

VPI Prime | £4200 | ★★★★★

# “Reminds you why you got into hi-fi”

**VPI Industries** has a long history of producing great value, high quality turntables. The New Jersey-based specialist's products have never been cheap, but at £4200 the Prime represents something of a bargain for a high-end record player. You'd have to look at decks costing close to double that before any notable upgrades are heard.

Surprisingly for a high-end offering, that circa-four grand price includes the deck and partnering arm. All you have to add is a suitably talented cartridge - in this case, a Lyra Delos moving coil at around £1000 - and off you go.

## Pivotal point

We're impressed by the build and finish of the Prime. The curved chassis is made of MDF, covered with textured vinyl and then reinforced with 11-gauge (around 3mm) thick steel plate. The plate is bonded to the underside to help control resonance and improve feedback rejection. Helping matters of isolation are a quartet of feet assemblies made predominately of Delrin (an acetal homopolymer resin made by DuPont) and ball bearings. The Prime's feet sit on these assemblies, improving isolation from the turntable support. It's all nicely made and has a well-engineered feel.

The deck's 24-pole AC motor is built into an outboard aluminium/steel housing that fits neatly into the left-hand curve of the Prime's shaped chassis. There's a simple but positive feeling power button, and an input for mains as far as features are concerned. Speed change is manual; the drive belt has to be moved to the larger step on the drive pulley if you want to play singles.

That chunky platter is machined from 6061 aluminium and weighs in at around 9kg. There's no mat supplied, but that bare metal top surface is beautifully machined and shouldn't damage your records. There is a small rubber washer though, which sits around the centre spindle and squashes down gently when the record clamp is screwed down.

The main bearing is an inverted design that uses a hardened steel shaft, a 60

## UNIPIVOT TONEARM

The VPI Prime's arm is a 'unipivot' design with a single, sharp point upon which the housing sits. This gives the arm an impressive freedom of movement, but it may take some time to get used to the amount of wobble when handled

Rockwell hardened chrome ball, a phosphor bronze bushing completed by a PEEK (polyether-ether-ketone) thrust disc. It's designed for precision and low noise, as well as longevity.

This deck isn't a particularly large unit by high-end standards, measuring 54cm wide x 40cm deep. The arm is, unusually, a 3D printed unit. It's a unipivot design, which may take a little time to get used to as it wobbles around the pivot point when handled, but settles quickly once placed on the record. As 'unipivot' suggests, the arm bearing consists of a single, sharp point onto which the arm bearing housing sits. This kind of design (in theory) gives the arm an impressive freedom of movement compared with a normal design with multiple conventional bearings.

## Confident product

There's plenty of adjustability built into the arm, making adjustment of vertical tracking angle and cartridge azimuth easy. It all helps to optimise the performance from the cartridge, which can only be a good thing. This is a simple deck to use. Apart from the initial wobbliness of the arm there's nothing else here that's out of the norm. Apart from the performance, that is.

We start off with Radiohead's *In Rainbows*, an intricately produced album, packed with noises and sounds that can easily end up becoming disjointed and confused. Not through the Prime.

This is a confident sounding product that maintains sonic stability and composure even when faced with something as brutally challenging as the album's opener, *15 Step*.

Here the VPI uncovers links between the flood of instrumentation and apparently random sounds, turning what could be an acoustic mess into an organised and cohesive whole. It's a feat that few rivals at this price manage.

## Showing Orff

We move to something larger scale in the form of Orff's *Carmina Burana* but it holds little fear for the Prime. It's controlled when the music turns wild and digs up a lot of detail. The piece's small and large-scale dynamics come through and there's plenty of attack when needed. The stereo imaging is impressive; wide, deep and populated with crisply focused instrumentation. Sounds are fixed in position even when the piece becomes complex.

The Lyra cartridge lives up to its manufacturer's reputation by working with the arm and deck perfectly. Its high level of resolution and convincing tonality dovetail superbly with the Prime's sonic talents.

VPI has made some terrific decks and the Prime should be considered one of them. By high-end standards, it's aggressively priced while delivering a scale of engineering and sound that's hard to better for anywhere near this price. Sure, there's no lid, and you'll have to pay extra for a decent cartridge. But, once you do, we think the Prime is good enough to remind you why you got into hi-fi in the first place.

## WHAT HI-FI? says

**VERDICT** The Prime turntable/arm combination is one of the most likable record players we've heard in recent times



### NICE PRICE

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