

Rega P3

Rega P3 turntable. \$1000

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A couple of issues back I reviewed Rega's P2 turntable, and, in the interim, Rega announced the P2 will cease production. The two events are probably not connected, so this review doesn't signal that demise of the P3. The P3 will now be Rega's entry-level unit, so you don't have to elbow aside children and old people in your rush to the shops. Well, you don't have to.

The machine

For a basic intro, I invite you to nip back to the May review of the P2. The P3 differs from its now defunct little brother in three important ways, and one not so important way. Firstly, it has a 'proper' 15mm untinted glass platter, as opposed to the particle board stuff used on the P2. It's not hugely massive, but glass is a tried and true platter material, being lovely and inert. Secondly, it

is equipped with Rega's esteemed RB300 tonearm, not the P2's lesser RB250. The final change of note is the plinth, which is made of a lighter material than that of the P2, helping with dispersion of vibrations from the motor. It also

has chamfered edges.

For these substantive upgrades, the P3 costs a couple of ton more than the P2, but the improvement in sound quality is certainly worth that little extra, and, in light of the relatively small pricing gap, I'd bet eight out of ten buyers opted for the 3 over the 2.

Before moving on, I should mention that unimportant difference: unlike the basic black P2, the 3 is available in a selection of bright colours. We're talking really bright colours here.

The method

Setting up the 3 was no more problematic than the 2 - simply run the drive belt around the sub-platter and motor driveshaft, pop the platter on the sub-platter, the felt mat on top of that, and



plug it in. Again, it pays to give thought to placement - a non-suspended design like this is not immune to vibrations, even though those three rubbery feet do a remarkable job.

As in my review of the P2, I mounted my Goldring 1022 moving magnet cartridge in the RB300 to familiarise myself with the P3. Intriguingly, whereas it fit beautifully on the P2, its vertical tracking was out of whack on the P3. Rather than sod about installing a spacer under the arm, I switched to Rega's own Elys cartridge, which I'd come to know on the P2.

The music

Listening hard on the heels of the P2, the P3 quickly exhibited superior performance. To a long time tweaker, the P3 had that better-by-degrees advantage over the P2 that you get in other equipment after mucking about with speaker placement, isolation, or a cable upgrade. The P3 is tauter, faster, just a little quieter, just, well, better, and better in all the dimensions in which the P2 is already strong. My only niggle was the slight hollowness invested in the lower-midrange, brought to my attention on the The Chills' *Lost EP 45*. Experimentation with placement might very well cure that, however.

Of course, the P3 isn't a chromed, sprung, high mass, spindle-weighted, electronic speed-regulated monster costing thousands. In automotive terms, it's a highly tuned P2, manifest-

ing the same kind of lean, go-for-it sound. That means it plays very well, giving a dynamic, expressive rendering of Respighi's *Pines of Rome*, or knocking out XTC's *Skylarking* with a fresh and enthusiastic feel, not quite but nearly weaving the illusion that you're sitting in the third row of the auditorium or the engineer's booth at the recording studio.

To my antique Garrard 401-trained ears, the Rega sounded 'newer', more together, sharper, more focused. It's a contemporary sound, not a million miles from well sorted CD players of three times the price, but with the immediacy that comes of stripping away all that fussy digital processing. It was also less weighty than the old Garrard, and paid stricter attention to the metronome.

Conclusion

The P3 is not the introduction to the virtues of vinyl that the P2 is, or was; it's a good stride up the scale of high fidelity toward the original performance. The tangible spaces, the insight into how instruments and voices combine, the unforced upper midrange and treble, it's all here. P2s are still around in the shops, so if you find yourself facing a P2 versus P3 choice, go the extra mile - it's more than worth it—*Brent Burmester*

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