



Six music

Jason Kennedy spins some top tunes with Rega's brand new mid-price RP6 turntable...

Paying a visit to Rega's Southend base last year, I was not only struck by the hive of industry concealed beneath its red brick exterior, but by similarities between its founder and driving force (but not MD) Roy Gandy and James Dyson.

Had Gandy gone into a field like domestic appliances, he could well be as familiar a figure as the aforementioned maestro of the bagless vacuum cleaner. But because he concentrated his efforts on hi-fi equipment, the audio appreciating fraternity gets to enjoy extremely

well thought out, competitively priced British components.

There was a time when you had to wait a few years between new Rega products, but that pace has accelerated in recent times to the point where the company delivers several new components a year. This is the case even on the turntable front; 2010 saw the launch of the P1 and the following year a replacement for the P3-24 appeared in the RP3, now there's a replacement for the P5 called the RP6.

The P5 was a relatively elaborate turntable with a frame surround and

▣ DETAILS

PRODUCT: Rega RP6
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: turntable and arm
WEIGHT: 6.3kg
DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 450x120x365mm
FEATURES:

- tonearm: Rega RB303
- speeds: electronic 33/45rpm
- external power supply
- 24V AC twin phase motor
- colours: red, green, white, black, orange, yellow, blue, pink

DISTRIBUTOR: Rega Research
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a higher grade tonearm than the P3-24, the RP6 looks like a far closer relation to the new RP3 and, at a glance, all that differentiates the two is the shiny polyester paint job.

But look a little closer and you'll notice that the platter is thicker, at least it's thicker on the edge; take the felt mat off and pick up the glasswork itself and it reveals that a ring of 10mm glass has been bonded to the underside of the 6mm thick platter.

This peripheral weighting, as it's known, is a popular means of adding inertia to a platter without increasing overall weight, as much as thickening the entire platter would. It's a system that I've seen on metal platters like that of the LP12 and is also used on the Rega P9's ceramic platter, but this is the first time its been achieved with glass, to my knowledge.

Another thing you notice when removing the mat is that the subplatter looks like it is metal, but it turns out that there is a machined aluminium 'platter adaptor' on top of the ABS subplatter. This supports the platter on six points with the aim of keeping it as flat as possible relative to the stylus.

The plinth is the same lightweight MDF as an RP3 and the double brace

which inevitably increases mass, it uses phenolic resin plates on either side of the plinth to create a stressed beam. The result with the RP3 was pretty impressive, which is presumably why this big brother design was created.

The RP6 has a low-noise, twin phase synchronous 24 volt motor with an anti-vibration circuit that's hand tuned and driven by a Rega TT PSU external power supply. As this box controls on/off and speed selection, the plinth is devoid of a switch which makes it look very elegant.

The arm is an RB303, the latest and smoothest incarnation of the original RB300. This has sprung downforce, a three-point fixing and no means of adjusting VTA – which is another effort to maximise rigidity. The RP6 can be supplied with a Rega Exact, which is the company's highest spec moving-magnet cartridge; it's differentiated by a vital fine line stylus. This is what arrived with the review sample, and was used for much of the listening.

Sound quality

Shortly after you put a slab of vinyl on this turntable and drop the stylus gently in the groove, it becomes difficult to concentrate on the sound of the player, because the music absorbs your attention. This is a good sign, as it means that the turntable is acting as a conduit rather than a performer. If you start thinking about how sweet the highs are and how thunderous the lows, you know you're hearing the machine before the music, which kind of defeats the object!

As a result, my notes quickly start describing the way the musicians play, how the music is arranged and what the nature of the recording is like. With Al Green's *Sha La La (Make Me Happy)* the string arrangements are revealed to be perfect, despite the fact that I usually hate the things, these ones are of the right timbre, duration and intensity to raise the power of an already fine song.

For the sake of producing an informative review I made an effort to concentrate on the RP6's character, and the first thing that becomes apparent is bass weight. That extra ring of glass seemingly brings depth, body and muscle to the bottom end that the RP3 fails to reach. Because this is a Rega, it's very tuneful, clean and precise bass, but it's nice to have a bit more welly at that end of the scale. The other result of the flywheel effect is a calmer, cleaner presentation that remains consistent, no matter how raucous the material. This means that you can easily hear the quiet notes alongside the louder ones, there is lots of dynamic contrast and very little masking.

The RP6 is highly able when it comes to reproducing the space in a recording; you can hear plenty of reverb on kick drums alongside their intrinsic power. This is apparent on Leo Kottke's *Great Big Boy* album, which also lets the Rega show off its ability to produce a 3D soundstage for your listening pleasure. This in the context of dense music with plenty of energy, a result that betters what I've heard from a number

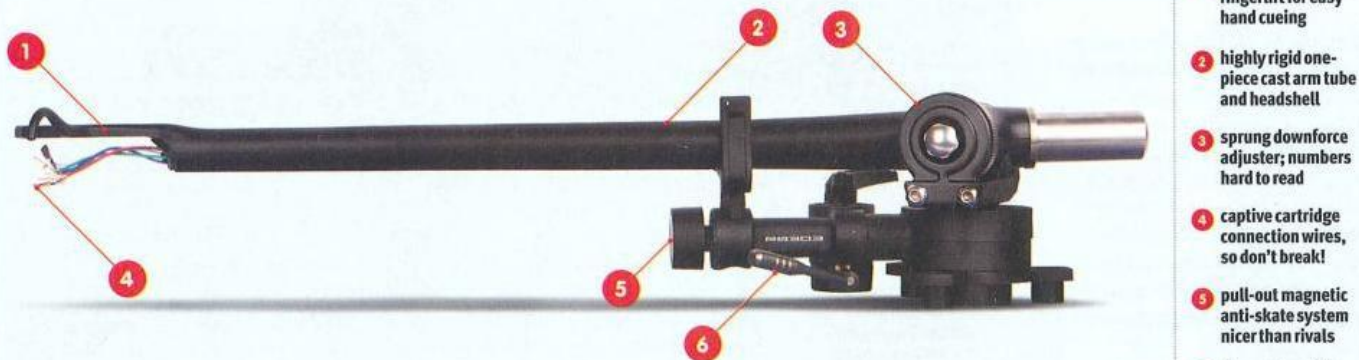
The RP6 is a killer turntable, and it's hard to see why the music lover would ever want for more...

of more fashionable turntables. Moving onto one of the more relaxed pieces, and it's lovely to hear the textural breadth of a fretless bassline under the crisp plucking of acoustic guitar. The combination of effortlessness with resolution is beguiling.

For some reason I felt the urge to hear the Stones' *Can't You Hear Me Knocking* one evening and could only find an ancient 'zipper' cover copy of *Sticky Fingers* which usually sounds worn – I have a more recent and cleaner pressing somewhere. But the RP6 revealed that there's still a ton of top

from the same source, in this case Rega has gone for an aluminium finish which makes it look a bit fancier. This element is pretty fundamental to the whole design, as it concentrates rigidity *precisely* where it's needed between the arm base and the platter bearing with the minimum of mass. Rega's thinking is that 'mass absorbs energy – lost energy equals lost music', so rather than trying to make the whole plinth rigid,

IN SIGHT



- 1 headshell with finger lift for easy hand cueing
- 2 highly rigid one-piece cast arm tube and headshell
- 3 sprung downforce adjuster; numbers hard to read
- 4 captive cartridge connection wires, so don't break!
- 5 pull-out magnetic anti-skate system nicer than rivals
- 6 damped arm lift works swiftly yet smoothly

Q&A

JASON KENNEDY SPOKE TO PAUL DARWIN AT REGA RESEARCH ABOUT THE RP6 TURNTABLE



JK: Why change the number of this model relative to the one it replaces – P5 to RP6?

PD: It was felt that it was so different to the outgoing P5 that it deserved a new model number (new arm, double brace, new platter, new plinth, sub-platter updated TT PSU).

What does the aluminium disc between subplatter and platter achieve in sonic terms?

The aluminium part of the subplatter assembly brings stiffness, while remaining low mass and ensures the correct height adjustment for the 16mm flywheel effect platter. Coupled together with the platter, the two components offer improved speed stability than the previous design, improving imaging and detail.

What's the difference between an RB300 and an RB303?

Designed using the latest 3D CAD and CAM technology, the new RB303 is the culmination of more than thirty years of tonearm design experience. Due to advances in technology we have been able to fine tune the iconic RB300 tonearm design. Featuring a brand new tube with increased rigidity to the bearing housing, arm carrier and headshell, coupled with intelligent redistribution of mass, this arm will exhibit fewer points of possible resonance. Extreme stability with almost friction-free movement from the bearing assemblies guarantee to gather more information from the vinyl.

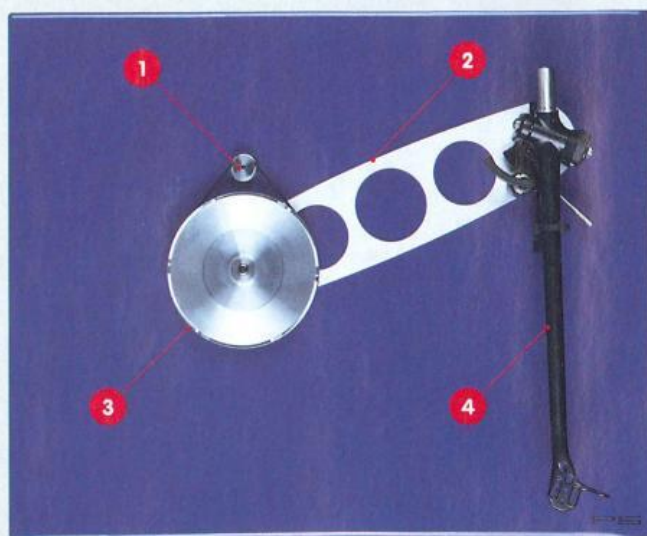
The marks on the downforce gauge are difficult to see, was this deliberate?

We felt it looked nicer than the printing as they were often poorly printed on the curved surface. As it is used so infrequently by most customers, when redesigning the tracking housing we changed the tool to have the markings in place, which saved a printing process and improved the cosmetics of the arm.

How is the prototype carbon fibre turntable coming along?

Nicely, thanks! Can't give a date on this one yet, it's still in development...

IN SIGHT



- 1 24 volt twin phase synchronous motor gives stable sound
- 2 brace between bearing and arm base for maximum rigidity
- 3 aluminium top hub adaptor provides 6-point mounting for the platter
- 4 Rega RB303 tonearm, CAD refined replacement for the RB300

HOW IT COMPARES

THE RP6 HAS A combination of fine detail resolution, broad bandwidth, good dynamics and high musicality. Its competitors include Michell's entry-level TecnoDec and Project's Experience in either Classic or 2 Pack form.

The latter pair come with an arm and a starter cartridge, while the TecnoDec can be equipped with any of the Rega arms. It's not as entertaining as this Rega nor does it have such a strong grip on timing, but is easily on a par when it comes to detail resolution and evenness of response. The Project Experience designs have not been tested yet, but if other models are anything to go by they will offer slightly more finesse than the RP6, but less of the energy and musicality that it can deliver.

The only other close competition comes from Thorens' TD700. When Malcolm Steward reviewed it a few years back he got a decent, but ultimately less than thrilling result and that clearly isn't the case with the RP6.

notch white blues in the groove. What stood out is the contrast between the thick but multi-faceted sound of Bill Wyman's bass, and the knife-edge of the classic riff that makes the track so instantly appealing. After a while I also started to enjoy the deep groove of the organ that gives the song a swampy feel underneath Keef's spare, but inspired solo.

Don't expect the RP6 to transform a classic Al Green album into something with the sonic properties of one by Patricia Barber, it ain't going to happen. On the contrary, by getting itself out of the picture to a remarkable degree you hear the tape compression on the Al Green, the thick nature of its tonal balance and the soul that he manages to inject into the mix regardless of its technical limitations.

Out of interest I installed the trusty Dynavector DV20X2L on the RP6 to see what a classy, but affordable MC cartridge would bring to the party. It proved a fatal move – you've heard the term 'lost in music'? Well that just about sums up my situation once this giant slaying turntable and cartridge combination got warmed up. Now we had speed, energy and thrill power on top of the aforementioned musical and resolving powers. Not only did this introduce full on engagement but that state of affairs transmuted in to 'air guitar' with unrestrained alacrity.

While this turntable has a remarkable ability to mainline the musical message with all of its melodic and temporal charm, it is also extremely good at differentiating between recordings. If there is not

much dynamic range or a small soundstage you know all about it, equally if the recording, production and mastering have been done well you are presented with a wealth of detail. The amount of reverb, dimensionality and the full extent of the bandwidth that's in the pressing is delivered.

This is a neutral turntable but not a dull one – there are a lot of very even sounding rivals that deliver plenty of detail but fail to pick up the dynamic and timing cues that make the music magical. If you are looking for a cuddly analogue experience choose albums that have this quality because it's not intrinsic to the medium.

Suffice to say that the new Rega RP6 is a killer turntable and arm. Unless you'd rather look at something with springs in or slabs of acrylic, it's hard to see why the music lover would ever want for more. And even if you did crave something better, bank on spending a good few hundred pounds extra. ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Dynamic and remarkably revealing turntable, with maximum musicality

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Downforce markings on the RB303 require reading glasses!

BUILD QUALITY



WESAY: Package produces the sonic goods like few others can at the price

FEATURES



OVERALL

