Hi-Fi Choice RECOMMENDED

Vinyl's plus one

In a move towards convenience, Rega adds a phono stage to its entry-level model. ***Ed Selley*** sees how the 1 Plus fares

Increasingly, the entry-level turntable market is in pursuit of convenient plug 'n' play solutions, with everything that's needed in one complete package to make spinning LPs as simple a process as possible. This is not typically the audiophile way of going about things, but with a growing desire for quality turntable solutions to appeal to new or returning vinyl fans, the move towards one-stop solutions that combine cartridge and phono stage preamps, reducing the box count, is enormously appealing.

With a range of acclaimed dedicated phono stage designs for every budget, Essex-based Rega has traditionally held off from the area of all-in-one vinyl solutions, but took the wraps off the Planar 1 Plus at the Sound & Vision Bristol Show back in February. As the model name suggests, at its core this is a Planar 1 turntable (the entry point to the Rega range) and a belt-driven unsuspended design with the belt acting on a sub platter rather than directly against the phenolic resin platter.

The matching tonearm is the RB110, which has been tweaked with a view to improving the user friendliness, thanks to the inclusion of an automatic bias adjustment. Rega says this makes setup easier than on any previous iteration.

The slight counter to this is that the value that the bias operates to is fixed and so may not suit all cartridges that the arm is otherwise capable of handling. It is, of course, an ideal match for the Carbon cartridge that comes supplied and if you roll the counterweight at the back of the tonearm to the raised rubber line, you'll have set the correct tracking weight too. What could be simpler?

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Rega Planar 1 Plus

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Belt-drive turntable

WEIGHT
4.35kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
447 x 117 x 360mm

FEATURES
- 33 & 45rpm
- Built-in MM phono stage
- RB110 tonearm with automatic bias adjustment
- Fitted with Rega Carbon moving-magnet cartridge

DISTRIBUTOR
Rega Research Ltd.

TELEPHONE
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WEBSITE
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The phono stage that's been incorporated into the Planar 1 Plus is derived from the standalone Fono Mini A2D moving-magnet option (*HFC* 360) that is still very much part of the range. Rega has removed the analogue-to-digital section along with the USB port, but beefed up the performance of the moving-magnet circuit, which outputs to a pair of RCA connections on the underside at the back of the unit. An interconnect lead comes supplied in the box.

It does a brilliant job of engaging and pulling the listener into the music

Aesthetically, the Plus version is almost indistinguishable from its Planar 1 sibling, with only a 'Plus' script under the P1 logo on the plinth to denote the difference. As with all Rega turntables, there is a sense of proportion to it that makes it look fundamentally right and it has a simplicity that will be very appealing to vinyl fans of all types. It is available in either gloss black or white finishes.

Build quality is very respectable for the asking price and while the platter and arm don't feel as good as Rega's more upmarket decks, it is ahead of much of the competition (see How it compares). It could be argued that the fitment of the phono stage and the nature of the bias system preclude extensive upgrades, but I suspect that Rega has crunched the numbers and realised that most users will look to hand it down as they upgrade to a more versatile deck as a passion for the format takes hold.

In terms of simplicity of setup, the Plus is about as straightforward as it gets. Remove the cardboard liner under the sub platter, slide the counterweight on, connect power and signal cables and pop the Perspex lid on (if you don't feel it affects sound quality, of course). Even a complete novice should be good to go in less than five minutes. No less positive is that connected to the line input of a Naim Uniti Star one-box system (*HFC* 433), the internal phono stage is completely silent at idle and should have enough gain for most setups.

Sound quality

Start playing LPs and the Plus shows some clear benefits to the cartridge and phono stage being matched. Amadou and Mariam's *La Confusion* is handled with confidence and authority. The fabulously involving *Mokou Mokou* has a real sense of the intimacy of the studio it was recorded in, while Mariam's vocal turn is recreated with a meaningful amount of weight and texture to it. Some of the effortless three dimensionality that more expensive members of the Rega range can demonstrate is present here and it really helps to immerse you in the music. There is a sense when the track gets more congested that the Carbon cartridge can struggle to make sense of all of the information and it hardens up a little at high levels, but never to the point where things become unlistenable.

HOW IT COMPARES

The Planar 1 Plus is similarly priced to the Audio-Technica AT-LP5 (*HFC* 415), which is also designed with a view to use in a fit-and-forget context. Out of the box in their shipped condition, the better phono stage and arm of the Rega are capable of a superior sonic performance. Where the LP5 hits back is that it is far easier to push the spec beyond what comes supplied. It is easy to change and accommodate a variety of cartridges, the phono stage can be switched out and it is unusually receptive to other tweaks and upgrades. If, however, you simply want to buy a turntable with great performance from the off, the Planar 1 Plus is the superior solution.

Rega's excellent Carbon MM cartridge is factory fitted

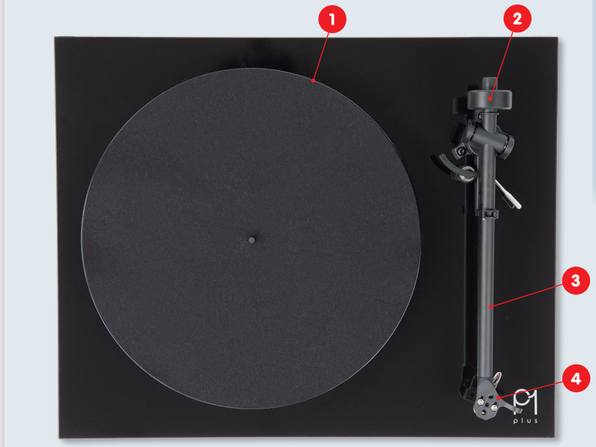
The faster and more potent musings of Goldfrapp's *Rocket* allow the Planar 1 Plus to show off its impressive rhythmic assurance. It does a brilliant job of engaging at an emotional level and pulling the listener into the music. This has always been a Rega strongpoint, but it is still noteworthy just how entertaining the P1 Plus is. More than almost any other turntable I've tried at this price point, it compels me to keep trying new music on it and it does a superb job of taking me beyond the equipment I'm listening to. This is not solely the preserve of more ballistic music either. Even with the positively stately *Black Pudding* by Mark Lanegan and Duke Garwood, there is a cohesiveness that can be found lacking with some rather more expensive rivals.

Rega seems to have set the Planar 1 Plus to be inherently forgiving, no matter the condition of vinyl it spins. In terms of the equipment that it is likely to be used with, this makes sense and it does a better job than most of keeping the poorly pressed *Meds* by Placebo listenable, and it is able to handle well-worn records pretty well too. The counter to this is that given a genuinely superb pressing – like *Toward The Within* by Dead Can Dance – it isn't always able to do it full justice and show off just how good it should sound.

Conclusion

With the Planar 1 Plus, Rega has managed to create a turntable that is utterly untaxing to set up and use, that still delivers the qualities that we have come to expect from the company. If you're looking for an entry-level turntable to be the first step to greater things with a clear upgrade route, the relatively fixed specification might not appeal, but as a beautifully realised one-stop shop for high-quality analogue playback, it certainly takes some beating ●

IN SIGHT



1. 23mm high-mass phenolic platter
2. Tonearm counter weight
3. RB110 tonearm
4. Rega Carbon moving-magnet cartridge

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★½
FEATURES	★★★★½

LIKE: Engaging presentation; easy to set up; build

DISLIKE: Sounds fractionally congested with busy recordings; lacks upgrade potential

WE SAY: A well thought out starter that balances convenience with performance

OVERALL ★★★★½

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