The end result is a supreme turntable that's more than happy in the company of far more expensive amps and speakers than its rivals ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ | LIKE: Powerful, incisive sound; style; build |
| VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ | DISLIKE: Nothing at the price |
| BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ | WESAY: Affordable analogue esoterica, this is a comfortable Group Test winner |

EASE OF USE
★★★★☆

OVERALL

