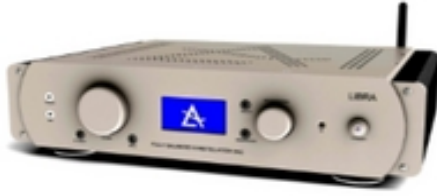


Pro-Ject RPM3 Carbon

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As the vinyl revival keeps on rolling forward, Ian Ringstead takes a listen to the £599 Pro-Ject RPM3 Carbon turntable.

Pro-Ject is a company who I feel have somewhat revolutionised the hifi industry in the last 25 years or so and particularly in the turntable sector. When I was in retailing, the 1990's were not the best period for turntables. CD was king and vinyl sales had slumped; people couldn't be bothered with the hassle of record care when CDs were so convenient and apparently perfect! Hence the major Japanese companies dropped making turntables and companies like Dual who had dominated the budget sector all but disappeared.



Along came Heinz Lichtenegger in 1990 to rewrite the history books and help spark the vinyl revival. Like me, Heinz didn't believe vinyl was dead, just on a hiatus and felt that the industry and consumers needed to be enlightened as to what they were missing out on. The Pro-Ject Debut was born, a new upstart looking to take the crown for the best budget turntable. The rest is history. I sold hundreds of Debuts and they came to dominate the budget sector. The reason it succeeded was because it was so

simple in concept and was dead easy to set up as well as being reliable. The fact it sounded great as well was a real bonus and price-wise it was spot on for the budget sector.

Come forward in time to the present and Pro-Ject's rise is meteoric as a company. They now make a huge range of products including highly respected electronics and turntables from the budget to the true high-end sector. I recently met Heinz at a show and personally thanked him for his contribution to hifi and producing such a great range of products.

Now all this adoration might seem as if I am fawning over the company, but I don't impress easily, however, I do use a Pro-Ject Extension 9 myself, which is not faint praise given the number of turntables I have had over the years. As a retailer product excellence and reliability, as well as sound quality was a major factor in continuing to sell manufacturers' wares and Pro-Ject had this in spades.

Now to the item in question and the subject of this review, the Pro-Ject RPM3 Carbon, that retails for £599. As the name suggests, carbon fibre is used in this model in its newly designed S shaped 10" tone arm. The tone arm is a Pro-Ject design and is made from carbon, aluminium and resin, utilising special heat and pressure treatments. Modern materials like carbon fibre give designers far more scope for producing great performing units (just look at Formula 1 cars for instance) and here in the RPM3 it has given us a great value for money package with an exciting arm that has an excellent moving magnet cartridge in the form of Ortofon 2M Silver.

The turntable is very compact and is deceptively simple in concept. Mass-wise it is lightweight compared to Pro-Jects' more expensive models, but none the less it works extremely well. Pro-Ject has worked hard to reduce resonance issues as much as possible in this design – the sub chassis is shaped like a boomerang, or delta wing shape in an aircraft and has an inverted high quality bearing spindle with a ceramic ball onto which the platter is placed. The platter is made of mdf which is topped with vinyl in a sandwich construction and is drilled underneath to balance it dynamically. This drilling, along with the ultra-precision DC-driven AC generator motor and belt drive synchronous motor unit, help to produce greater speed accuracy. Obviously speed options are 33/45 which can be changed via a stepped pulley. The power switch is on the motor unit and a bright red led indicates on off.



SOUND

Sound-wise the RPM3 ticks all the right boxes for me. Bass is solid and well controlled and with good midrange detail and a clear treble. Compared to my reference deck, solidity and detail re not quite there, but at a quarter of the price the Carbon RPM3 is superb at what it can do.

I played Roger Waters "Pros and Cons of Hitchhiking" which has superb dynamics and is a great recording. The RPM3 delivered a surprisingly good rendition of this album that has incredible detail and the production (*as expected from Roger Waters*) is amazing. A lot of detail came through and the sound spacing was admirable for a modestly priced turntable.

Another favourite was Supertramp's "Crime of the century" album – a delight from start to finish. Again the detail in the recording is amazing, with thunderous dynamics on the right system. The complexity of this recording astounds me, but Supertramp have always excelled in this area of creating consistently great productions and never compromising the end result. Standout tracks like School, Dreamer and Rudy thrilled me in their believability on the RPM3, with all the depth and nuances of the dense complex recording techniques held in place.

James Taylor's album "Dad Loves His Work" is a sublime listen if you enjoy his style of easy on the ear music. The singing is superb both from James and his backing singers

and there are always top session musicians accompanying him. If I am ever stressed or want a relaxing session with my system, I feel I can't go wrong with his music. The music flowed over me and was highly enjoyable, rather like a good glass of wine.



Tears for Fears "Songs From The Big Chair" was another album I enjoyed from the 80's

on the Pro-Ject, again with great production and infectious songs such as Shout. As you can tell from my musical choices I am a child of the 70's/80's era and I am not ashamed to admit that.

CONCLUSION

All in all then the Pro-Ject RPM3 Carbon as a package is superb. It is easy to set up and use, as are all of Pro-Jects products and is built to an enviable standard of finish for the money.

The paint finishes, of which there are three options (Piano Black, White or Red) are all very smart. As the cartridge is factory fitted there are no set up issues or time wasting and I got the deck up and running in less than 10 minutes. The instructions are clear and comprehensive.

You can even upgrade the deck with a better plug in arm lead if you so wish... which I did for experimentation and found the benefits worthwhile. Of course if you wanted to improve the cartridge by trying a moving coil you can easily do that as well, but I feel the 2M Silver is a good match for the budget.

Make sure the deck is positioned on a well isolated rack or surface to avoid any possible feedback issues and you will be richly rewarded.

Pro-Ject has done it again in producing a superb package that really works as a whole. The current vinyl revival has yet another bargain turntable to add to the roster of real value for money turntables.

If you are new to hifi and vinyl, coming back into the fold after a long hiatus, or currently strapped for cash you should take a serious look at this turntable.

Bravo Heinz, you and your team have done it again.

Sound Quality: 8.6/10



Build Quality: 8.6/10

Value for money: 8.6/10

Overall: 8.6/10

Pros

Easy to use and set up

Works supremely well as a package with an excellent arm and cartridge

Can be tweaked if you so wish.

Cons

No lid (but you can buy a cover from Pro-Ject)

Hard to criticise at this price-point.

Ian Ringstead