

BENCH TEST TWO BOX AMPLIFIERS



PRIMARE A30.1 INTEGRATED & A30.2 POWER AMPLIFIER

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **A30.1 - £1499.99, A30.2 - £1199.99** **CONTACT** 01423 359054 www.csesolutions.co.uk **G'TEE** 2 years

The A30.1 90 watt/channel integrated amplifier (reviewed *HFC* 214) is partnered here by the

A30.2, the matching stereo power amplifier is rated at 2x100 watts/8 ohms, rising to a healthy 180 watts/4 ohms with help from the hefty toroids that drive each channel output. The design of the two amps is very similar with extensive use of surface mount devices, and in the A30.1, Primare's usual high-precision, finely-stepped impulse generator volume and balance controls.

One curiosity of the Primare combination is that both have balanced inputs – the integrated amp has two – and in this test it was driven from the balanced output of the test Primare CD player using a set of Nordost Valhalla balanced XLR terminated cables. The obvious omission is a balanced preamp level output from the A30.1, even though the internal topology is balanced throughout – the power amp is balanced in this case from input through to output.

As usual with Primare, build quality is excellent, with thick metal panels and aluminium slab fascias, but the A30.2 power amp test sample, which had already run the gamut at our technical Editor Paul Miller's lab, failed to emerge from protect mode

when received for listening (couriers, who needs them!), and was replaced by another sample.

SOUND QUALITY

It was not possible to run the replacement A30.2 in fully, though the consistency of the comments between morning and afternoon sessions suggests this was not a problem. One listener described the combination as giving a 'rose coloured' sound, which another panellist described as 'smooth', despite which there were odd complaints of 'harshness', for example in the Marc Cohn recording, and of 'muffle', 'dullness' and 'congestion' in the Mary Coughlan. On the other hand, the combination was praised for its 'ripe, listenable' vocal quality, and a 'smooth and sweet' balance. The Primare combination was felt to be grippy and in control, with a strong sense of image focus, but it was also a tad opaque with the Tannoy's.

Despite this, overall scoring was towards the top end of the scale, and the hands-on testing with the alternative B&W speakers was much plainer sailing, the combination adding a gravitas and an improved sense of scaling, separation and control, though it seemed somehow

less consistent in bi-amped form than when the A30.1 was used on its own (see the Lab Report for a reason).

CONCLUSION

The lack of a balanced output from the A30.1 integrated, especially when such an output is available from the Primare CD player, implies that in its present form the A30.1/A30.2 combination is a halfway house. Successful with the B&W speakers, the Primare was palpably ill at ease with the difficult Tannoy load. This combination is one with some potential benefits, but which should be auditioned carefully in your chosen system.



THE LAB REPORT

Primare's popular A30.1 has been 'tickled up' since we last reviewed it in *HFC* 214, offering +2dB extra gain and a little extra headroom to accommodate musical peaks. The 2x120W/8ohm rating is unchanged, but a full 160W, 310W, 530W and 470W (21.7A) is now achievable into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads under dynamic conditions. Distortion remains reasonably constant at 0.01% (bass), 0.02% (midrange) through to 0.04% (treble) as it does through the A30.2 power amplifier. However, as supplied, the total gain

of the A30.1/30.2 is +1dB more than the A30.1 in isolation, implying that, in bi-amp mode, the A30.2 is always +1dB 'louder' than the A30.1. As the A30.2 also has different dynamic characteristics, the pair are probably better used as a conventional pre/power combo. A final warning: as both the A30.1 and A30.2 are fully balanced amplifiers, their return or 'black' terminals should never be grounded. Dealers should take particular care if either amp is routed through a speaker selection switchbox, for example.