Vinyl’s plus one

In a move towards convenience, Rega adds a phono stage to its entry-level model. Ed Selley sees how the Plus fours fare.

Increasingly, the entry-level turntable market is in pursuit of convenient plug’ n’ play solutions, with everything that’s needed in one complete package to make spinning LPs as simple a process as possible. This is not typically the audiophile way of going about things, but with a growing desire for quality tunable solutions to appeal to new or returning vinyl fans, the move towards one-stop solutions that combine cartridge and phono stage preamps, reducing the box count, is enormously appealing.

With a range of acclaimed dedicated phono stages designed for every budget, Essex-based Rega has traditionally held off from the area of all-in-one vinyl solutions, but took the wraps off the Planar 1 Plus at the Sound & Vision Bristol Show back in February. As the model name suggests, its core this is a Planar 1 turntable (the entry point to the Rega range) and a belt-driven unpowered design with the belt acting on a sub-platter rather than directly against the phenolic resin platter. The matching turnsoner is the RB110, which has been tweaked with a view to improving the user friendliness, thanks to the inclusion of an automatic bias adjustment. Rega says this makes it simpler than on any previous iteration.

The slight counter to this is that the value that the bias operates to fixed and so may not suit all cartridges that the arm is otherwise capable of handling. It of course, an ideal match for the Carbon cartridge that comes supplied and if you roll the counterweight at the back of the tonarm to the raised rubber line, you’ll have the correct tracking weight too. What could be simpler?

Rega has crushed the numbers and realised that most users will look to hand it down as they upgrade to a more versatile deck as a passion for the format takes hold.

In terms of simplicity of setup, the Plus is about as straightforward as it gets. Remove the cardboard boxes under the sub-platter, slide the counterweight on, connect power and signal cables and pop the Perpetual lid on. (If you don’t feel it affects sound quality, of course). Even a complete novice should be able to go in less than five minutes. No less positives is that connected to the line input of a Naim Uniti Star one-box system (HFC 433), the internal phono stage is completely silent at idle and should have enough gain for most setups.

Sound quality

Start playing LPs and the Plus shows some clear benefits to the cartridge and phono stage being matched. Amadon and Mariam’s La Conquista is handled with confidence and authority. The deadends involving Mokhib Mokhib has a real sense of the intimacy of the studio it was recorded in, while Mariam’s vocal turn is recreated with a meaningful amount of weight and texture to it. Some of the effortlessly three dimensionality that more expensive members of the Rega range can demonstrate is present here and it really helps to immerse you in the music. There is a sense when the track gets more congested that the carbon cartridge can struggle to make sense of all of the information and it hardens up a little at high levels, never to the point where things become unlistenable. The faster and more potent musing of Goldfrapp’s Rocket allow the Planar 1 Plus to show its impressive rhythmic assertion. It does a brilliant job of engaging at an emotional level and pulling the listener into the music: This has always been a Rega strongpoint, but it is still noteworthy just how entertaining the FI Plus is. More than almost any other turntable, I’ve tried at this price point, it compels me to keep trying new music on it and it does a superb job of making me beyond the equipment I’m listening to. This is not solely the preserve of more ballistic music either: Even with the positively stately Muck Pushing from Mark Lanegan and Doler Garwood