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Rega Planar 10 / Apheta 3 review

Rega takes a radical approach to turntable design Tested at £4499 / \$6695 / AU\$4999

By [What Hi-Fi?](#) Posted 2019-12-27T07:00:49Z

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(Image: © Rega)

OUR VERDICT

Rega's mainstream range-topper is an exceptional performer that packs clever engineering and fine build into a visually striking design

Honest and insightful sound
Rhythmically driven and dynamic
Impressive engineering

Appearance won't appeal to all

Ever heard of the Rega Naiad? Don't worry, not many people have. It's the best record player Rega can make and was designed with little regard for cost or ease of manufacture.

Originally it was only an engineering exercise, and was never intended to reach production. But once people heard about it, demand started to build, despite a price in the region of £30,000.

Rega was forced to put it into limited production, but has only committed to building

50 units in total. Last time we asked, around 40 had been bought, so hurry if you want one.

What's all this got to do with the Planar 10 on test here? Well, this turntable is the closest the company has got to building a production version of the Naiad. Importantly, it can be made on standard production lines with materials that are (relatively) easy to obtain and work with. The result should be something that offers a good slice of the Naiad's performance but at a far more approachable, though still premium, price.

Build

Rega Planar 10 / Apheta 3 build

(Image credit: Rega)

On unpacking the deck our attention is grabbed by that minimalist and dramatically styled plinth. It's more a structure for the main bearing, tonearm and motor to attach to than anything resembling what we normally think of as a plinth. The cheaper, Award-winning **Planar 8** uses the same kind of design. It's made of an ultra-lightweight Tancast 8 polyurethane foam core sandwiched between two layers of HPL (High Pressure Laminate). The idea is to create a rigid but extremely low mass base to support the various elements of the deck.

Rega has been adding bracing between its turntables' main bearings and tonearms for a number of years now. Here the company has refined the process by using two differing braces, the top is made of ceramic while the lower one is phenolic resin. Mixing materials in such a way is claimed to improve resonance control.

This bracing increases rigidity between the bearing and arm without adding much in the way of mass. Rega generally avoids excess mass in its turntable plinths because that feeds unwanted vibrations into the record and so degrades the sound.

One of the few areas where the company likes to have more mass is the platter. The one used here is made of custom ceramic, which has most of its mass concentrated on the outside edge to maximise the flywheel effect. The platter's increased inertia helps with speed stability. The company's engineers particularly like the hardness of the material, feeling it gives a better performance than the traditional metal, glass or acrylic alternatives.

The Planar 10's main bearing design is a work of art. It uses a single piece machined aluminium sub-platter with hardened tool steel spindle running inside a custom brass housing. We couldn't detect any free-play on our test sample and it spins with impressive smoothness.

Rega Planar 10 / Apheta 3

(Image credit: Rega)

This turntable uses a 24v AC motor driven by an external power supply. Each individual power supply is adjusted to work with its partnering motor optimally, so reducing any vibration generated.

A great deal of care has also been taken in the way the motor is mounted to the plinth. The engineers have worked hard to minimise any stressing of the motor body while ensuring that the motor pulley holds still. The motor drives the beautifully made sub-platter through a pair of round-sectioned belts. Rega spent three years developing these belts so that they could be manufactured with the required precision and have just the right amount of elasticity. Every detail matters.

The RB3000 arm's basic design looks familiar enough, but it has more tightly

toleranced bearings as well as a notably classier finish than its cheaper siblings. There's also an improved feeling of luxury thanks to the use of metal rather than plastic for the bias adjustment mechanism.

It's possible to buy the Planar 10 without a cartridge for £3,599, but Rega's Apheta 3 cartridge makes such an ideal partner that going for anything else doesn't make much sense. The Apheta 3 costs £1,250 if bought separately, so there's a substantial £350 saving when it's bought as part of this package.

Features

Rega Planar 10 / Apheta 3 features

(Image credit: Rega)

This third generation moving coil has a redesigned, single piece, aluminium anodised body and tracks well at the recommended 1.9-2.0g. The cartridge's electrical loading requirements are entirely conventional. You'll need to set your phono stage to 100 ohms resistance and 1000pF capacitance, but there's no harm in straying from these values if it leads to an improved sound in your set-up.

Rega Planar 10 / Apheta 3 tech specs

(Image credit: Rega)

Planar 10:

Speeds (rpm) 33.3, 45

Electric speed change Yes

Manual operation Yes

Automatic operation No

Tonearm included Yes

Cartridge included Yes

Belt drive Yes

Finishes 1

Dimensions (hwd) 13 x 42 x 32cm

P10 PSU:

□ **Dimensions (hwd)** 8 x 22 x 32cm □

Weight 3kg

The Planar 10 isn't overly fussy about placement but, like any turntable, it will benefit from being put on a level, low resonance and, ideally, low-mass platform. The further away from the speakers, the better.

Any turntable at this price deserves a top class system. As a starter, [Naim's Supernait 3](#) amplifier (plus a dedicated outboard MC phono stage such as [Rega's Aria](#) or [Vertere's Phono-1](#)) and a pair of [ProAc Response D2Rs](#) speakers will work a treat.

But such is this turntable's ability that it doesn't sound out of place even in our

reference system, made up of **Burmester's 088/911 Mk 3** pre/power (£36,150) and **ATC's SCM 50** speakers (£9,820).

Regular readers will know we're generally big fans of Rega's turntables. In our experience, there's not a dud among the current range, each model delivering enough performance to be considered one of the very best at its respective price. The same applies to the Planar 10, though that wasn't our first impression.

Sound

Rega Planar 10 / Apheta 3 sound

(Image credit: Rega)

This deck's sound isn't as instantly lovable as that produced by its more affordable siblings. There aren't any sonic fireworks here or any attempt to spice the sound up to make it more impressive.

The Planar 10 chooses a more measured approach to music replay, one that takes time to appreciate. Give it that time and it becomes apparent that there are few price rivals that get close to matching the Rega's combination of transparency, detail resolution and dynamic expression.

You can add rhythmic security to those attributes, as we swiftly did while listening to Four Tet's *There Is Love In You*. We love the way the Planar deals with this demanding recording. It handles the album's complex rhythms in a wonderfully surefooted way, rendering each beat with precision while managing to deliver the whole with considerable drive and punch.

The Planar 10/Apheta 3 resolves a great deal of detail but never comes across as overly analytical. All that information is presented in a coherent and wholly musical way. It simply helps to communicate the music's message rather than impress in its own right.

Moving to Bob Marley's *Catch A Fire* reinforces our impression of a rhythmically coherent sound but also shows that the package has an expressive and clear midrange. Marley's voice comes through with clarity and passion on *Concrete Jungle*, while the backing instrumentation is presented with an insistent drive that has our feet tapping instinctively.

Rega Planar 10 / Apheta 3 sound

(Image credit: Rega)

We love the weight and authority of the bass. It's agile and underpins the music brilliantly. Equally, there's enough in the way of refinement to prevent any excess edge in the music despite the Planar's impressive transparency showing up the limitations in the production.

Orff's *Carmina Burana* shows off the Rega's stable sound staging and its ability to draw an expansive and convincingly layered sound stage. It's an open and spacious presentation that effortlessly transports us to the recording venue. Instruments and voices remain stubbornly locked in place no matter how demanding the music gets.

Tonally, the Rega's sound is full bodied and balanced. Those looking for a stereotypically warm and rich presentation would do better to look elsewhere. The Planar 10 sounds explicit without going as far as being rude, even to poor recordings.

It's an honest sound, though, one that reveals the texture of instruments and subtle dynamic nuances. The Planar 10 doesn't back away from the big stuff either. It manages that rare feat of being able to surprise us with the force of our music's

seismic crescendos, but still handles it all with enviable control.

Verdict

The Rega Planar 10 is quite some engineering statement.

Visually, it's as striking as turntables get at this level, but this isn't design for its own sake. Each detail is backed with solid engineering reasons and it all comes together to create what is unarguably the most sonically capable turntable we've heard at this price.

If you really want to find out what's hidden in that record groove, start here.

SCORES

Sound 5
Features 5
Build 5
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Michael J. 30 December 2019 16:45

Thanks for article, but I will stick with my levitating turntable maglev audio

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