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OCTOBER 2014

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magnum key



# STYLUS COUNSEL

That long, hot summer might be drawing to a close but the market for vinyl is still sizzling. So which of these four affordable turntables should you go for? Here's our advice

**T**here's never been a better time to invest in vinyl. Demand is stronger than it has been for years, and those dipping their toes into the medium don't have to spend a fortune to get a good turntable. The notch above the budget end is full of talented record players: just look at the

Pro-Ject Debut Carbon and Rega RP1, the latter of which has been spruced up with upgraded components. These two go up against newcomers from Lenco and Audio Technica, which come packing some fancy features such as USB output and built-in phono stage. Who will come out on top? Let's take them for a spin...



## What's on test

1. **Rega RP1 Performance Pack**  
£300 p55
2. **Lenco L-175**  
£400 p51
3. **Pro-ject Debut Carbon**  
£325 p52
4. **Audio Technica AT-LP124USB**  
£500 p50





# REGA RP1 PERFORMANCE PACK

£300

★★★★★

**1** Under the platter, the belt is made of a new, grippier material  
**2** The anti-skate device is calibrated by means of an easy-to-use slider

We've always been fans of the Rega RP1. It's a brilliant entry-level turntable. We liked it enough to give it five stars and, eventually, an Award. But that was a few years ago. Today we're dealing with an enhanced version: the Rega RP1 Performance Pack.

Mostly, this is the same turntable we know and love, but with a few key tweaks. For starters, there's a new, thicker drive belt. You also get a new mat: it's thicker too, and made of natural wool, as opposed to the synthetic material of the original (for better damping and reduced resonance).

The moving-magnet cartridge is new, too. The standard Ortofon OMB5 has been replaced by Rega's own Bias 2. We're told it's hand-assembled, with an elliptical stylus and parallel wound coils, and quality-tested for two days.

You can get the Rega RP1 Performance Pack factory fitted, as we did. But if you already have the turntable, you can buy the parts separately as an upgrade. That will set you back about £85.

### Simply made...

Elsewhere, it's a standard RP1. You get a simple rectangular plinth with three rubber feet. The plinth carries a superbly-made main bearing and the RB 101 tonearm - a simplified version of Rega's highly regarded RB 300. The platter is made of phenolic resin (read: fancy plastic). Speed change is manual:

**We put on Nirvana's *Nevermind* and the opening drum whacks of *In Bloom* are properly thrashy. It's a detailed sound: plenty of texture, as well as a pleasing degree of transparency**

you have to take the platter off and move the drive belt by hand. This really is a basic turntable - which is fine if it means more attention is paid to its engineering.

You can get the turntable in matte black, white or grey. There's also a version pimped out with the Union Jack.

### ...and simple to use

Setting up is about as simple as it gets. The cartridge comes pre-fitted. The ideal counterweight position is marked on the arm, so it's merely a matter of attaching the weight itself. Just set the bias - a slider under the tonearm - and you're off. As always, careful placement is key. Be sure to use a flat, stable surface, preferably far from your speakers (or any other source of vibration).

The original RP1 was a terrific performer for the money, but the Performance Pack bumps up the quality further. It's a surefooted, confident sound whether you spin an older, scratchier record or a fresh pressing.

There's a good sense of rhythmic drive, while the dynamics are strong and wide. We put on Nirvana's *Nevermind*

and the opening drum whacks of *In Bloom* are properly thrashy.

It's a detailed sound: there's plenty of texture, as well as a pleasing degree of transparency, which was never the greatest strength of the standard RP1. The Pro-Ject Debut Carbon does have a slight edge when it comes to absolute insight. Then again, the Rega counters with a weightier, more exciting sound.

### Terrific value

We really like the Rega RP1 Performance Pack. It's a blindingly good turntable for the money, and a great entry point into the world of vinyl. And if you're already the proud owner of a standard RP1, this is an upgrade you should consider.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Good sense of drive; pleasing transparency; easy to set up

**AGAINST** Manual speed change

**VERDICT** The unadorned RP1 is an impressive turntable in its own right, but the upgraded version puts in one hell of a performance



# TEST VERDICT



## THE WINNER

### Rega RP1 Performance Pack

£300 ★★★★★

**S**ometimes, it's really not about the features. Here we have two traditional turntables and two shinier ones with more bits and pieces - and the winner is really rather basic.

That's the Rega RP1 Performance Pack. We've always liked the 'basic' Rega RP1, but this upgrade has elevated it to superstar status, supplying increased musicality and improved precision. And all that's down to a new mat, a new belt and a new cartridge. It's a real temptation for vinyl newcomers and existing owners of the RP1.

Next up is the Pro-Ject Debut Carbon, our favourite sub-£500 turntable of 2012. Two years on it's still a stonkingly good turntable for the money. We particularly like the remarkable level of clarity and insight offered. But it loses out to the Rega when it comes to precision and overall cohesion. As good

as the Pro-Ject's performance is, it has now been bettered. Just.

Audio Technica's AT-LP1240USB comes third. It looks impressive (if a bit on the flashy side), and we're pleased with the number of features and settings offered. It's not surprising, really, that a deck aimed at DJs will be a lot fancier. Sadly, the features outshout the sound. While the performance is good, it's not as subtle or insightful as the Pro-Ject or the Rega.

### Short on drive

Finally we get to the Lenco, which is in an awkward place. Its sonic performance lacks drive and dynamism, and isn't anywhere near as engaging as any of the others. It has a USB output for computer recording purposes, but that's not enough to save it from a middling verdict.

## SYSTEM BUILDER

Perfect partners for the Rega RP1 Performance Pack



**Stereo amplifier**  
Marantz PM6005  
£300 ★★★★★

The Marantz's spacious sound and fine detail will nicely complement the precision of the Rega's analogue signal.



**Speakers**  
Q Acoustics Concept 20  
£350 ★★★★★

Impressive clarity, heaps of refinement and excellent build - although they do need their £200 stands. Our 2013 Product of the Year



**Equipment rack**  
Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40  
£450 ★★★★★

Not just gorgeous to look at and highly customisable, this rack also lets the system's components really shine

**Total build £1400**

For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit [whathifi.com](http://whathifi.com)

## Facts & figures



**Audio Technica AT-LP1240USB**  
£500 ★★★★★  
Speeds 33⅓/45/78 • Phono amp Yes  
• Cartridge included No • Drive type Direct • Electric speed change Yes • USB output Yes



**Lenco L-175**  
£400 ★★★★★  
Speeds 33⅓/45 • Phono amp Yes • Cartridge included Yes • Drive type Direct • Electric speed change Yes • USB output Yes



**Pro-ject Debut Carbon**  
£325 ★★★★★  
Speeds 33⅓/45 • Phono amp No • Cartridge included Yes • Drive type Belt • Electric speed change No • USB output No



**Rega RP1 Performance Pack**  
£300 ★★★★★  
Speeds 33⅓/45 • Phono amp No • Cartridge included Yes • Drive type Belt • Electric speed change No • USB output No