



# Pre/power is a prime choice

## Primare Pre30/A30.2

Pre/power amplifier  
£1200/£1200  
★★★★★

**FOR**  
Winning combination of power and poise; impeccable build

**AGAINST**  
Works best with balanced inputs and connections

**VERDICT**  
Combines generous power with a warm yet informative sound

### TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

- Inputs**  
3 line, AV bypass, 2 balanced, 1 tape
- Outputs**  
One pair of speakers, preamp has twin preout connections
- Remote control**  
With CR31 handset
- Power**  
2x120w into 8 ohms
- Dimensions (wxhxd)**  
Pre30: 43x10x41cm  
A30.2: 43x10x38.5cm

SOUND APART, THE great thing about Primare's components is that they look a lot more expensive than they are (yes, even at £1200 per box), thanks to solid, rigid case-work and controls with a smoothness and precision that makes them a delight to use.

Inputs on the preamp are available both on standard phonos – three line-ins, a tape loop and an AV bypass (more on that in our *Primare Primer* panel) – and two sets of balanced XLRs; while the power amp can also be hooked up using balanced or conventional phono cables. We'd suggest you use balanced wherever possible – running our Marantz CD-7 reference player into the Pre30 balanced, then connecting the power amp in the same way, brought extra focus, plus greater control to the bass.

The power amp is a twin-mono design, and delivers 120w into an 8 ohm load, rising to 200w into 4 ohms. It can be converted into a 400w mono amp, though on its showing running in stereo we wouldn't think that would be necessary.

Primare's C31 remote handset – a chunky metal-cased device, again with those precise buttons – controls the Pre30, and can also drive a range of the company's other products. The overall impression of quality is maintained before you even start to listen.

After a few hours' warm-up the amps showed their not inconsiderable mettle with a spirited delivery of Primal Scream's *Evil Heat* disc, allowing the raw edges of the recording to shine through. It was similarly accomplished with Pearl Jam's *Riot Act* set, the guitars at the opening of *Get Right* roaring out of the speakers, and the acoustic scoring of *Thumbing my Way* sounding 'in

the room' real, with Eddie Vedder's weary vocals gaining excellent presence. There's a raw, 'live' feel to this disc, and the way these amps deliver it is bang on the money.

The balance is natural and controlled, but at the same time fully able to shake the walls when the recording and the ancillary equipment allows. Play the current Tori Amos set, *Scarlet's Walk*, and the way the Primare place the singer's voice and piano centre-stage is glorious, with that almost tangible presence that sets fine stereo aside from the merely 'hi-fi'. The delicacy with which each vocal nuance is elicited is refreshing – forcing the issue is more common with so many amplifiers – and while this may make some feel the Primare are understated, in fact they're just accurate, and a much more enjoyable listen long-term.

Switch musical style to a string quartet arrangement of Britten's *Simple Symphony*, and that combination of rhythmic accuracy, dynamics and delicacy is clear with the skittering strings of the *Playful Pizzicato*, while the textures in the more lyrical sections are just as beautifully rendered. And there's all the power and drive needed to make the most of conventionally scored

orchestral works, even when a symphonic big band is going full tilt at a spot of Mahler, or combining with a choir in a Verdi opera, or a Bach oratorio.

There's actually a dearth of amplifiers for this kind of money, and the Primare finds itself up against some serious rivals. On this showing, however, the Pre30/A30.2 combination has the ability to take on the best and shine through, with a sound that's rather more than just that of the company's integrated amps plus a dose of extra oomph.

### HOW DOES IT WORK?



## Primare primer

The A30.2 power amplifier, like the Pre30 preamp, is designed as a balanced device from start to finish. The dual mono construction goes right back to two hefty toroidal power transformers, and four bipolar output devices operate in push-pull configuration for each channel. The amp can be converted to balanced mono operation, providing a clear upgrade path, and other facilities extend to a remote link with the preamp so the two switch on and off together. A matching 12v output is fitted to the Pre30, along with Cat5-style computer connections, which are designated for future system control and expansion developments.

### LEADING RIVALS

**Meridian 562V.2/557**  
£3070 ★★★★★ October 2000  
Beautifully built with a sound that's sophisticated and muscular – an astonishingly flexible amp

**Myriad MP100/MA240**  
£1500 ★★★★★ August 2001  
A real powerhouse, impresses with a broad spread of talents