



SOUND ADVICE

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Rega Naia

THE NAIA REPRESENTS A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT WAY OF MAKING A HIGH-END TURNTABLE TO MOST RIVALS- IS THE CONTRARIAN APPROACH THE CORRECT ONE?

£9,999



The Rega Naia is an unsuspected, belt driven turntable... but if you are in any way familiar with Rega turntables that won't come as too much of a surprise because this is the configuration that all Rega turntables have taken since day one. In fact, with the Naia, this similarity goes even further. Take a look at it next

to the Planar 10, the next rung down the ladder and it's hard to escape the thought that Rega has done the engineering equivalent of pressing Control+C.

In fact, the Planar 10 and the Naia share very few parts in common.

What they *do* share is a common ancestry point. This is a device called the Naiad and it's barely less mythical than the Loch Ness Monster. Originally developed as a sort of technology demonstrator, it entered extremely limited (in that it's made largely by one person who has other things to do as well and costs a brisk £30,000) production in response to requests from Rega superfans. Design philosophy from the Naiad has influenced the design of the Planar 8 we have already looked at and more of the technology and materials go into the Planar 10.

The Naia ups the ante to the point where, as the name suggests, it becomes the last stop before the Naiad. This means that it takes the same basic form as the Planar 10 and even uses the same offboard power supply and speed control to power their motors as Rega doesn't feel that the design can be easily or meaningfully improved. They are also both have plinths made of the same Tan Cast 8 foam used in the Planar 8 and Planar 6 as well. It works brilliantly and Rega doesn't feel the need for change.

From there though, the changes begin. The Tan Cast 8 is encased in layers of graphene infused carbon fibre and the plinth itself sits on skeletal aluminium feet. At the centre is a bearing that is made of Zirconium toughened alumina, giving the spindle its distinctive white colour. The ceramic platter looks similar to the Planar 10 but is thicker and has a different profile on the underside that allows space for a sub-platter that could be sold for hundreds of pounds as an executive desk toy and that is rotated by no less than three specially selected belts.

The refinements keep coming.

The RB Titanium Tonearm is, as the name suggests, closely related to the RB3000 on the Planar 10 but uses titanium for the one-piece vertical bearing and vertical spindle assembly, completed with a tungsten counterweight and shaft assembly. Like other Rega models, you can order your Naia with or without a cartridge (this option is £9,999) but the only option for pre fitment is the flagship Aphelion 2 cartridge (the £12499 option that we are reviewing here); a device good enough to be standard fitment on the Naiad itself.

What results is the ultimate expression of Rega's philosophy of applying mass where it is needed and going to quite extraordinary lengths to shed it when you don't. The Naia is something that looks superficially simple – basic even – until you begin to look at it more closely and you realise that it really, really isn't.

SOUND QUALITY

As they embody a shared design philosophy, you can experience elements of the Naia's performance when you listen to a Planar 10 (or even an 8 or a 6) but it's very, very clear from about five minutes in that the Naia is something else again (and has you wondering in idle moments what the Naiad is capable of...).

At its core, the Naia is impressively neutral and transparent for a vinyl source; this is a less overtly characterful design than the Roksan Xerxes 20+ or Linn Selectt LP12 we have looked at around this sort of price. It does a more effective job of getting out of the way and letting the record itself be the story.

And boy, is the record the story.

Listen to the Planar 10 against a great many rivals (even ones that cost rather more) and you will be aware that it extracts an impressive amount of information from a record thanks to combination of low noise floor and impressive stiffness that its design imparts that means that the arm's relationship to the bearing changes only in means that Rega wants it to.

Listen to the Naia though and there is more information again. It's a terrible cliché to say it's like hearing things for the first time but I'd buy you the beverage of your choice if within ten records, you weren't made aware of a nuance you hadn't heard previously, even on a record you know well. This is a forensically capable record player. It performs this remarkable role with two useful caveats though. The first is that the Naia is able to take your less than magnificent pressings (be honest here, not everything you actively enjoy listening to counts as 'audiophile' does it?) and manage to pull a fearsome amount of information out of them without simply pointing out that the record is a bit lacking. Nothing in your collection will be off limits to the Naia.

The second is that 'supremely accurate' does not in this case mean 'joyless.' All the effort that Rega has expended in mass control has resulted in a turntable that will follow any time signature with the dogged agility of a jack Russell chasing a rat. Even designs you previously considered pretty dynamic can feel a little lumpen in comparison to the experience here. Regardless of whether your poison is an orchestra flowing gently through a symphony or a wall of electronic noise on the rampage, the Naia is going to handle it just fine.

It will be wholly convincing across the whole performance too. The Aphelion 2 is not the sweetest sounding cartridge available at the price but the tonal realism on offer is truly outstanding. Voices and instruments are unfailingly believable and rich without being over emphasised. The bass extension is also truly extraordinary. It feels impossible that a turntable you can lift (carefully!) with one hand can deliver the sort of subterranean urge that the Naia can but it does and it does with the same articulation as the rest of the frequency response.

LIVING WITH THE NAIA

This is the point where the Rega doesn't so much have an ace up its sleeve as an entire pack of aces. There's no suspension, no sub chassis, even the belts come pre fitted. If you choose to buy a Naia with the Aphelion 2 fitted at the factory, it is genuinely no harder to put together than a £299 Planar 1 and the number of other turntables at this sort of price you can say that about can be counted on the fingers of one knee.

Nor is the Rega done there. It's small and doesn't take up very much room - even the power supply is a half standard width design. Absolute best performance

would be secured on a wall shelf but the wide range of isolation platforms on the market would be a useful alternative. Being incredibly picky (and I need to be to prevent this review sounding like an advert), the removable dust cover doesn't offer quite the same protection as a more conventional lid and, combined with the fairly small stylus guard on the cart, means the Rega is slightly more vulnerable than some rivals but that's about the limit of my criticisms.

It's also important to stress when talking about the Naia's unique construction that 'small' and 'light' does not ever mean 'flimsy' or 'insubstantial.' The Rega is assembled and finished with a care that goes a long way to justifying the asking price. Spend a little time with it and you can see where the money has gone. Of course, if you're looking for wood and trad, this probably isn't it but, as a counter to that, few turntables at any price feel as contemporary as this one does.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, the idea of 'convenient high end' has become more prevalent. Equipment that blows your socks off while requiring no suffering for your art have started to appear in most product categories. The Naia might be the first time this has genuinely been the case with a turntable though. Here is a genuinely high end device; a piece of analogue replay equipment that trades blows with the best of them, but that is no more demanding in use than one at a tenth of the price.

The Rega is a tremendous achievement and an outstanding turntable.

LISTENING NOTES

Cinematic Orchestra *To Believe*

A record that combines moments of enormous scale with incredible delicacy and a huge selection of tempos and styles. The Naia delights in every single second of it.

Gregory Porter *Liquid Spirit*

I thought I had heard the title track of this enough times on enough turntables that there was nothing more to give. The Naia somehow managed to prove me wrong.

Fingerprintz *Distinguishing Marks*

An almost forgotten Scottish post punk band who's work never even made it to CD. To hear this tremendous album on the Naia is equivalent to time travel, so impressive is the level of performance it extracts.

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

If you have an extensive vinyl collection, the Naia is the device that can unlock it without fear or favour while being compact, easy to use and a pleasure to live with.