

Rega Planar 3 RS Edition for the joy of vinyl

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Rega Planar 3 RS Edition turntable, arm & cartridge

The turntable market is pretty well supplied with offerings at almost all price points, so why did Rega feel the need to create the Planar 3 RS Edition? I presume it's because there is a pretty wide gap between the price of the standard Planar 3 and the Planar 6 above it, a gap that some brands fill with several turntables. The Planar 3 with Nd5 cartridge costs £895, the Planar 6 with the same cartridge is £1450, so it's a £500 gap. The Planar 3 RS fits between the two at a under £1,000, only a pound under but that is a critical price point beyond which many enthusiasts will not go.

The Planar 3 RS is essentially a Planar 3 with the laminated plinth from a Planar 6 (but not the foam core), a hand tuned Neo PSU Mk2 power supply and the Nd5 MM cartridge launched earlier in the year. Unlike the other Planar models the Planar 3 RS is not available without a cartridge or with one of the other Rega needles, this fixed package allows Rega to offer a £156 saving over purchasing the turntable, power supply and cartridge separately. However, you can't buy this particular turntable on its own.

The Planar 6 plinth is made using a high pressure laminate (HPL) material that means it is stiffer than the usual Planar 3 plinth and controls resonance more effectively, in this instance the plinth is finished in a satin brushed aluminium with a dark grey colour that looks pretty cool. The Neo PSU is a small separate power supply which gets the platter spinning as soon as it's turned on, the second button selects between 33.3rpm and 45rpm. It connects to the turntable with a fairly stiff cable that has DIN plugs at either end and receives its power from a 24V plug top power supply with its own captive cable. Having a separate power supply is good thing for speed stability but marginally less convenient when it comes to switching on and off, the switch under the plinth on a regular Planar 3 is always to hand whereas the Neo may not be.

The Planar 3 RS has three rubber feet under the HPL plinth which provide a degree of isolation but I recommend placing this and most other turntables as far away from the speakers as is convenient, preferably on an isolating platform or feet. A turntable is designed to measure

vibration so if the surface that it's sitting on vibrates because there are speakers on or near it that energy will be added to the signal. The tonearm is Rega's RB330 and has spring downforce and magnetic anti-skate settings, for the Nd5 cartridge you want the downforce at 1.75 grams, this is not picked out on the dial but it's possible to get close to it by eye. Rega suggest setting anti-skate at the same figure but the gap between 1 and 2 on the this slider is tiny, fortunately this setting is not critical to performance.

The 12mm thick glass platter sits on a plastic subplatter which is belt driven from a small pulley right next to it. This is the right way to drive a platter because it has the least potential for adding vibration, peripherally driven platters (where the motor pulley and belt are visible) are at

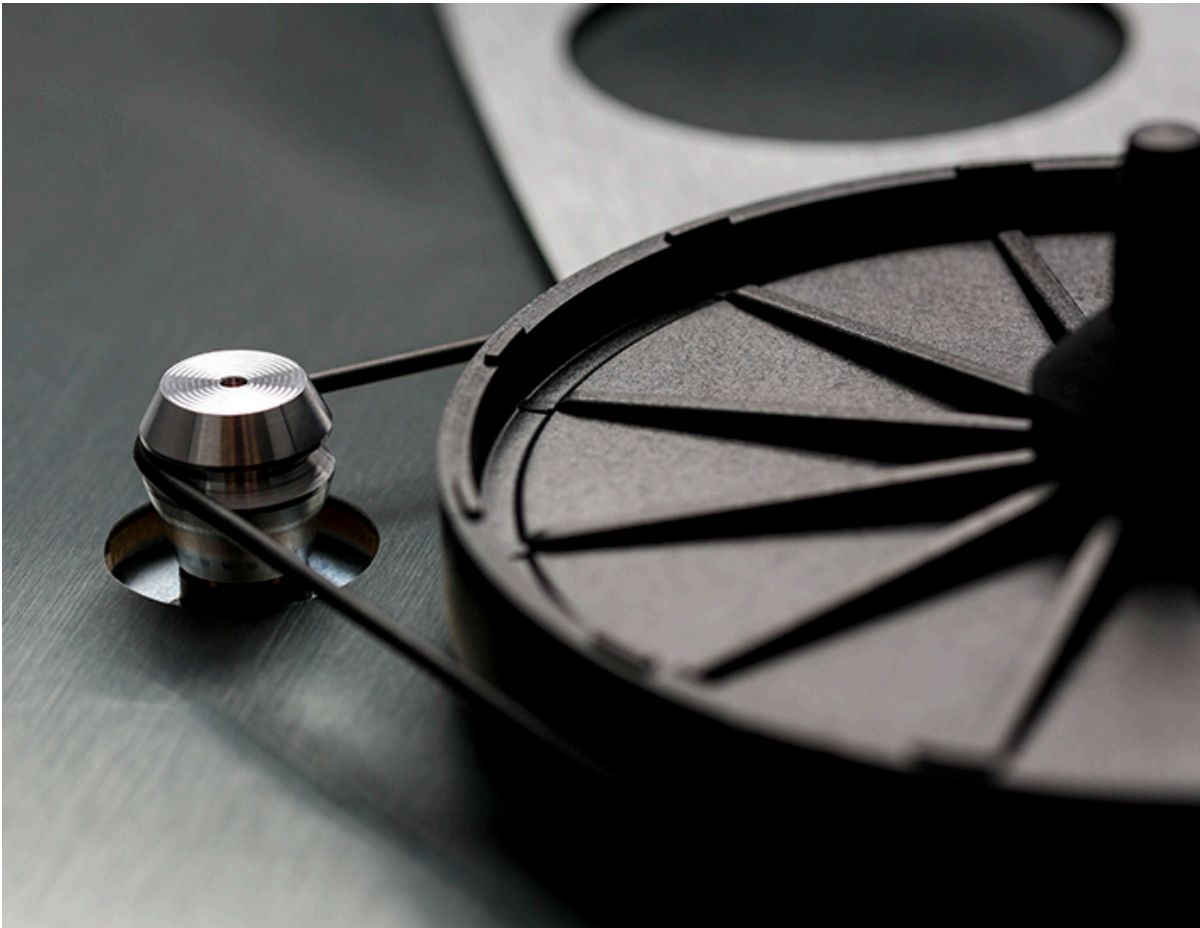


the opposite end of the scale. As with all the rectangular Planar turntables the Planar 3 RS is supplied with a dust cover, in this case a smoked grey one which looks great with the grey finish on the plinth.

Sound quality

Before detailing its sonic capabilities it's worth mentioning just how easy it is to use this and pretty well all Rega turntables but especially those that have a square plinth. This combined with the ergonomic fingerlift makes it a doddle to place the stylus onto the run-in groove without the need to employ the lift/lower lever at the back of the arm. The latter approach is probably best if you are new to turntables but it won't be long before all but the most cack handed can place the needle precisely where they want it. A process that is facilitated by the pointed stylus guard above the needle itself, this means you can see where the stylus will land even though it's obscured.





I put the Planar 3 RS atop my Townshend Seismic rack but didn't use the extra isolation platform that supports my Naia, not in an effort to make the newcomer's life more difficult but to get some idea of how it would cope with a relatively real world listening scenario. There is no levelling option with this or any Rega turntable, you have to do your best to make the supporting rack itself level. I connected the chunky black arm cables to a Rega Aria phono stage and switched it to MM to suit the Nd5 cartridge.

The sound that this record player produces is more stable and composed than I remember hearing the last time I played with a Planar 3, but that was a long time ago and audio memory can fade. It's a strong result and one that allows the music to flow in an easy, engaging fashion with all the emphasis on the singing, playing and production with the minimum of turntable character. On Norah Jones and Herbie Hancock's version of Court and Spark (*River: The Joni Letters*) the polish of the playing and recording are obvious, this is a sophisticated piece of music making that reaches its apotheosis in the piano solo toward the end, the Planar 3 RS makes that abundantly clear but also homes in on Jones' dulcet tones that while very different from Mitchell's original deliver the truth and depth of the song superbly.

On Hiatus Kaiyote's *Love Heart Cheat Code* the emphasis is less on natural sound and more about feel which means that the soundstage is limited in scale and there is less space in the mix, there is however lovely weighty bass and the Planar 3 RS manages to extract more image depth than most. I contrasted this with a digital stream which provided a less relaxed, slightly brighter sound that made the vinyl sound slightly slow. Such is the nature of tonal balance however because the turntable was running a shade fast according to the RPM app, and that should be taken with a pinch of salt because such devices are not as precise as the strobe system used to set speed in the factory.

With the Lizz Wright's *Shadow* album the Planar 3 RS once again delivered an easier, more natural sound compared to the digital (and we're talking decent digital here), which makes the music that much more engaging and involving. A lot of Rega products have the ability to make music easy to enjoy, to bring out new facets of familiar recordings and make you fall for them all over again. I often find that however revealing, dynamic, well timed and impressive a turntable is, if it doesn't get to the heart of the performance I lose interest in a relatively short time. That is not the case with the Planar 3 RS, it gets to the parts that others can't and reminds me why I bought the album in the first place.

Rega Planar 3 RS Edition

This happened with Tom Waits' *Heart Attack and Vine* that I have had for years but rarely play, on this Rega I listened to the first side and enjoyed every minute of it, from the story telling of the title track through the lounge jazz vamp of In Shades to the Springsteen-esque love song Jersey Girl. I jumped from this to Stevie Wonder's *Talking Book* which isn't in such great shape sadly, it was clear however that Sunshine of Your Love has not been diminished from over exposure, the Planar 3 RS revealing facets of the production that are not usually clear. Maybe



Your Baby absolutely streams with funk, the keyboard and guitar are really outstanding, not to mention the multiple vocal parts.

Out of interest I got a Planar 6 out of the vault and fitted an Nd5 cartridge to it in order to see what benefits the extra expense of this next model up brings. They turned out to be quite large and mainly come down to a much lower noise floor, a quietness in the background that allows more of the detail to be heard and understood.

Conclusion

Whether such refinements enhance the enjoyment of the music will depend on your system and tastes and as I have hopefully explained the Planar 3 RS Edition is a stonkingly good turntable. It really does deliver the musical goods in a more engaging and enjoyable manner than the competition, what's more you get build quality that few can compete with and a lifetime warranty. Add in the superb finish and extra savings provided by this package and you have a record player that anyone with a £1,000 budget would be nuts not to audition.