

Rega Planar 6 RS turntable

Ed Selley

In recent years, Rega turntables have undergone the most significant change to their fundamental design language the company has made in its half a century of continuous production. While the more affordable models have retained a conventional full plinth, the higher-specification models have moved to a more skeletal design; initially supplied with a lift-off plinth, but more recently embracing a minimalist design.

Situated between these two schools of design is the Planar 6, which embodies aspects of both approaches. It features a full plinth, but its core is made from the same TanCast8 foam as the pricier models, allowing it to keep a foot in both camps. The standard Planar 6 has been in production for nearly a decade, but to better compete with the £2,000 'turnkey' price point, Rega has now created the Planar 6 RS.

RS revisited

The RS concept isn't new to Rega; it created an RS version of the more affordable Planar 3 in late 2024. Slightly confusingly, though, the two RS models take different approaches to being enhanced versions of the model on which they are based. The Planar 3 RS features specifications you can order on a standard Planar 3, but it is bundled at a lower price point. The Planar 6 RS, by contrast, has specifications that cannot be ordered with the standard Planar 6.

One feature the two RS models share is their plinth coating. This is an HP aluminium skin laminate, which is stiffer than the standard version. This is the only finish available, but I can't see many people being unhappy with that. The 24v low-noise Neo Mk2 PSU is also retained on





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» both models. On the Planar 3 RS it's an upgrade, whereas here it's the same fitment as the standard Planar 6. Given that exactly the same PSU is used on the Planar 8, this is more a reflection that there is absolutely nothing amiss with it than any form of economising on Rega's part.

From here, the RS begins to ring the changes on the standard model. Beneath the glass platter, the aluminium sub-platter is driven by two EBLT-type belts rather than the standard Planar 6's single belt. This still isn't the fastest turntable to reach speed, but it's quicker than the stock model and should be fractionally more pitch-stable once it is.

Hiding in plain sight

The most significant change does the neat trick of hiding in plain sight. The standard Planar 6 uses the same RB330 tonearm as the Planar 3 (and indeed the Planar 3 RS). This can be specified with either the Nd5 or Nd7 moving-magnet cartridges or the Ania Pro moving-coil. The RS dispenses with this and switches to the RB880 arm, which until now has been exclusively employed on the Planar 8. This is almost impossible to tell apart from the 330 once attached to a turntable, as the changes are internal. A low-mass, precision-engineered vertical bearing assembly gives the 880 higher performance than the 330 while retaining the same fundamental user-friendliness.

Rega then dispenses with the existing cartridge choices for the Planar 6 and instead uses the range-topping Nd9 moving magnet. This is a relatively recent addition to the Rega range and combines the company's neodymium magnet-based generator with the boron cantilever and fine-line stylus previously used only on the flagship Aphelion 2. When the Nd models were developed, Rega envisaged using an aluminium cantilever with them. The boron rod that forms the Aphelion 2 cantilever isn't the same, so it's not a straight swap. Rega has worked with a watchmaker to manufacture an ultra-fine connecting tube with different diameters at each end to mate the two components. The result is the only moving magnet cartridge on the market that combines a neodymium magnet and a boron cantilever.

Not a tricky argument

The economic case for the Planar 6 RS isn't hard to make. A base Planar 6 is £1,280 less than a cartridge with an RB330, which costs £430 on its own. The Nd9 cart currently retails for £695 and the RB880 for £765, so, as a package sold at £2,000 (without assigning any value to the different laminate or twin belt arrangement), this is a lot of deck for the money. The Planar 8 fitted with the Nd9 (on the same arm) is £554 more, while an Nd7-equipped Planar 6 (which uses an RB330) only saves £345. As well as occupying a psychologically important price point, the numbers add up too.



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» There's something else as well. The old adage that if something looks right it probably is might be responsible for a number of DIY catastrophes over the years, but it applies absolutely and utterly to the RS. I have long felt that the plinthed Rega turntables are proportionally perfect; beautiful because they have not a single unnecessary detail. When it launched in its rather austere grey finish, the Planar 6 actually had the worst of the deal, as it looked a bit dour. The arrival of a white finish a few years later helped it considerably, but the addition of the aluminium finish for the RS has transformed it. To these eyes, at least, this is the prettiest current-production Rega turntable.

Along with this come the standard Rega niceties. The Planar 6 RS emerges from its packaging in a wholly logical and unintimidating way (it even goes back into said packaging without much of a fight, making this a very rare beast in analogue circles). Setup is completely and utterly logical and can be completed within a few minutes. Like all Rega designs, it will benefit from a degree of external isolation, but, as it is not a terribly heavy device, this doesn't require anything especially ornate. The standard of build and finish is also entirely competitive for the price.

Critical listening

My critical listening to the Planar 6 RS had been preceded by testing the Nd9 cartridge on the resident Planar 10. The experience had been extremely positive and revealed that the Nd9 is a highly capable performer. What has impressed me from the outset is that a great deal of what I was hearing from the Nd9 on the significantly more expensive Planar 10 has remained intact here.

What this means is that when the Rega tears into the opening *Dreams Come True* on Brandon Flowers' *The Desired Effect* [Island], the Nd9 extracts an impressive amount from this less-than-stellar pressing, yet it balances it with enough refinement to let you happily wind up the volume and enjoy this homage to the eighties in all its extremely entertaining glory. The Nd9 is not a cossetting cartridge; it's more forward than the company's moving-coil models, but here it complements the rest of the turntable brilliantly.

It is this sense of the Planar 6 RS as a complementary whole that permeates your listening experience. The RB880 and Nd9 form an effective partnership, ensuring Poppy Ackroyd's superb piano work on *Resolve* [One Little Indian] is delivered with little to no mechanical coloration. Ackroyd's style of 'playing' the piano is more akin to a full-body experience, using the strings and even the creak of the lid to complement the keys. On some turntables, the effect can be slightly bewildering; here it's as immersive and immediate as it should be.

Rega Reflection

This is a reflection of Rega turntables rather than an expansion of the company's skillset of late. The Planar 6 RS generates a soundstage that is wider and more open than its predecessors. Nils Frahm's gorgeous *Spaces* [Erased Tapes] is reproduced with a genuine sense of the venue, with a width that extends beyond the physical placement of the speakers. This is achieved without sounding diffuse or vague at the centre. There is cohesion and order to the information presented; it's simply far more spacious than before.

Crucially, though, the Planar 6 RS can still move like a Rega should. Listening to *Art Angels* by Grimes [4AD] is utterly and joyously ballistic. The gently demented contrast of doom-laden lyrics and bouncy, pop-infused beats on *California* showcases the Planar 6 RS's ability to hit hard and fast, generating a desire to engage with what you hear in a way that even some breathtakingly expensive bits of source equipment cannot begin to emulate. The bass on offer is proper 'felt as well as heard' style bass, too, that should have anyone who still adheres to the fetching notion that good analogue bass is irrevocably linked to mass questioning their beliefs.

The more time I've spent with this last outpost of plinthed Rega engineering, the more I've found it further refines the standard Planar 6's ability to bridge the sound of the plinthed designs and the skeletal ones. The upgraded arm and cartridge can get closer to the almost transparent quality that the Planar 10 can demonstrate, but there is still a perception of the plinth itself. This perception is unquestionably character (or coloration if you're feeling less charitable), but it means that the Planar 6 RS is an incredibly 'Rega-sounding' Rega turntable. »

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» The catch?

So what's the catch? Depending on your aspirations for the turntable, there might not be one. As the ultimate expression of the Planar 6, your options for upgrading it further are somewhat limited, and the most obvious area, the cartridge, will require you to unlimber a brand-new Nd9, which comes with the RS whether you like it or not. It did respond positively to the Stack Audio Serene stabiliser, which is presumably light enough to avoid the standard issues of putting anything over a Rega bearing. Feedback from various sources also suggests that if you do have the extra £554 to hand, the Planar 8 with Nd9 is still better, but Rega is not in the habit of shooting themselves in the foot, so this is perhaps to be expected.

This also overlooks some of the qualities the RS brings. As a man now hosting four cats, you begin to appreciate the virtues of a full-sized, hinged lid, and I suspect anyone reading this who plays music in a 'busy' household might be inclined to agree. This is a more unobtrusive, room-friendly device than its bigger brothers, but still achingly pretty when you lift the lid and take a closer look.

The fundamentals

It also delivers a fundamental rightness in how it looks, feels and sounds, and talk of the limits of upgrading it becomes less relevant the more you listen to it. This is one of a few products that have turned up for me over the years where, at a number of points while listening to it, I've felt that, realistically, this is all I would ever need for the rest of my days. Combining it with a Musical Fidelity A1 and a pair of Neat Petite Classics would result in a system that achieves this sufficiency in spades. It's not to say I couldn't do better if the budget allowed; more that I wouldn't need to strive to do so.

This is the fundamental magic of the Planar 6 RS. Viewed dispassionately, it's a pragmatic application of Rega's extensive parts bin to hit a key price point with a turnkey turntable. What actually results is so much more than that; a balance of prettiness, user-friendliness and sheer musical joy that is very hard to compete with at the price. As with some of the offerings from fellow Essex residents Ford, the application of an RS badge and some engineering know-how has taken a great device and made it a truly fantastic one. +

Technical specifications

Type: Belt-drive turntable, arm and cartridge package

Speeds: 33/45rpm

Speed Control step size: 0.01rpm

Tonearm: Hand assembled precision RB880

Motor: 24 V low noise motor

Platter: 16mm dual-layer float glass - opti-white clear.

Connectivity: RCA - Phono

Power: Via Mini DIN from Neo PSU

Neo MK2 PSU: 24 V protected by resettable fuse

Neo MK 2 Speed control step size: 0.01RPM

Dimensions (WxHxD, turntable, lid closed): 44.7 x 11.7 x 36cm

Dimensions (WxHxD, power supply): 18 x 5 x 15cm

Weight (turntable): 5.4kg

Weight (power supply): 0.6kg

Price: £2,000, €2,699, \$3,195

Manufacturer: Rega Research Ltd

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