

Rega Nd7 cartridge takes on the best in class

Friday, August 2, 2024
Jason Kennedy



Rega Nd7 moving magnet cartridge

The Nd7 is the most ambitious of Rega's radical new moving magnet cartridge range. We enjoyed the entry level Nd3 a couple of months back, got some excellent results with the Nd5 not long ago and have arrived at the Nd7 to top of the trio. All three cartridges share the same unique design of generator which has much higher symmetry between channels than in the previous Rega MMs, and most others for that matter. This is done with coils that have fewer turns which are smaller in diameter than usual, something that allows them to produce higher frequencies than conventional designs.

The Nd models also share the neodymium magnet that moves between the ends of these coils at the opposite end of the cantilever to the stylus, hence the prefix. Neodymium magnets are common in moving coil cartridges but have not been used in MMs in the past, their advantage is a very high power to size ratio, this means that there is greater scope for movement, it also makes up for the relatively low turn count of the coils in these designs when it comes to output, this isn't as high as the previous Rega MMs but more than enough for any MM phono stage.

The difference between Rega Nd models is in the stylus tip at the end of the aluminium cantilever, while the more affordable models have elliptical examples the Nd7 uses a fine line nude diamond. This is the same tip that you will find on Rega's best cartridge, the Aphelion 2 at nearly three and a half thousand pounds, in that instance it's mounted on a boron cantilever that connects to a set of coils inside the cartridge body. But you get the picture, it's the preferred stylus profile in Rega's corner of Essex. A fine line as its name suggests is slimmer in profile than an elliptical stylus and sits deeper in the groove as a result. It also requires more careful alignment or it would were this side of set up not set by the three point mounting found on Rega's better cartridges.

This means that the tracking angle cannot be changed unless you remove one of the three bolts that thread into the body of the cartridge. Which makes set up much quicker and easier than more conventional two hole cartridges but removes the tweakability that some enthusiasts like. The same is true of VTA on Rega turntables of course, the height of the arm is fixed so you can't change the angle at which the stylus sits in the groove as seen from the side. This is considered a step too far in many quarters of the turntable world but results in a more rigid arm fixing and thus allows the arm to channel energy into the plinth more effectively. It's worth remembering that not all of the vibration that a stylus picks up is converted into an electrical signal, a good proportion of it travels into the arm and the platter for that matter, so rigidity in both these elements is critical to the end result.

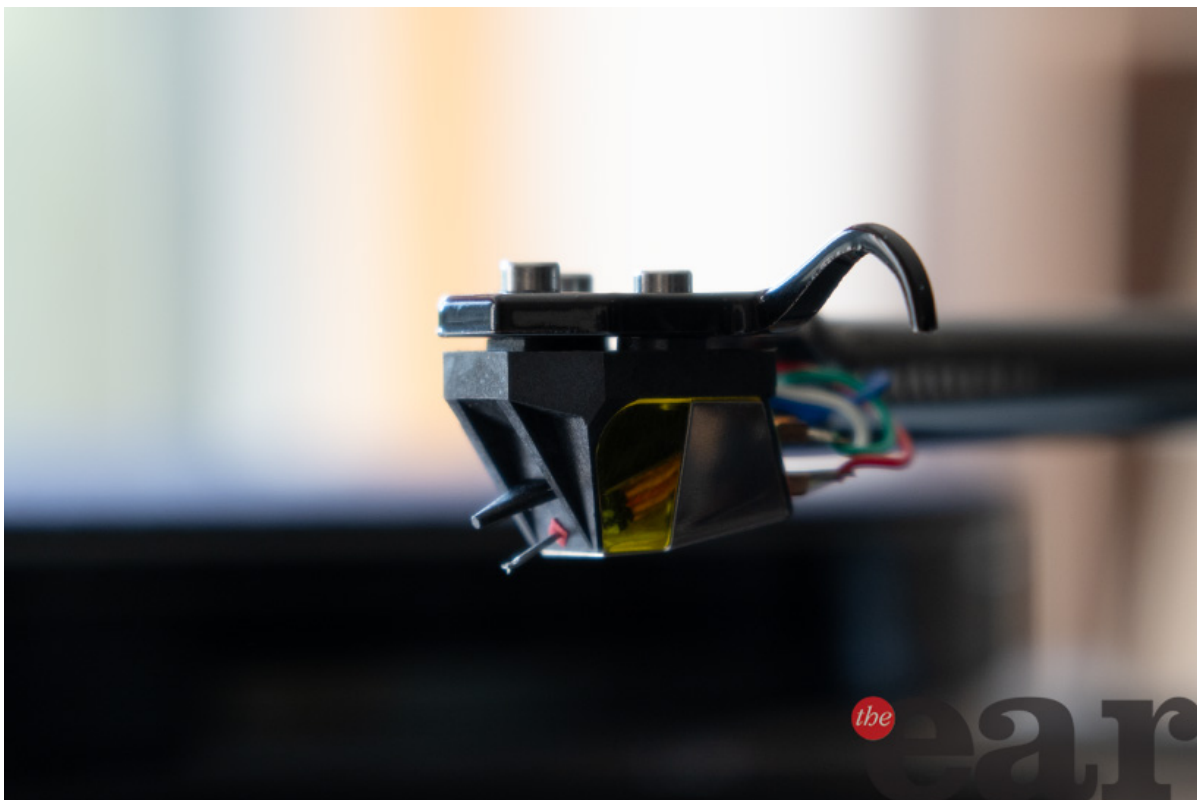
The Nd7 has a yellow tinted cover which matches that on the Aphelion 2 but that and the stylus tip are the only common features, unless you count the colour marked connections on its back panel. Mounting this MM is a relatively simple process of attaching the four arm wire tags to the relevant pins (much easier with long nosed pliers than fingers) and screwing in the three fixing bolts, on a Rega arm at least. On other arms you would need to omit the front fixing and align the Nd7 with a gauge. Downforce is 1.75g as seems to be the case with a lot of MMs.

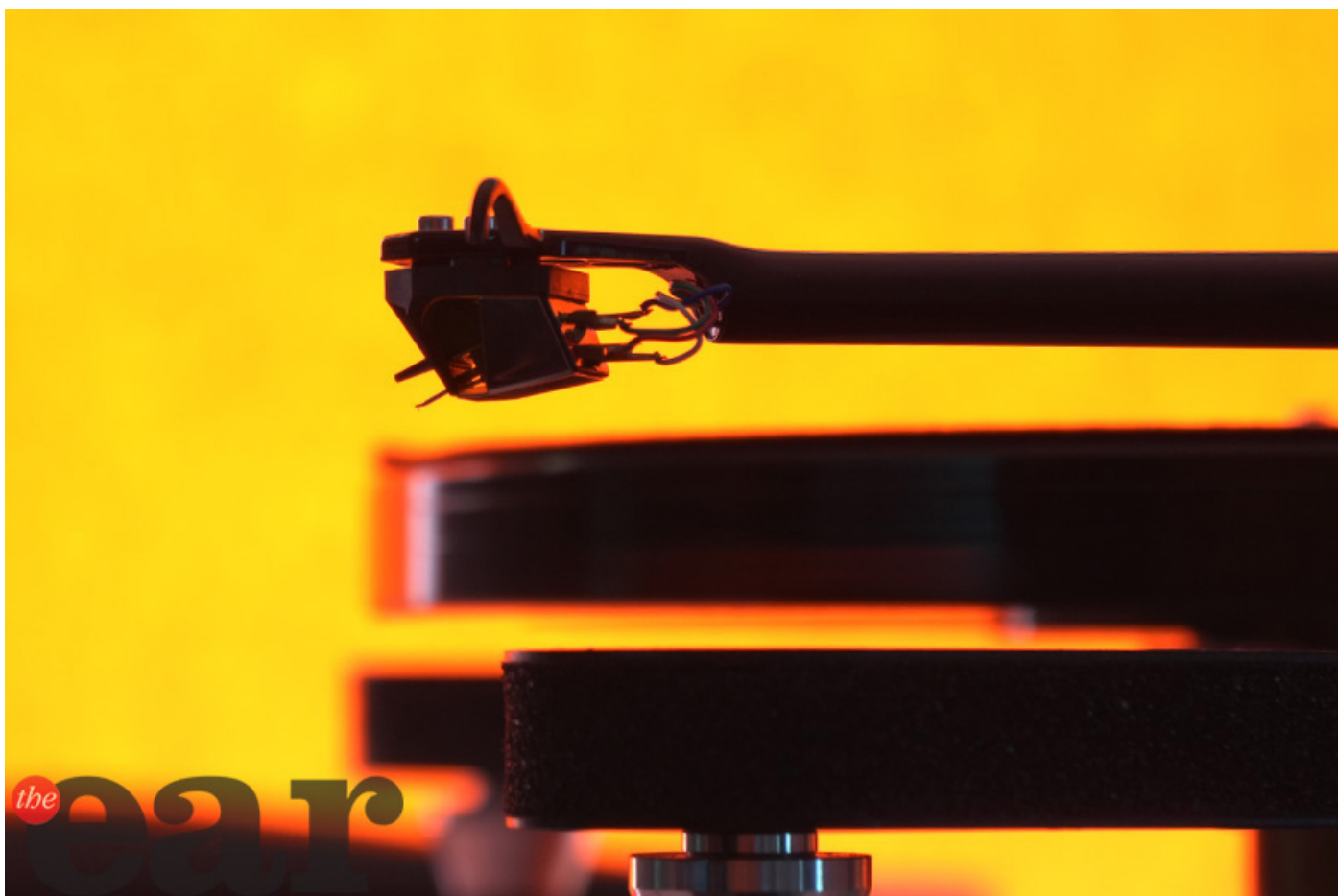
Sound quality

Being an Aphelion 2 user I decided to put the Nd7 on my Rega Naia turntable in the first instance, just to see how close Rega's best MM gets to their best MC. Unsurprisingly the answer is not very, I reckon it might give the Ania, the least expensive MC, a run for its money depending on phono stage, but there was a clear drop in performance here. That said the result was very engaging and articulate with good dynamics, it was easy to hear the multiple layers in various recordings as well, it reinforced the fact that the turntable is more important than the cartridge when it comes to extracting coherent detail from a vinyl groove.

I used a vintage Trichord Delphini phono stage in the first instance and this allowed the Nd7 to extract serious low end crunch from the Prodigy's *Poison*, delivering all the menace and intensity of the track; bass is clearly a strongpoint. This was also apparent alongside impressive dynamics on the track *Lone* from Bugge Wesseltoff's *Moving* album, which was very engaging and powerful. Then I dropped the fine line stylus on Prince's *One Nite Alone*, the result was electrifying, his high vocals low in the mix alongside a solid piano and some OTT bass synth. The latter is always overblown but the voice and keyboard were surprisingly vivid.

Aware that no one is likely to put a £450 cartridge on a £10k turntable I moved the Nd7 over to a Rega RP8 which was around £1,600 when in production. This proved to be a very happy combination, not as transparent as the Naia but very musically entertaining. I started by contrasting the Nd7 with the Nd5 and found that the extra £150 buys a bigger scale of sonic





picture with better dynamics and more powerful and well defined bass, it digs down deeper in the mix and pulls out the quieter sounds which coalesce into harmonics and accents. Percussion instruments became clearer thanks to better treble detail and this brings a crispness and refinement to the presentation.

Continuing with the RP8 and a Rega Aria phono stage resulted in a whole raft of different records sounding great, its ability to dig down and define what was going on with all of them making for highly rewarding listening. One particular highlight was Hiatus Kaiyote's latest release *Love Heart Cheat Code*, this tasty slice of Australian funk includes great vocals and a bass line that is constantly looking for new ways to express the rhythm. It's a dense recording with obvious compression but the Nd7 managed to open it up and draw me in to highly entertaining effect. I also got a thrilling result with a more familiar track in Frank Zappa's *Apostrophe*, this instrumental piece is pretty grungy and heavily squeezed to ramp up the intensity but the Nd7 allowed Zappa's guitar to reach out and speak to me in a way that is hard to achieve. The shredding is heavily compressed but it was easy to follow what was being played if not possible to turn the musical message into words.

Conclusion

Rega's top moving magnet cartridge is an extremely capable and revealing allrounder. While obviously designed to sit in a Rega tonearm it is likely to compete on other turntables thanks to its impressive detail digging qualities and extended high frequency resolution by MM standards. Given the cost of a decent MC phono stage I would suggest that those looking for next level results with vinyl consider the Nd7 before an MC. It competes with both types at its price point and above, and the high output plus great tracking ability make it a very hard act to beat if you want to really dig deep into your vinyl. If you are looking to buy a Rega P6 or P8 this is the cartridge to go for, it will make your vinyl shine and comes with a discount when bought as a package.