

Rega P1

Art Dudley

RECORD PLAYER



Rega P1 record player

DESCRIPTION Two-speed, belt-driven turntable with synchronous AC motor, MDF platter, pivoted tonearm with aluminum-alloy armtube, moving-magnet phono cartridge with replaceable stylus. Wow and flutter: unspecified. Rumble: unspecified. Tonearm spindle to pivot distance: 222.8mm. Tonearm effective length: 240mm. Downforce: noncalibrated counterweight. Antiskating: calibrated sliding magnet.

DIMENSIONS 17.5" (450mm) W by ca 4.5" (115mm) H (with dustcover) by 15" (385mm) D. Weight: not specified.

FINISH Gray semigloss.

SERIAL NUMBER OF UNIT

REVIEWED 00235.

PRICE \$350. Approximate number of dealers: 125.

MANUFACTURER Rega Research Ltd., 119 Park Street, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex, England SS0 7PD, UK. Web: www.rega.co.uk. US distributor: The Sound Organisation, 159 Leslie Street, Dallas, TX 75207. Tel: (972) 234-0182. Fax: (972) 234-0249. Web: www.soundorg.com.

For a word that first appeared in print only 35 years ago, *prequel* has a lot of impact—if only in a commercial sense. The television series *Smallville* has become a staple of American broadcasting. Film producers gambled millions on the chance that audiences would want to know what happened when Batman *began*. And while moviegoers have turned their backs on the apparently awful *Hannibal Rising*, the book of the same name is doing brisk business indeed.

Our antediluvian interest isn't limited to superheroes and scary creeps: After enjoying the Rega Planar 2 record player for 32 years, and the Rega Planar 3 for almost as long, someone in the audio world finally got around to asking: *What about the Planar 1?*

Thus the stage was set for Rega to fill in the missing first chapter, and their new P1 record player has now reached our shores. Intended as a bargain among bargains, the Rega P1 is an old formula brought to life with new parts—including a brand-new tonearm, the Rega RB100.

Description

Like most Rega record players—and especially like the very first Planar 3—the P1 has a purposeful, unfussy appearance: a simple-looking, lightweight wooden plinth covered in dark, semigloss laminate. The underlying design is less simple, however—something that Rega's many imitators have missed over the years—and is the direct result of designer Roy Gandy's abiding belief that a massive

REGA P1

plinth is massively good for one thing only: the storing of unwanted resonant energy (which *always* gets rereleased, and which doesn't wait for you to flip the record over before doing so). That plinth sits on three of the same multi-tiered rubber pods that have supported Rega Planar turntables since time out of mind: Each of the three feet supports an area of different mass compared with the other two, and is thus "tuned" to a slightly different frequency.

The Rega P1 also uses the same sort of molded subplatter, with the same sort of interference-fit bearing spindle, as Planars gone by, and to which is fitted the same round-cross-section drive belt. The outside diameter of the P1's bearing well is only $\frac{7}{16}$ " compared with the $\frac{1}{4}$ " of the P3, yet their bores are the same, as are their captured thrust balls and reddish gear oil. The Dutch-sourced AC motor is a bit less refined than the one used in the P2 and P3, and topped with a similarly less select pulley; the only drive circuitry to speak of is the usual three-part "phasing" network, to get the platter turning in the proper direction.

That's all well and good. But in order to sell the P1 for \$350—a significant savings¹ compared with the already affordable P2 (\$525)—Rega had to economize in two other, more major ways. The first of those is the aforementioned RB100 tonearm, which is outwardly similar to the very successful RB300 family of arms, despite its simpler construction: The one-piece armtube casting has given way to a simple alloy tube with a bonded aluminum headshell, and the spring-actuated downforce of the more expensive tonearms—actually an adjustable spring whose *upward* pressure is relieved as downforce is increased—has been replaced with a simple adjustable counterweight. Damped cueing and magnetic antiskating remain, as does the arm's basic effective length of 240mm.

The second major scale-back is even more drastic: For the P1, Rega has forgone their famous glass platter in favor of one machined from MDF. That's right: Put away the Windex and get out the Pledge. The fiberboard platter is $\frac{1}{16}$ " thick, and is machined in an effort to concentrate a bit more mass toward

the periphery than toward the center—although I can't imagine it makes much of a difference, given MDF's low mass. The platter is sprayed black and topped with a somewhat coarser version of the standard Rega felt mat.

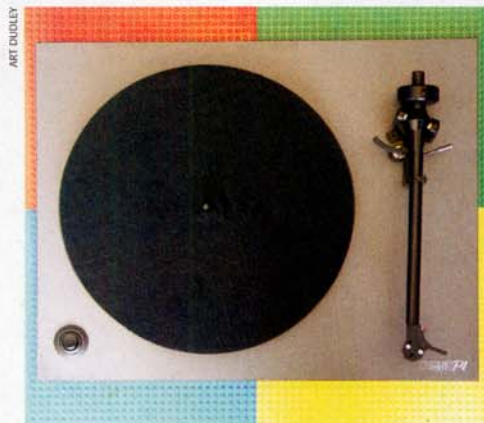
Setup

In an effort to make the P1 record player even more attractive to the first-time buyer, Rega bundles it with an Ortofon OMB 5E, a moving-magnet phono cartridge of presumably humble cost. (The OMB 5E, an OEM-only model offered with record players from a number of different manufacturers, can't be purchased separately.) In fact, Rega hasn't just *bundled* the cartridge—they've installed it, and aligned it to perfection.²

There's even more to it than that—or less, depending on your point of view: In mapping out their new RB100 tonearm, Rega designed its counterweight so that the user could scoot it all the way forward, to the limit of its travel, to achieve a tracking force of approximately 1.75gm when used with a cartridge weighing 4.8gm—which just happens to be the mass of the humble Ortofon.

The implication, while less than staggering, is at least mildly impressive: To get the P1 up and running, all you have to do is remove it from its box, plug it in, snap the hinged dustcover in place, put the platter and mat on the subplatter, place the counterweight on the tonearm, rotate the counterweight toward the bearing until it can move no farther, slide the antiskating control toward the notch labeled "2," and play records. You don't need a horoscope or a microscope.

I tried mounting other cartridges in the P1—noting, in the process, that the Ortofon was a little too tall for an unshimmed Rega tonearm—and had especially good luck with both a Rega Elys moving-magnet and a Goldring Elite moving-coil. Even without



The Rega P1 refuses to blend with its surroundings.

numerical calibrations on the counterweight, downforce was easy to set: A half-turn of the weight corresponded with a 1gm change in force (confirmed with my Technics electronic pressure gauge). Counter to my experience with other Rega arms, the RB100's antiskating force seemed a bit on the high side for a given downforce-correlated setting.

The RB100's bearings appeared free of egregious friction—although the high residual antiskating force made this a little more difficult than usual to check—and while the MDF platter wasn't entirely free from runout error, it was shockingly good for a product in this price range. I've seen platters on four-figure turntables, made of both alloy and acrylic, that weren't nearly as true. Platter speed was spot-on at 45rpm, but over 1% high at 33.3rpm, which most users would consider audible.

Performance

The Rega P1 surprised me by being the rare turntable whose performance changed noticeably during the break-in period. It was a decently musical player right from the start, but its sound became a bit cleaner after the first week, with an audible decrease in flutter. Perhaps the bearing, or even the drive motor itself, required running in?

Whatever the reason, it took a little while for the Rega to sound like itself—which I would describe as unsurprisingly pacy, and not at all bright or crisp. Listeners whose analog experience runs deeper, and whose tastes are arguably more sophisticated, might consider the P1 a bit dark sounding; I imagine that its target audience will think of it less as

¹ By my calculation, the P1 is 33.3% less expensive than the P2. Surely that is not a coincidence.

² The cartridge on my sample was indeed set up perfectly, but in accordance with Rega's own alignment scheme: a double-null geometry that differs from others in that its innermost null point is closer to the lead-out groove. Prospective buyers should also note that the RB100 has shorter cartridge-alignment slots than other Rega tonearms, and does not allow quite enough overhang to achieve perfect Baerwald alignment with many cartridges.

