

Rega Planet 2000 CD Player

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In the beginning, the British firm Rega Research was considered an “analog only” company whose cost-effective turntables, pickup arms, and cartridges found favor with vinyl lovers around the world. Even after the digital era entered full swing, Rega bucked the trend and focused on analog products—refusing, for years, to offer digital components of any kind. On one hand, Rega’s unwavering devotion to the analog “faith” reflected a genuine commitment to musical excellence (in the mid-1990s, modestly priced Rega analog rigs routinely outperformed expensive high-end CD players). On the other hand, Rega’s “digiphobia” seemed an obstinate refusal to face market realities (the main reality being that digital audio, though beaten by vinyl in individual performance “battles,” had already decisively won the consumer acceptance “war”). And then, in 1997, the analog stalwarts at Rega shocked us all by *finally* releasing a CD player, the classic Planet.



Partly because audiophiles felt they could trust a digital product from a long-term digital holdout, and partly because the player was extraordinarily good for the money, Rega’s Planet became a classic in its own time. Where others of the period tended to sound sterile and flat, the Planet offered analog-like warmth and a sound that emphasized depth and spaciousness over raw “definition.” As a result, many analog enthusiasts found the Planet was the first affordable CD player they could actually embrace—a player that went a long way toward healing the rift between high-end audio’s opposing digital and analog camps.

Rega followed the successful Planet with its upscale Jupiter CD player, and more recently released updated versions of both players known in the US market as the Planet 2000 and Jupiter 2000. The flagship Jupiter 2000 attracted favorable coverage from our affiliated publication *The Absolute Sound* and from others (see the review in

TAS 135 and recommendation in TAS 140, both articles available for download from this site), but with the unintended consequence that the Planet 2000 somewhat got lost in the shadow of its more costly sibling. However, the Planet 2000 merits the full review we present here for several reasons. First, there's the matter of affordability; at \$895, the Planet 2000 fits many more audiophile budgets than the \$1895 Jupiter 2000. Second, there's the related issue of cost-effectiveness, and my high-end instincts suggest that models like the Planet 2000, which fall one notch below the flagship level, often make the sweetest values—providing trickle-down high-end technology at bargain prices (besides, there's no denying the appeal of a sub-\$1000 CD player that promises "giant killer" performance). Third, many of us are simply curious to know how (or *if*) the Planet 2000 improves upon the legendary Planet it replaces. With these considerations in mind, let's look at how the Planet 2000 is configured.

Like its predecessor, the Planet 2000 is a top-loading single-disc CD player with simple, easy to use controls (four rubber touch pads provide basic Play/Pause, Stop, Track Previous, and Track Next



functions). The player comes with a Solar remote control that provides more elaborate programming, display, and playback controls, but the basic controls are really all you need: They are so intuitive that even children enjoy using them (my eight-year-old son had the Rega figured out

in under a minute and has used it happily ever since). The Planet 2000 is larger in every dimension than the original Planet, features a pleasingly symmetrical design (the original was decidedly asymmetrical), and is housed in an attractive custom-built extruded aluminum case whose thick faceplate panels are attached with recessed cap-screws. Both the Planet and Planet 2000 are well made, but I prefer the newer model for its more refined design, broad-shouldered good looks, and noticeably better fit and finish. Differences between the players are more than cosmetic, as the Planet 2000 incorporates a long list of enhancements, including an improved CD lid assembly, a high-performance Sony CD mechanism, a display that supports CD Text, a toroidal power transformer with separate windings for the display and audio stages, a new Rega 24-bit Sigma Delta IC40 DAC, an improved power-supply design featuring an extra supply for the digital section of the DAC, improved coupling capacitors, both

Toslink and co-axial digital outputs, and improved parts throughout the signal path. Individually, these changes might seem small and incremental, but their cumulative sonic effect is, as we'll see in a moment, quite dramatic. Let me sketch for you the main characteristics that define the sound of the Planet 2000, with comparisons to the original Planet, where helpful.

The Planet 2000 is blessed with a neutral spectral balance, with a treble region that is well extended but not overly forward, and with bass that strikes a good balance between taut, clean-edged impact and correct warmth and weight. Its voice has a natural, "organic" quality that stands in contrast against those players tipped toward the bright, clinical end of the spectrum. Don't get me wrong; the Planet 2000 does not impart any sort of false "golden glow" to the music. It just faithfully delivers whatever warmth and body are present in the recording—something many CD players have trouble doing. The Planet 2000 corrects two subtle deficiencies I perceived in the 1st-generation Planet. First, it removes that model's very slight touch of euphonic mid-bass "enrichment," meaning you now hear what's going on in good bass recordings without even a hint of "caramel coating." The difference means you'll enjoy all the low-frequency articulation a good recording has to give, as in Michael Manring's *Toward the Center of the Night* [Windham Hill], where you hear the great bass virtuoso playing his signature Zon Hyperbass (surely one of the most expressive fretless bass guitars ever made) with extraordinary clarity. Second, the Planet 2000 provides more neutral upper midrange/treble balance than the original (which sounded just a touch recessed in those regions). While this change *does* make the new model sound ever so slightly brighter than the original, it is a move toward neutrality—not toward exaggerated treble edginess. The payoff comes on recordings whose midrange/treble content demands neutral reproduction. One example would be the Hilary Hahn/St. Paul Chamber Orchestra recording of the Edgar Meyer *Violin Concerto* [Sony Classical]. The first movement of the concerto introduces recurring violin phrases each punctuated with a sweet, crisply rising note whose harmonics ring upward and outward; on dull players, these harmonics get lost, and on bright players they can sound painfully hot, but the Planet 2000 gets them just right. In sum, the well-balanced Planet 2000 can deliver warmth at least as effectively as the original Planet, but with a more neutral presentation overall.

Common audiophile wisdom holds that Rega CD players have pleasing musicality but lack the nth degree of resolution and detail. While this might have been a fair characterization of the original Planet, it's not an accurate portrayal of the Planet 2000, for this player offers *substantially* more resolving power than its predecessor—though never in a spectacular or exaggerated way. The Planet 2000 builds

upon the midrange clarity of the Planet, but it presents textures and harmonics with greater lucidity, and does a better job reproducing small cues that help you sense the size and acoustics of the recording space (or any signal-processing effects that might have been applied in the recording). The result is sound that at once contains more musical information, yet is more relaxing for the listener; because details are more explicit, you don't have to struggle to discern subtleties in voicing, dynamics, or the hall. To appreciate how the Planet 2000's improved resolution can enhance your listening experience, try the "Fade to Black" track from Dire Straits' *On Every Street* [Warner Bros.]. As in many of Dire Straits' best recordings, there's a lot going on in this track; you have Mark Knopfler's distinctive but hard-to-capture voice (a voice that easily becomes a caricature of itself with some equipment), his exquisitely modulated guitar, and organ, bass, and percussion accompanists recorded with extraordinary depth and delicacy. This lovely track yields decent results with a number of players, but its rich, layered textures fully unfold and blossom through the Planet 2000; suddenly, you can follow individual sonic threads with ease, while getting a finely resolved picture of how those threads are woven together in the mix (and Knopfler's voice just sounds *right*). I believe the Planet 2000 provides as much (or more) usable musical detail as I have heard from any player in this price class. While there are certainly higher resolution players, the genuinely good ones cost a *lot* more, while the flawed wannabes give the illusion of producing greater detail but at the expense of such tradeoffs as over-burnished treble regions and transient overshoot that compromise the music in unacceptable ways.

It's in the area of soundstaging that the Planet 2000 most distinguishes itself from the original Planet and from many other good players in this price range. This player effortlessly creates a wide soundstage that reveals the layers of depth captured in your recordings (provided, of course, your speakers are up to the task). Even non-audiophiles find this aspect of the player captivating. A guest who recently heard the player turned to me with a look of amazement and said, "Wow, not only can you tell *what direction* each sound is coming from; you can even tell *exactly how far back* each musician is standing." By comparison, many other players seem to compress or flatten the soundstage to the extent that much of the depth information in good recordings gets lost. To hear how good the Planet 2000's soundstaging can be, listen to the Wilma Cozart/Robert Fine-produced Dorati/London version of Webern's *Five Pieces for Orchestra* [Mercury]; you will not only hear how the performers are arranged on the stage, but also have an uncanny sense for the boundaries of the hall. Much more than the original Planet, the Planet 2000 conveys a

sense both of *placement* and *place*, which really is what great soundstaging is all about.

Rega's Planet 2000 is a worthy successor to, and a worthwhile upgrade from, the original Planet. The Planet 2000 preserves much of the original model's warmth and natural, "organic" voicing, but it offers even more neutral spectral balance, greater resolving power, and much better soundstaging. In the broader scheme of things, I would say the Planet 2000 represents a true point of diminishing returns—that happy point on the graph where high performance and rational pricing intersect. When you look to climb above the level of the Planet 2000, performance improvements start to taper off while prices soar, meaning that for all the right reasons, the Planet 2000 may be as fine a CD player as many audiophiles will ever need, or want. **AV**

Specifications	
Type of Outputs:	1 pair Analog (on RCA jacks), 2 Digital (Toslink and coaxial)
Dimensions:	17 1/8" x 4" x 10.75"
Weight:	14 lbs.
Associated Equipment	
Parasound Halo P3 preamplifier and A23 power amplifier; Red Rose Music Spirit integrated amplifier; Magnepan MG 1.6QR, Meadowlark Kestrel2, and Red Rose Spirit Studio Monitor loudspeakers; Sony DVP-S9000ES; Rega Planet and Planet 2000 CD Players; Chang Lightspeed CLS-HT 1000 Mk II power line filter; Audio Magic, Cardas, Rega, and Red Rose audio and speaker interconnects	
Manufacturer Information	
Rega Research Limited www.rega.co.uk	
U.S. Distributor: Cogent 11140 Petal Street, Suite 350 Dallas, TX 75238 972-234-0182	
Price: \$895.00	