

Turntables

A New Entry-level Model from a Classic Brand

REGA P-1 TURNTABLE AND ORTOFON OM5E CARTRIDGE

Wayne Garcia



It was just about, uh, 30 years ago that I bought my first “serious” turntable. Which meant a belt-drive, English-made design. Before then I’d dabbled with direct-drive units from Technics and lusted for a Linn Sondek LP12 (then the ultimate English belt-drive). But lacking the cash to buy one, I instead bought a Rega Planar 3 from a local dealer who swore it was the next best thing. I enjoyed that Rega for years and eventually did “upgrade” to a Linn. To this day Rega seems destined to be the “poor man’s” this or that, when in reality Rega turntables needn’t play second fiddle to any other. They never tried to be anything other than what they are, which is simply the best value going in vinyl playback.

For the unfamiliar, Rega is an acronym for the name of the company’s founders, Tony RELph and Roy GAndy (Relph left the company in the early 70s, Gandy remains Mr. Rega). But what even initiates may not know is that Gandy’s first audio designs were not turntables but loudspeakers, built when he was 18 years old. It wasn’t until he started modifying a hand-me-down Connoisseur model that Gandy began tinkering with record players. The original Rega ’table was dubbed the Planet—a name that eventually found its way to Rega’s first CD player—but it was the introduction of the Planar 2 in 1975 that put Rega on the map.

A study in simplicity, the Planar 2 was a thin slab of veneered MDF, topped by a 12V AC synchronous motor, a dual-rimmed pulley that drove a small plastic subplatter, and a glass platter damped by a felt mat. The original Rega arms were S-shaped, with a removable bayonet-mount headshell, and the ’table’s only control was a rocker switch to power up the motor. Three rubber feet and an O-ring decoupling the motor from the plinth provided minimal isolation, and switching speeds from 33 to 45rpm meant—and still does—moving the drive belt from the pulley’s top rung to its lower one. The idea behind the design was to minimize resonance via low mass and selected materials. Aside from a major arm upgrade in 1983, when Rega introduced the standard-setting and now ubiquitous RB250 and RB300 arms, the P2 and slightly more expensive P3 remained virtually unchanged until recently. (The P2 just underwent a platter upgrade, and the P3 is in the process of an overhaul.)

At a glance the \$350 Rega P1 is virtually indistinguishable from earlier models. And as Rega proudly points out, the P1 is entirely British-made. It uses the classic Rega motor, drive system, and main bearing, but instead of glass the platter is made of MDF. The arm is the new RB100, which comes pre-mounted with the Ortofon OM5e moving-magnet cartridge. The only setup

Rega P1 • Turntables

required is to attach the counterweight and thread it all the way to the front of the mounting post to reach the recommended 1.75 grams of vertical tracking force. I checked the accuracy of this placement with AcousTech's electronic stylus gauge (reviewed elsewhere this issue), and got a reading of 1.92 grams. Not a huge amount off, but you might want to back the counterweight off a quarter turn or use a similar gauge to get a more accurate VTF.

I enjoyed a great many LPs with the P1, including The White Stripes' *Elephant* [V2], Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat* Suite [Columbia], Sinatra's *The Voice* [Classic Records reissue], and Milt Jackson and Cannonball Adderley's *Things Are Getting Better* [Acoustic Sounds 45RPM Series]. Like other Regas, the P1 runs ever so slightly fast, which gives the music a fine sense of energy and pace—two hallmarks of the Rega sound. This also brought out the unique phrasing in a Sinatra vocal line, the dynamic snap and insistent march beat to the opening passage of the Stravinsky, the interplay of the Adderley-Jackson group, and the rhythmic starts and stops of the White Stripes. These are, of course, many of the qualities vinyl lovers cherish, and ones harder to find in digital audio sources. The Rega/Ortofon combo also displayed excellent focus and three-dimensionality in Gerhard's *Libra* [Decca].

Being an entry-level design—and one I might add dropped into a very expensive reference system—what you won't get from this combo is much in the way of extended highs or lows,

or the wide dynamic range heard from more costly rigs (I suspect a cartridge upgrade would help, but reviewed the unit only as delivered). That minor criticism aside, because it is destined for less revealing systems, the Rega P1 continues the company's tradition of offering the musical pleasures of analog playback in a very attractively priced package. If you've been tempted to give analog a try but have been put off by the price of admission, Rega has just made it that much harder to resist. **TAS**

Specs & Pricing

Type: Belt-drive turntable with factory-mounted Ortofon OM5e mm cartridge

Speeds: 33.3 and 45 rpm (manually selected)

Dimensions: 17" x 5.25" x 13"

Weight: 20 lbs.


Price: \$350

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

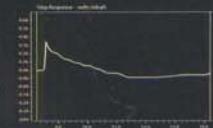
Artemis Labs LA-1 lineage and PL-1 phono stage; MBL 5011 preamp, 1521 A CD transport, 1511 E DAC, and 9007 monoblock amplifiers; Kharma Mini Exquisite and Sonus Faber Elipsa loudspeakers; Kubala-Sosna Emotion interconnects, speaker cables, power cords, and Expression digital cable; TARA Labs Zero interconnect and digital cables, Omega speaker cables, The One power cords, and AD-10B Power Screen; Finite Element Spider equipment racks

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This "Step Response" graph is from a time- and phase-accurate speaker where all drivers work in unison to replicate the waveform produced by the amplifier.



The harmonic distortion produced by an amplifier can be measured without ambiguity and so can the time- and phase-accuracy of a loudspeaker. If a loudspeaker delivers a step response that looks like this, it's time- and phase-accurate.

Take the "Step-Response" Challenge

If the graph doesn't look like this, the speaker is not time- and phase-accurate and some drivers pull while others push. No amount of rhetoric will change this simple fact.

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