Rega Nd3 Moving Magnet Cartridge Review
The Nd3 is everything we might have hoped an all new Rega moving magnet to be. It's innovative and technically fascinating but this innovation isn't the story. Instead, the level of performance it offers at the price is the headline grabbing element and I can't wait to see what the big ones can do.

Pros

- Dynamic yet refined sound
- Forgiving measurements and requirements
- Well made and easy to use

Cons

- Maybe not as spacious as some rivals

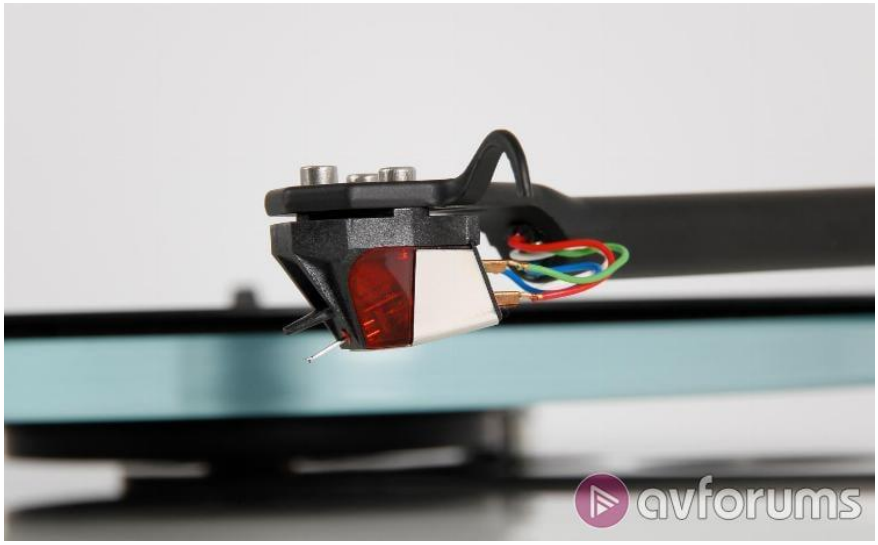
What Is the Rega Nd3?
The Rega Nd3 is a moving magnet cartridge and the most affordable member of what will become a three strong range of Rega moving magnet models. This blunt sentence doesn't really capture how big a deal this thing is though. The Rega Bias, Elys and Exact cartridges have been part of the affordable turntable landscape for an extremely long time. They are fitted to literally thousands of Rega turntables and represent a link back to a time when vinyl was a default medium for people. Such is the loyalty they command, changing them after nearly forty years has to be done right.

To do this, Rega has borrowed thinking from its moving coil family (itself heading towards its twentieth year of development) for the basis of the moving magnet models. This means that the same single piece 'spine' you see on those is present

here. Like the more affordable models, it is made of PPS plastic and this curves around so that it forms both the top and the rear section with the pins mounted. The generator sits in this ninety degree arc.

The generator is the most radical area of the Nd3. It is - according to Rega at least - the first such design to use a neodymium magnet which is the most powerful commercially available magnet type. Everything that Rega has learned from its moving coil work is that the smaller the moving mass at the end of the cantilever the better the performance on offer. Using neodymium allows this to be the case. The more potent magnet allows for lighter and finer coils and this further reduces the overall mass. If this was easy to achieve, we'd have seen it before and the ten years of development and aspects of the design that go tantalisingly undescribed go some way to inferring quite how tricky it has been to do in reality.

As the most affordable of the models in the forthcoming range, the Nd3 uses a relatively straightforward elliptical stylus on an aluminium cantilever. This is entirely competitive with what key rivals are up to and unlike the very fine stylus profiles available is more forgiving of less than perfect alignment. Of course, if you're reading this as a Rega turntable owner, this is an irrelevance. Thanks to using the company's three point mount system, if you are using an Nd3 on a Rega tonearm, so long as the three bolts are attached, the alignment will be perfect.



Of course, while this is a large core market for the Nd3, the basic design is amenable to being used on a much wider selection of turntables. The light all up weight (Rega doesn't list it exactly but my scales put it around 6 grams), sensible all up dimensions and output of over 5mV makes this a very benign cartridge to fit and use. The process of fitting is painless too although Rega's dinky stylus guard isn't quite as protective as some rivals and is quite easily lost if you aren't careful.

Performance

Honesty dictates that I state at this point that, while I consider the Elys (the cartridge that the Nd3 replaces) to be both important and well loved, it was not a design I personally adored. The Planar 3; the deck it most commonly adorned could be made to sound better with carts that weren't drastically different in price if you didn't mind fitting something yourself. The bar I set for the Nd3 is those rivals rather than the Elys itself.

The good news for Rega is that the new cart tackles those rivals head on. Mounted on a Rega Planar 10 which is both very transparent in what it does and offers the all important three point mount, the Nd3 gets all the basics sorted from the off. It's quiet, tracks beautifully and forms a happy partnership with an iFi ZEN Phono 3. It's completely and utterly painless to live with.

More than this though, it channels some of the exceptional dynamics of the Rega moving coil designs. Hammering through the post punk perfection of *Distinguishing Marks* by Fingerprintz, the Nd3 isn't good for an affordable moving magnet, it's good full stop. Jimme O'Neil's distinctive deadpan vocals are well captured and the effect is refined but superbly energetic. Without ever sounding forced or strained, the Nd3 latches onto rhythms and makes them structural to the listening experience. Goldring's slightly pricier E4 is perhaps more detailed still and finds a little more space in the performance but it simply doesn't sound as fun while it does so.

Change tack completely and listen to Enya's magnificent *Watermark* and the Rega is flowing, natural and utterly composed. Ironically, it's with this album that is almost completely free of percussive bass that you become aware of how good the Nd3's low end really is. Low notes are felt as well as heard and integrate perfectly with the midrange. They rise and fall with a speed and control that has you thinking that Rega really might be onto something here. Something that the Nd3 also does well is handle less than brilliant pressings. It plays though minor damage without issue and won't show up Placebo's *Meds* for the heroically awful pressing it really is.

Conclusion

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Replacing something that has been part of the audio landscape as long as the Rega moving magnet designs have been is not without risk but it doesn't take long to realise that what the talented souls in Southend have been working on is a worthy successor. What the Nd3 does very effectively is bring some of the sheer energy that the moving coil designs deliver down a much lower price point with a huge helping of convenience at the same time. Where the Elys was something you chose because it arrived perfectly set up on your Rega turntable and sounded pretty decent, the Nd3 is something that warrants consideration on a host of affordable turntables. The Nd3 is deeply impressive and an unquestionable Best Buy.