

# The world's most desirable kit

# TEMPTATIONS

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

■ **VPI Prime** Turntable

■ **£3750** ★★★★★

**V**PI Industries has a long history of producing great-value, high-quality turntables. The New Jersey-based specialist's products have never been cheap, but even at £3750 the Prime represents something of a bargain as far as high-end record players go. You'd have to look at products that cost close to double that before any notable upgrades are heard.

Surprisingly for a high-end offering, that sub-four grand price includes the deck and partnering arm. All you have to do is add a suitably talented cartridge - in the case of the review sample, a Lyra Delos moving coil (costing around £1000) - and off you go.

### A well-engineered feel

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. There are a quartet of feet assemblies made predominately of Delrin (an acetal homopolymer resin) and ball bearings. The Prime's feet sit on these assemblies, improving isolation from the turntable support. It's all nicely made with 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. As far as features are concerned, there's a power button, and an input for mains. 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.



**1** Speed change is manual; to play singles, move the drive belt to the larger step on the drive pulley  
**2** Made of Delrin (an acetal homopolymer resin) and ball bearings, the quartet of feet assemblies do a fine job of isolating the deck from its support

That chunky platter is machined from 6061 aluminium (an alloy containing magnesium and silicon) and weighs in at around 9kg. There's no mat supplied, but the bare metal top surface is beautifully machined and shouldn't damage your records. There is a small rubber washer that sits around the centre spindle and squashes down gently when the record clamp is screwed down. Don't overdo the tightness - it doesn't bring any benefits and could result in damage of your record, the clamp or both.

### Designed for precision

The main bearing is an inverted design that uses a hardened steel shaft, a 60 Rockwell hardened chrome ball, a phosphor bronze bushing completed by a PEEK (polyetheretherketone) thrust disc. It's designed for precision and low noise, as well as longevity.

By high-end standards, this isn't a particularly large deck. Measuring 54cm wide x 40cm deep, it should fit on the top shelf of most supports. Despite VPI's attempts to design in isolation it still pays to use a rigid, low resonance platform for the best results.

Make sure everything is level before you start, and it also helps to keep the support as far from the speakers as practical to reduce the amount of vibration energy fed into the turntable's structure. You'll get a better sound if you take such care.

### Freedom of movement

Unusually, the arm is a 3D-printed unipivot design. It may take a little time to get used to, as it wobbles around the pivot point quite strongly when handled. But this instability settles quickly once

It takes it all in its stride, turning what could be an acoustic mess into an organised, cohesive whole  
See overleaf for more detail...



#### TECH SPECS

Speeds (rpm) 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ , 45 Electric speed change no Manual operation yes Semi-automatic operation no Phono amp no Automatic operation no Tonearm included yes Cartridge included no Belt drive yes Direct drive no USB port no Suspension no Finishes 1 Dimensions (hwd) 18 x 54 x 40cm

The chunky platter has no rubber mat, but the bare metal surface is beautifully machined and shouldn't damage your records

The arm is an unusual 3D printed unipivot design, consisting of a single point onto which the arm bearing housing sits. This gives the arm an impressive freedom of movement compared to a design with multiple conventional bearings

the arm is placed on the record. As 'unipivot' suggests, the arm bearing consists of a single, sharp point onto which the housing sits. This design gives the arm an impressive freedom of movement compared to a normal design where multiple conventional bearings are used to allow vertical and horizontal movement.

Arm bias can be set in two ways. There's a pivoted mechanism that adds suitable sideways force, or a tried and trusted VPI method where the innate tension in the exposed cartridge lead-out wires (the looped piece of cable that comes out the back of the arm) supplies the outward force. Either method works well.

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.

We start off with an old favourite, 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 though. This is a wonderfully confident-sounding product, and one

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VPI Prime

## In detail

### 1 Balancing act

Balancing weights on either side of the unipivot arm allow enough adjustment to keep the cartridge tracking vertically. The counterweight can also be used to help.

### 2 Do the twist

Two types of bias arrangements on this arm. VPI uses the inherent twist in the lead-out wire to apply the sideways force. The other option is to use the weighted pivot system to do the same thing.

### 3 Captive audience

The arm doesn't have a captive lead to connect to the amplifier. Use cable that is transparent enough to reveal the deck's quality.



which can organise with the best of them. It maintains sonic stability and composure even when faced with something as brutally challenging as the album's opener, *15 Step*.

The VPI takes it all in its stride, uncovering links between the flood of instrumentation and apparently random sounds, turning what could be a big acoustic mess into an organised and cohesive whole. This is a difficult feat few rivals at this price manage.

### Real expression

There's plenty of punch here, and the kind of runaway train-like momentum to the rhythm track that the music deserves. Vocals are articulate,



## The Prime is a confident-sounding product which can organise with the best of them. It maintains sonic stability and composure even when faced with a brutally challenging track

intricately detailed and delivered with an appealing combination of natural warmth and solidity.

These qualities come to the fore again when we put on Nick Cave's *The Boatman's Call*. We're taken by the subtlety of the presentation and the convincing way that the VPI renders Cave's distinctive vocals. There's real expression here and we're left in no doubt as to his feelings on tracks such as *Into My Arms*. The prominent piano is lovely, delivered with weight, harmonic richness and dynamic subtlety intact.

### Enviably reputation

We move to something larger-scale in the form of Orff's *Carmina Burana* and find out such music holds little to fear for the Prime. It's controlled when the

music turns wild and digs up an awful lot of detail. The piece's dynamics - both small and large scale - come through unhindered and there's plenty of attack when needed. The stereo imaging is impressive too - it's wide, deep and populated with crisply focused instrumentation. There's admirable stability, even when the piece becomes complex.

The Lyra cartridge lives up to its manufacturer's enviable 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.

### Scale of engineering

VPI started back in 1978. Since then it has made some terrific decks and we

think 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.

**Consider if** You want a beautifully engineered, sensibly priced high-end record player

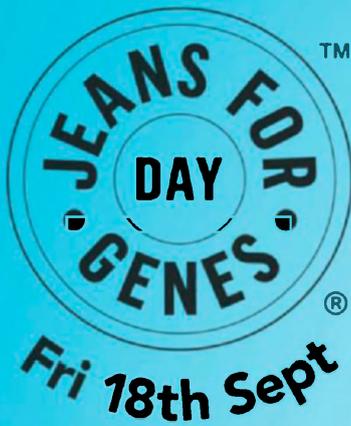
**Highlight** It has to be the sound quality. We can't think of a better-sounding alternative for the money

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Confident presentation; expressive dynamics; excellent build and finish

**AGAINST** Nothing at this level

**VERDICT** One of the most likeable record players we've heard in recent years. Don't buy any rival until you've heard this first



WHATEVER  
YOU DO  
18TH  
SEPT DO IT  
IN JEANS

WEAR  
JEANS,  
CHANGE  
LIVES



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