



Wax works

Neville Roberts checks out the re-launch of Rega's Planar 2 – one of the most famous British turntables ever

In his younger days, Roy Gandy had the vision of designing a turntable that was better made and more reliable than the ones he had been selling as a part-time audio equipment retailer. This vision became a reality in 1973 when he formed a partnership with a colleague, Tony Relph, and registered the company name 'Rega', formed from the first two letters of their respective surnames. This partnership did not survive for long and Tony eventually left. However, the company continued to evolve with Roy at the helm and this led to the launch of the Rega Planar 2 turntable with its glass platter in 1976 as a development of the original Rega Planar with an aluminium platter that was produced the previous year. The Planar 2 rapidly established itself in the market as one of the finest budget turntables around. Fast forward 40 years and the company has just launched a brand new Rega Planar 2. The new version of the classic turntable has been developed over the past two years alongside the recently released Planar 3 (HFC 411). It features a raft of new parts, including the RB220 tonearm, a 24V

low-noise motor housed in the acrylic laminated plinth and a newly designed central bearing for the platter. Starting off with the tonearm, the RB220 is fitted with a new ultra-low friction, zero-play ball bearing system contained within a stiff and lightweight bearing housing, which is designed by Rega (patent pending). The company has also developed an innovative automatic bias adjustment that eliminates the need to set the bias. The housing also includes an integrated arm clip along with the latest custom-designed aluminium arm tube. These features make the RB220 almost completely plug and play, apart from simple arm balancing. The arm is fitted with a Rega Carbon moving-magnet cartridge as standard. This requires a stylus force set between 2-3g, has a user-replaceable stylus assembly and generates 2.5mV at 1kHz. Should you wish to upgrade it, this is an easy job but, as with all Rega tonearms, there is no VTA adjustment. The hub bearing fitted to the Planar 2 has a new 11mm self-securing brass bearing (also patent pending) to offer a low-stress but tighter tolerance unit over the previous design in order to reduce frictional losses and thus improve the transfer of rotational

DETAILS
PRODUCT
Rega Planar 2
ORIGIN
UK
TYPE
Belt-drive turntable
WEIGHT
5.5kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
447 x 117 x 360mm
FEATURES
• 33 & 45rpm
• Optiwhite glass platter
• RB220 tonearm
• 24V synchronous motor
DISTRIBUTOR
Rega Research Ltd
TELEPHONE
01702 333071
WEBSITE
rega.co.uk

energy to the platter. The 10mm-thick platter is (you guessed it) also new and is manufactured to a high accuracy from float glass called Optiwhite. It's driven by a new 24V low-noise, low-vibration motor assembly fed from a special PCB control unit. The motor is fitted with a cover tray underneath and has an integrated cooling system. Power for the motor comes from a 24V wall-wart mains adapter. I must confess it takes me a while to locate the 'ergonomically positioned power switch' as it is referred to on the Rega website as it is actually positioned on the underside of the plinth near the front on the left-hand side.

The bass line is deep, powerful, well extended and very well controlled

Speed is changeable between 33 and 45rpm by moving the belt between two pulleys fixed to the motor. Although simple to do, I do find it a bit of a pain as the platter has to be removed every time you want to change speed. The Planar 2's motor cannot be used with the Rega TT-PSU power supply upgrade that provides electronic speed change for its big brother, the Planar 3. However, this is a minor gripe. The plinth is a stiff, acrylic laminated design and is available in either gloss black or gloss white. The re-designed rubber feet are adjustable and intended to increase stability and reduce vibration transfer. A clear acrylic lid is also included, as are some tiny adhesive

clear rubber corners that can be stuck to the appropriate area of the lid if desired. These are included to help prevent marking the acrylic skin plinth over time. Straight out of the box, setting up the Planar 2 is a piece of cake and takes about a minute all in. Apart from plugging in the power supply to a mains socket and the phono leads to the amplifier, all that is required is to fit the platter, level the turntable using a spirit level and set the tracking force to 2.5g.

Sound quality

I decide to begin with some electronic vinyl in the form of *Desireless* by Laurent Garnier. This is a great recording for testing out bass response, and I am surprised by just how well the Rega Carbon, which is a budget moving-magnet cartridge, performs in this respect. The pounding bass line is deep, powerful, well extended and very well controlled. There is no sense of it interfering with the top end of the hi-hat hits and synthesised percussion sounds, which are extremely clear and precise. The growling vocals are well positioned towards the front of the soundstage and although there is quite a lot going on during this track, the Planar 2, RB220 tonearm and Carbon cartridge comfortably takes it all in its stride.

So far, so good. Next up I turn to an excellent LP of Handel's *Organ Concerto No.5* in F Major played by E Power Biggs with Adrian Boult conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra. The orchestra is full, open and energetic and the instrument focus is very good indeed. The stately



Apart from simple arm balancing, the Planar 2 is pretty much plug and play

opening movement shows how well the orchestra is balanced with the organ. The sprightly second movement has the melody played on the organ, which is beautifully clear and elegant. The violins in the final movement are perhaps a touch over bright during the crescendos, causing them to feel a little flustered at times, but this effect is very subtle and may be down to personal taste. However, this does not detract from an excellent rendition of this recording.

Given my comment on the loud violin passages in the last recording, I really need to explore the top end performance more closely, so I swap the Handel LP for vocals with a half-speed mastered record of Simon and Garfunkel's *So Long*, *Frank Lloyd Wright*. As was typical of CBS records of the period, this is a very bright recording with a lot of potential for objectionable sibilance with vocals. I lower the stylus onto the last track on side one and grit my teeth... To my

amazement the vocal is smoother than I anticipate – yes it is bright, but certainly not overly sibilant, and is a real credit to the RB220 tonearm and Carbon cartridge combination. Trevor Pinnock playing JS Bach's *Partita No.4* on solo harpsichord demonstrates how the deck performs with the delicate detailed reproduction required by the instrument. The Planar 2 does not disappoint – I am treated to a very sophisticated performance that has an excellent sense of realism. I find that the recording has great depth, which combined with super imaging, contributes to the overall sense of reality with this recording. The felt mat appears to be a perfect partner for the glass platter. I find that there is no tendency for top ends to ring at one end of the spectrum; nor are they overly damped at the other.

Conclusion

The Planar 2 is certainly a classy performer, given its affordable price tag. It is without doubt going to spawn a whole new generation of followers and keep Rega's profile high in what is fast becoming a growing turntable market ●

CONNECTIONS



Hi-Fi Choice
OUR VERDICT
SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Excellent sound quality; modern styling; Optiwhite platter
VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Manual speed change; no VTA adjustment
BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** The famous Planar 2 is brought right up to date and offers amazing sound quality at a great price
FEATURES
★★★★★
OVERALL
★★★★★