

Analogue Judgement

A finely judged turntable package from Rega lifts analogue to its best, thinks Noel Keywood.

Rega's RB300 arm was always one of my favourites. A unique one-piece design, it was easy to use, affordable yet gave superb sound, mainly due to its rigidity. Their Planar 10 turntable I'm reviewing here gets a modern update, the polished aluminium RB3000, supported by a two-speed turntable

on vestigial plinth, accompanied by external electronic power supply. Price £4499 when fitted with their Apheta 3 moving coil cartridge, as ours was.

Whilst Rega arms have been consistent in basic design pattern, their turntables have differed more widely and the Planar 10 maintains this thrust. It is still a belt drive with

small hub and top-platter, but the plinth has shrunk to minimal size and weight, whilst retaining rigidity. Weighing just 4.7kg total it is easy to move, especially with the heavy ceramic platter removed. The three





Below the arm sits a bias adjuster that is pulled forward or backward to set force.

feet are non-adjustable for height and possess little damping so I would recommend this deck is used on a firm and level surface, such as a marble slab, or perhaps sand-filled two-part shelf. A nice project for DIYers!

Being light and compact, however, with dimensions of 429mm wide, 315mm deep and 125mm high (dust cover on) it can be slotted in places other turntables cannot go, a plus point. The simple formed acrylic dust cover must be removed completely during use, having the advantage of not demanding top clearance of hinged lids, again reducing space demand. But you have to put the cover nearby, perhaps standing it vertically on a shelf.

The plinth carries 24V a.c. motor fed by an external power supply – and the latter is large, measuring 218mm wide, 320mm deep and 80mm high, weight 3kg. It must be within 1m length (3ft) of the turntable's connecting cable and accessible, since speed select is located here, as well as speed adjust at rear, should it be needed.

The Planar 10 pays more attention to the issue of speed and speed stability than previous models, perhaps as Technics have drawn attention to it with their recent SL-1200GR and SL-1200GAE Direct Drives that deliver class leading figures. The Planar 10 was speed accurate and stable as belt drives go, our measurements showed, if not quite up to Technics Direct Drive standards.

But there is more to a turntable

than just speed stability – and Rega's glorious arm and impressive Apheta 3 cartridge had a big part to play in what I heard from this package, Technics having no answer to this except in after-market re-fits such as those from Sound Hi-Fi.

As Rega claim for Planar 10, our review sample was right on correct speed. Speed can be changed

it is contributory to stage depth and firm bass I heard.

SOUND QUALITY

I connected the Planar 10 to our Icon Audio PS3 Mk2 valve phono stage, with its super-quiet input transformer. It fed an Icon Audio Stereo 30SE single-ended valve amplifier via Chord Company Epic



Rega's lightweight vestigial plinth has a plate coupling arm to centre spindle, to eliminate relative movement between them.

however, at rear and in small increments, Rega suggesting use of the RPM 'phone app for anyone wanting to do this, or their own quartz locked stroboscope light and disc.

Just in case you are wondering, the Planar 10 is all manual; there are no auto systems of any sort. Press 33 or 45rpm speed buttons on the power supply to start, then manually place arm on LP using the damped lift/lower platform. I hand cue and found the RB3000 has a peculiarly short and strongly curved finger lift I don't recall on the RB300; it did not suit my digit but if you have diddly digits then perhaps it may.

Build quality is very good, the RB3000 arm in particular being superb. It is strapped to the platter main bearing to prevent relative movement between the two and I would guess Rega have made the plinth vestigial so as not to store energy. I also suspect the heavy ceramic platter contributes to sound because platters seem to do this. My favourite platter material is thick acrylic (Perspex etc), not metals or glass. I've not heard a heavy ceramic platter before and wonder whether

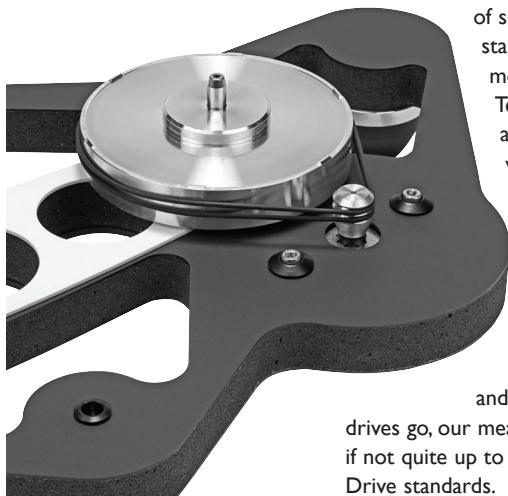


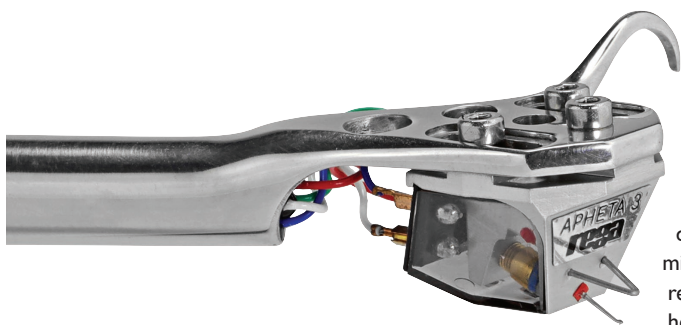
Our underside view shows the three, non-adjustable feet, motor and main bearing.

interconnects. Loudspeakers were Martin Logan ESL-X hybrid electrostatics hooked up with Chord Company Signature Reference cables.

Spinning Fanfare for the Common Man, from Two Countries One Heart, a 180gm all-analogue LP that has superb balance, I was immediately engaged by the strength and suppleness of the opening drum rolls, hearing the sort of powerful but

Belt drive to the hub in classic fashion, speed set by the motor power supply, not by moving belt on pulley.





The Apheta 3 MC cartridge has a three point fixing into the headshell, for improved mechanical coupling and rigidity.

tight bass so many crave. There was insight too, the track coming over as atmospheric. Horns were rich and sonorous, blaring from a deep background. As the grooves slipped by I also became aware of a softly smooth rendition free from spit or groove noise; the Apheta 3 cartridge has a mild top end delivery that makes it gentle in the high regions.

With Time to Say Goodbye, on inner grooves where things can get a bit muddled with a poor stylus, the Apheta 3 maintained its composure, Rosella Caporale's soaring vocal firm and clear, un-muddled by inner groove hash. I use this LP as a balanced benchmark – and Rega's Planar 10 delivered it in fine form, with massive low end power, superb stage depth and mild yet refined treble. For me this was a supremely enjoyable listen – 100% analogue.

Enthused, I put on the Direct Cut of Sing Sing Sing, from the Syd Lawrence orchestra, from Big Band Spectacular – and it was just that – spectacular. The live fast drumwork

came over with grippy timing and resonant power, pushing out at me with eye-popping drama. A recent, miked-up live studio recording, I got to hear the background acoustic and – again

– great atmosphere as a result. It was like being there. The Planar 10 comes over as smooth, clean and muscular in dynamic contrast. Absent were edginess, noise, sibilance or spit, making for a seemingly 'quiet' rendition. Less, but more.

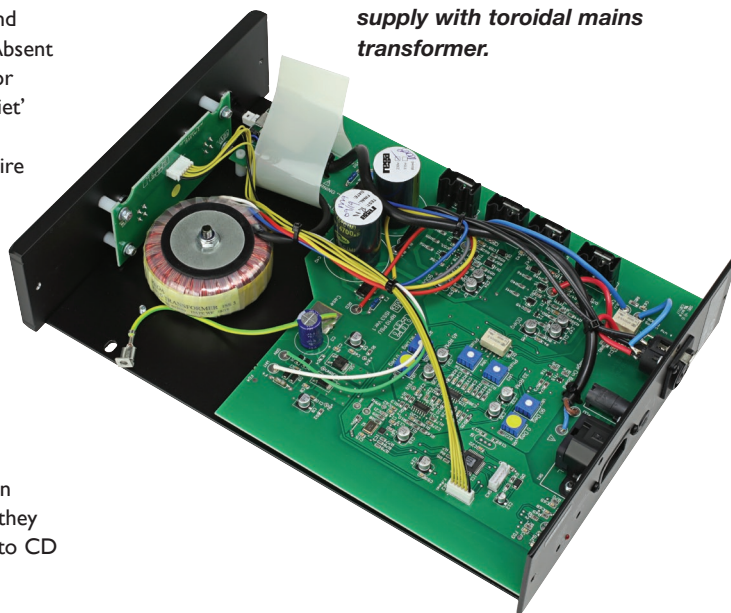
With straight Rock from Dire Straits, courtesy of Mobile Fidelity's 45rpm all-analogue re-master of Love Over Gold, finger picked guitar strings cut out cleanly in The Man's Too Strong, Knopfler's crashing chords having impact, without muddle.

CONCLUSION

Rega's Planar 10 is very much an analogue turntable. Yes, I know they all are – but some push closer to CD balance these days.

Not this one. It's fulsome, bass powerful and lush. With great stage depth, pin sharp imaging and no sign of noise – due substantially to the Apheta 3 cartridge in a great arm. The Planar 10 is a wonderfully judged analogue spinner well worth hearing. It is mild up top but all the same I could definitely live with it.

The external linear power supply with toroidal mains transformer.



At rear of the power supply motor speed can be adjusted in increments.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The 3150Hz test tone of a DIN 45-452 test disc was reproduced as exactly 3150Hz on our Wow&Flutter meter, with little wander of +/-2Hz Hz around nominal.

Low speed wander results in low Wow (low rate speed variation), the Planar 10 hovering around 0.1% and Flutter 0.05% – good results. Total Wow&Flutter (DIN weighted) measured 0.07%, again a good result. Measured to the Japanese JIS Standard for comparison with Japanese turntables total Wow&Flutter (wtd) measured 0.05%, JIS always giving a lower reading than German/European DIN. Our analysis shows the usual peak at 33rpm (0.55Hz), at low-ish level, plus harmonics and minimal flutter (right).

Frequency response of the Apheta 3 cartridge shows pronounced roll down in

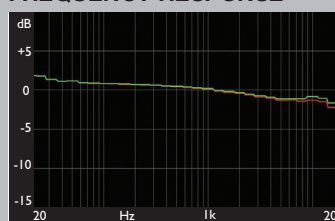
high frequencies, enough to give a mild sounding balance, likely full bodied though and with strong bass. Inner groove tracing loss (red trace) was minimal, due to effective stylus geometry – an excellent result.

Tracking at 2gm VTF was good, slight mistracking occurring on the 80µm (outer) band of Clearaudio's trackability test record LPT 83063 – but this is a high cut. The 90µm band caused severe mistracking.

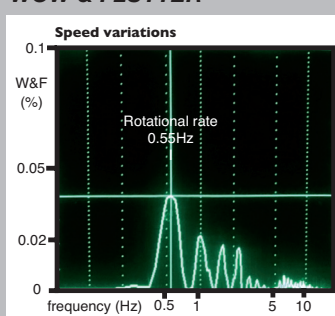
The Planar 10 turntable measured well and the Apheta 3 is distinctive in frequency balance. **NK**

Speed error	0%
Wow	0.1%
Flutter	0.05%
Wow & Flutter (DIN wtd.)	0.07%

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



WOW & FLUTTER



REGA PLANAR 10 WITH APHETA 3 £4499



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VERDICT

Great vinyl sound and easy to use, but expensive.

FOR

- powerful sound
- supremely smooth
- noise free

AGAINST

- non adjustable feet
- needs a firm base
- big power supply

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