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PRIMARE PRE30/A30.2

A beautifully built combo from the Swedish hi-fi maestros sporting a strong feature set and an equally solid sound

Distinguished by fascias that stand proud of the body of the amp, Primare are beautifully built devices and this latest pre/power adds genuine sophistication to the bill.

The fully balanced PRE30 makes at least two concessions to the demands of the growing install market with data ports in its back side and a five-volt trigger output so that it can remotely turn on the A30.2 power amp (albeit not being so well matched with 12V triggered kit from the US). From the well-hidden nature of the on/off switch on each unit (under the left-hand side of the fascia) you get the impression that they are happier left on.

The front panel has a couple of unusual buttons alongside the neat numerical volume display. These are a level button for adjusting input sensitivity and a surround button for integration into a multichannel set-up. The latter bypasses the volume control and allows the pre and its power amp to act as two channels in the system so that stereo playback is not compromised.

The A30.2 is the power amp incarnation of the A30.1 integrated. A dual mono design, it weighs a hefty 15.5kg and is specced to deliver 120 watts a side. Like the PRE30 it has both RCA phono and XLR connectors, the latter taking advantage of its fully balanced operation when in bridged (monoblock) mode. This being the only stereo Primare power amp, the only way to buy a bigger Primare is to double them up for staggering

amounts of power. The build quality on both units is also exemplary.

Pumping out the tunes, the Primare pair has an assurance and confidence that is highly seductive – you get the impression that nothing can phase them. Power is distinctly on the agenda and bass is always deep and solid, underpinning the music and helping to create very strong, three dimensional imaging. While the balance is a touch on the dark side, the Primares put in the most convincing performance when it comes to reproducing an instrument or voice in free space. The imaging is superb, which suggests that the pairing is doing a lot of things right.

Low-level resolution is excellent too, at times perhaps a mixed blessing – it would have been nicer to have heard less surface noise from the Lambchop LP but you can't apply transparency to music alone, more's the pity. Tonally the sound is rich, if a little lacking in sparkle, though the drums on Keith Jarrett's *Eyes Of The Heart* sound realistically 'live' and you're presented with a strong sense of the size of the venue. Perspectives are likewise very convincing, the Andras Schiff piano sitting precisely behind the speakers and 'klanging' away in its inimitable and eventually wearing style!

The Primares get livelier as volume level increases. They seem to prefer playing loud but sound detailed and musical at normal levels too, factors which should make them easy to match with all but the most laid-back of loudspeakers. Their eminently clean

RECOMMENDED

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



Beautifully built with great selection of features and serious power delivery, this is a hard pairing to criticise but some may prefer a more lively balance.

CHECKLIST

REMOTE CONTROL	✓
PROCESSOR BYPASS	✓
PHONO INPUT	✗
LINE INPUTS	6
TAPE/PROCESSOR LOOPS	1
POWER OUT	120W/CH

KEY FEATURES



CONTROLS: Primare's digital volume display is unique in the test and the front panel is bang up to date, boasting a level button for input sensitivity adjustment and a volume bypass switch for multichannel integration. The remote pictured above costs an extra £300, although a more conventional plastic item is supplied.

CONNECTIONS: A data port at the rear is an unusual sight on a stereo preamp, but points to the future of audio in the home. Combined with the more conventional RCA inputs (six) and single tape loop the Primare offers a flexible interface to AV connectivity for both now and the future.

and smooth sound balances John Surman's lyrical horn playing with Dave Holland's no less expressive double bass beautifully on Anouar Brahem's *Thimar* disc.

Overall, this Swedish duo delivers a mix of strong build and features that's very difficult to beat at the price, with a sound that's only a semiquaver behind the best. A sound all-round bet whichever way you slice it. **Ⓞ**