

BIRTHDAY BOY MAKES A HAPPY RETURN

Rega Planar 2 £375

FOR Rhythmically sound; great detail; authoritative; design

AGAINST Electric speed change would be preferable



What do *What Hi-Fi?*, Reese Witherspoon, The Eagles' *Hotel California* album and Rega's Planar 2 have in common? It's not your average pub-quiz question, so we'll spare you the head-scratching. The correct answer is that 2016 is the year they all turn 40.

The story so far

In 1976, three years after Rega's creation, the Planar 2 launched as one of the brand's very first turntables. Its S-shaped tonearm was then replaced in 1984 with Rega's RB250, and at the turn of the century a brand-new version of the deck - fittingly named the P2 2000 - took its place in Rega's catalogue until 2005. Now, over a decade later, the Planar 2, having been developed over the past two years alongside the recently released Planar 3, has been brought back from the dead - this time with the unabbreviated 'Planar' name.

The Planar 2 has been on quite a journey then, so much so the only things existing from the original are the drive-belt and the plastic mouldings for the dust-cover lid hinges.

That's surprising, as a picture of the last and current-generation models side-by-side would make a challenging spot-the-difference puzzle. The only things you'd ring straight away are the acrylic-laminated plinth - now supposedly more rigid and, like the Planar 3, sporting a more modish black or white glossy finish - and the power switch, which now sits underneath the plinth. It's a smartly understated design, and the accompanying solid build quality is a sign of Rega's long-established success at this price bracket.

Further refinements

Less immediately obvious changes include the new 24v low-noise motor, newly designed central bearing, and upgraded platter with a new floating glass 'Optiwhite' design. Rega has also designed new feet to make the deck more stable. Even the packaging has been changed.

Most importantly, the Planar 2 is fitted with Rega's new RB220 tonearm, which features new ultra-low friction ball-bearings, a stiffer bearing housing and an automatic bias setting, making it

The sleek, acrylic-laminated plinth is a head turner, whether in black or white



KEY FEATURES



Manual speed change



Moving-magnet cartridge



Dimensions (hwd)
12 x 45 x 36cm

"The Planar 2 has been on quite a journey; the only things existing from the original are the drive belt and mouldings for the dust-cover lid hinges"

virtually plug 'n' play. That should please newcomers who want to enjoy their vinyl with minimal fuss, but do be aware the Planar 2 doesn't have a built-in phono stage, so it needs to hook up to a stereo amplifier that has one. The Marantz PM6005 (£300), or a dedicated phono stage, such as the Rega Fono Mini A2D (£85) would be a good match.

The no-nonsense set-up requires minimal effort. Just ensure the speed is set correctly (speed change is manual) and adjust the tracking weight to balance the tonearm. Once the arm is in a floating position, setting the Rega Carbon MM cartridge's tracking force to the recommended 2g simply entails turning the weight a whole circle.

While we'd prefer numbers on the dial for guidance, we do find it reasonably accurate. Needless to say, buying a stylus gauge to double-check the measurement would be money well spent. It's important that the Rega sits dead flat on a tabletop or wall bracket, too.

Characteristic sound

We spin SBTRKT's *Wonder Where We Land* album and the Planar 2 finds its groove straight away. Anyone well-versed in Rega decks will no doubt recognise its sonic stamp: balanced and authoritative, with impressive scale and natural musicality. It gets us toe-tapping to *New Dorp, New York* the moment the first beat thumps into being.

"The Rega is big-sounding enough for the lush electronic soundscapes laced with synth chords to sound bold and atmospheric"

The Rega delivers the album's distinctive basslines with punch, its low end earning its wings for handling the plunging depth and buzzy texture of the guttural bass guitar in *Gon Stay*.

Voice recognition

It also has the agility and momentum to bounce along to Ezra Koenig's perky vocal accompaniment. There's insight into his playful quips, and a fitting solidity to the more thick-set sections of monologue that reveals the Rega's midrange versatility.

Any hi-fi kit that's going to get the best from SBTRKT has to be fairly methodical in its handling of fluttering tinny beats, slicing percussions and frenetic rhythms and, while the Rega has the necessary precision and rhythmic know-how to coordinate them accurately in the soundstage, its delivery isn't so clinical as to be without enthusiasm.

The Rega is big-sounding enough for the lush electronic soundscapes laced

with synth chords to sound bold and atmospheric too. It gets into a Saturday-night feeling with the album's pop melodies, and uptempo drums are energetic and punctual in the mix.

It's equally at home with the intricate, nuanced arrangements of Miles Davis' *Kind Of Blue* too, rendering the dynamic subtlety and timing to grasp the music's subtly shifting manner, and packing a single, wistful trumpet note with texture and information. The ability to tie all the musical strands together and paint them on a precise and spacious canvas seems to come easy to the Rega, and in that aspect its delivery just works.

A proper step up

Not only is this new incarnation of the Planar 2 a high-performing deck at a competitive price, it's also a proper step-up in performance from the RPI. And it can celebrate its milestone birthday with another five-star review from us.

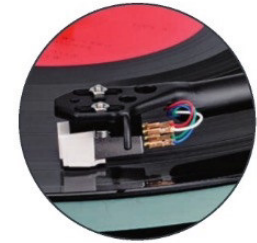
IN DETAIL...



The tonearm's bias is preset, so all you have to do is set the counter-weight



The Planar 2 makes a return to Rega's line-up after more than a decade



This deck comes ready-fitted with Rega's Carbon moving-magnet cartridge

WHAT HI-FI? says

Rating ★★★★★

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

FEATURES ★★★★★

VERDICT An elegant turntable that furthers the lineage of a classic deck with great sound and simple set-up