

# Dual-stage Volcano

Little box on little box: Primare goes about it with maximum serenity. But underneath lies a seething volcano. This pre/power tandem conjures up lust and passion, no matter how classically-refined its appearance may be. We were thrilled.

Please let's not get sentimental now. There's no reason for it. But a retrospect is worthwhile. Back then above all two companies were reigning over the digital air supremacy – Sony and Philips. The Dutch have almost disappeared from the scene. The Japanese are still around, but only a shadow of their former self. A beefy high-end combo from Sony? Negative. No player, no loudspeaker – only in the headphone sector the Japanese are still active. How can this market be neglected so carelessly? Bizarre. This brings the small ones into the

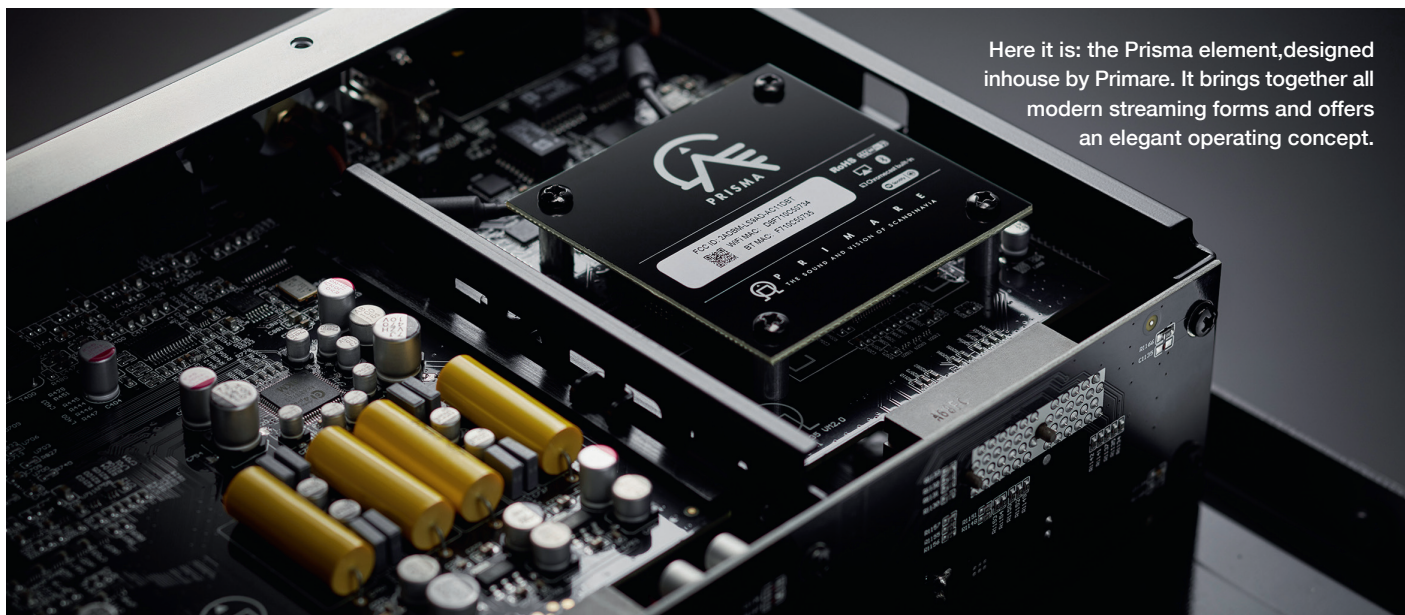
arena. Like the Swedes, for example. Primare resides in Malmö. This is way down south in the huge empire. There's no airport because one can easily get over from Copenhagen ac-

ross a big bridge. We would like to claim: Primare keeps watch over more topical sound knowledge than the Sony giant. In Malmö we come upon a mid-sized shack, everything is lucid,

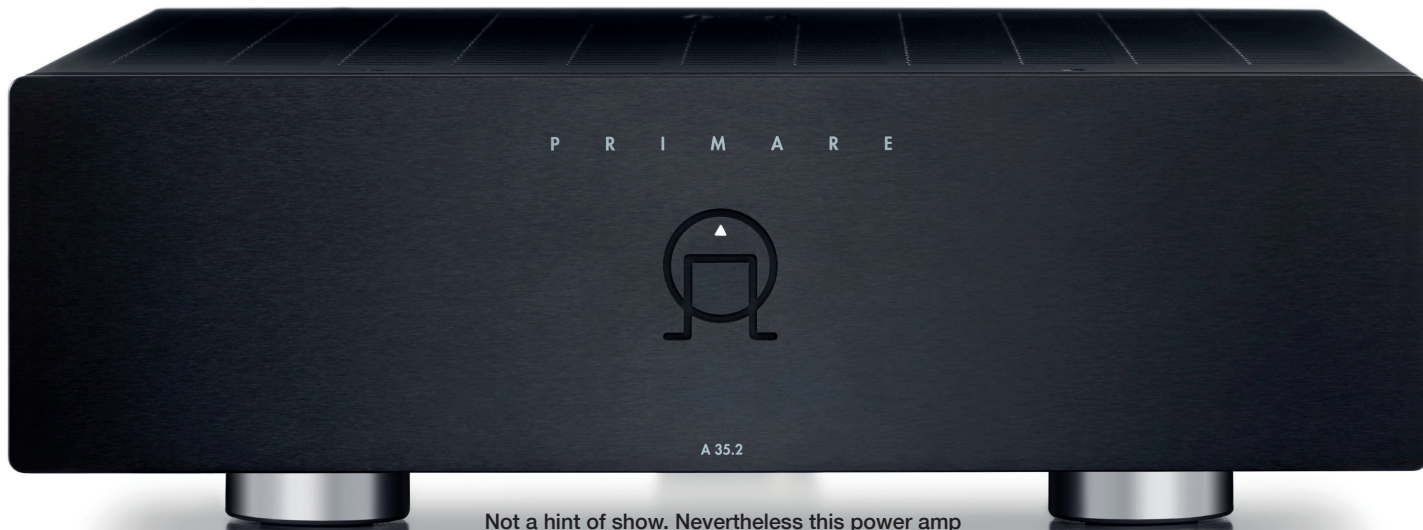
**Over 90 per cent of the energy is transformed into pure sound. A power plant for the future of music**

from the executive offices to the production. And yet Primare is braver and more future-oriented. The portfolio is strict: there's electronics – and that's it. But here the culmination of digital conversion is lived out. Early on the Northerners had realised that data conversion and digital amplification would mean the future. Sony would have invested millions,

but Primare bought the best heads for little money. Even so, ten years ago they established the logograph UFPD. Which stands for "Ultra Fast Power Device". Sounds good. In the meantime we have arrived in the second generation. Over 90 per cent of the supplied energy is transformed into sound, and owing to class-D the heat development remains extremely moderate; the A35.2 power amplifier will definitely not get hot. Everything is designed with utmost discretion. The cable paths follow ultimate symmetry. But we don't see this when



Here it is: the Prisma element, designed inhouse by Primare. It brings together all modern streaming forms and offers an elegant operating concept.



Not a hint of show. Nevertheless this power amp brings a lot of playfulness into the stereo image. Elegant: the power switch sits in the middle of the Primare logo.

we lift off the cover. This looks rather turbid: a heatsink at the rear, to the left and right some ventilation slots. The big toroidal transformer in the middle doesn't exist. Instead we find a miniaturised power supply mid- get. Looking into this power amp everybody who swears by the dual mono layout would feel distraught.

And still it does make sense. The signal paths are short; a centre board is to process the transients, a second one delivers the gain. The rear side, however, looks definitely more stringent. Two RCA ports plus two XLR

ports provide access to the inside, four speaker terminals lead outside. What's puzzling us: top right we see the lettering "De- signed in Sweden". That sounds a bit as if everything of significance were created far from home in Asia. But this is not completely true. We were present on the site in Malmö – here is a production hall where all Primare components are joined and measured extensively prior to shipping.

A tip for those who have tasted blood now, but are still uncertain – there is ample video footage on the website of the German

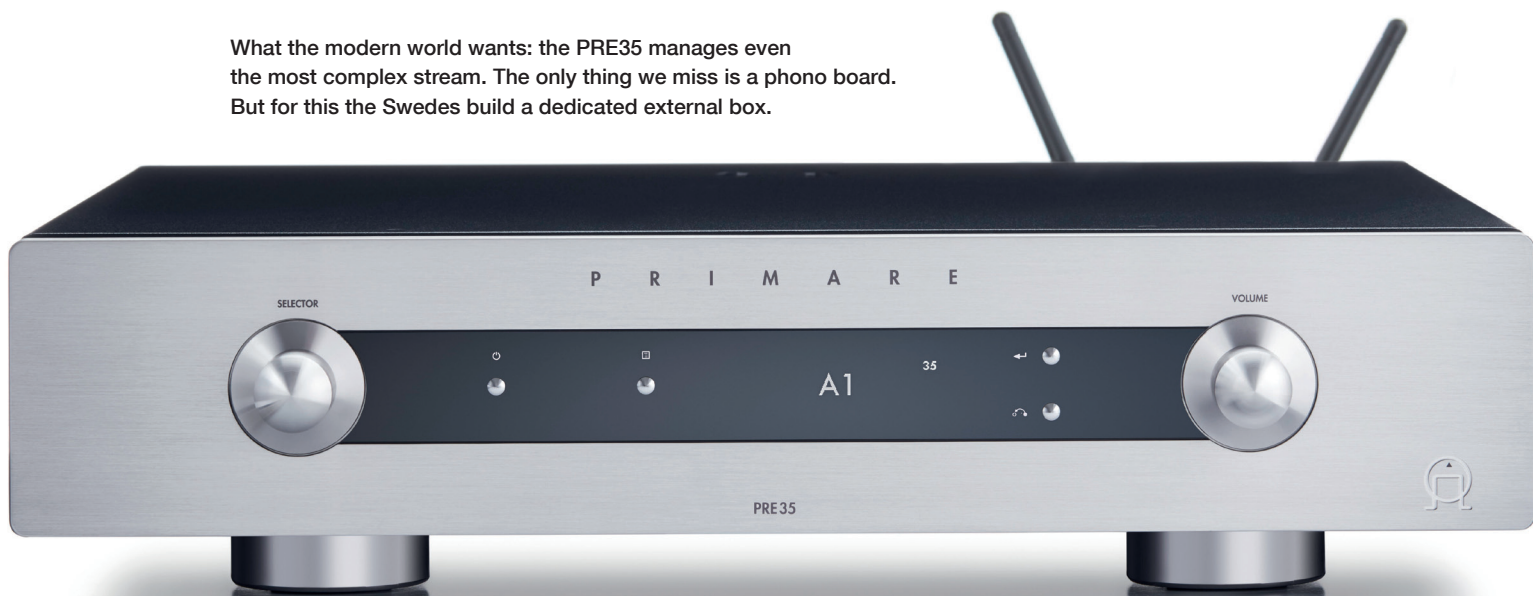
importer ([www.in-akustik.de](http://www.in-akustik.de)). We are seduced, but also informed which circuit design is being applied or which advantages we can extract from it.

#### Advantage: reduction

One of those benefits lies in the reduction. In former times we used to pile up stacks. A turntable, a cassette re- corder, a CD player, a tuner. All this doesn't make sense any more. The future sits gathered in a digital board which Primare has transplanted into the PRE35 preamp. And its last name is "Prisma". A Prisma

module does not only transfer the music signals, but will also convert them. Okay, the competition can do likewise, but Primare has ordered the biggest, most powerful chips. In the PCM stream a phenomenal 32 bits can be read out at 768 kilohertz. This lies way above the established download rates of the well-known portals. DSD is supported up to 256. We can access the PRE35 via network connector, but also through WiFi. Moreover, there's a multitude of optical and coaxial digital interfaces. In we go via two XLR pairs,

What the modern world wants: the PRE35 manages even the most complex stream. The only thing we miss is a phono board. But for this the Swedes build a dedicated external box.



**stereoplay  
Highlight**

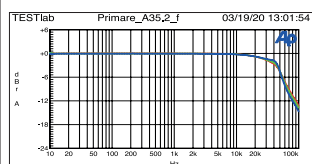
**Primare  
A35.2**

2900 Euro

Distribution: in-akustik GmbH & Co. KG  
Phone: +49 (0)7634 5610 0  
www.in-akustik.de

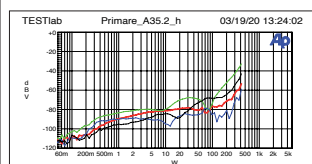
Dimensions (W×H×D): 43 × 14,5 × 40 cm  
(16.9 x 5.7 x 15.7 in.) Weight: 11.7 kg (25.8 lbs)

**Measuring diagrams**



**Frequency response charts**

Broadband and neutral, gradual level drop-off only in the HF range



**Distortion analysis** k2 to k5 vs. power  
Low distortions, slightly unsteady distribution at rising drive levels

**Practice and compatibility**

**Amplifier compatibility diagram**

Very high output with perfect stability, can drive virtually every known loudspeaker



**Measured values**

**RMS output power** (1 kHz, k = 1%)  
an 8 Ω 200 watts  
an 4 Ω 396 watts

**Peak output power** (60Hz-Burst)  
into 8 Ω 219 watts  
into 4 Ω 451 watts

**S/N ratio**  
XLR (2,83 V an 8 Ω) 98 dBs  
XLR (10 V an 8 Ω) 109 dBs

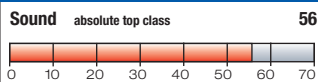
**Power consumption**  
**Standby/operation** 0,4/24 watts

**Evaluation**

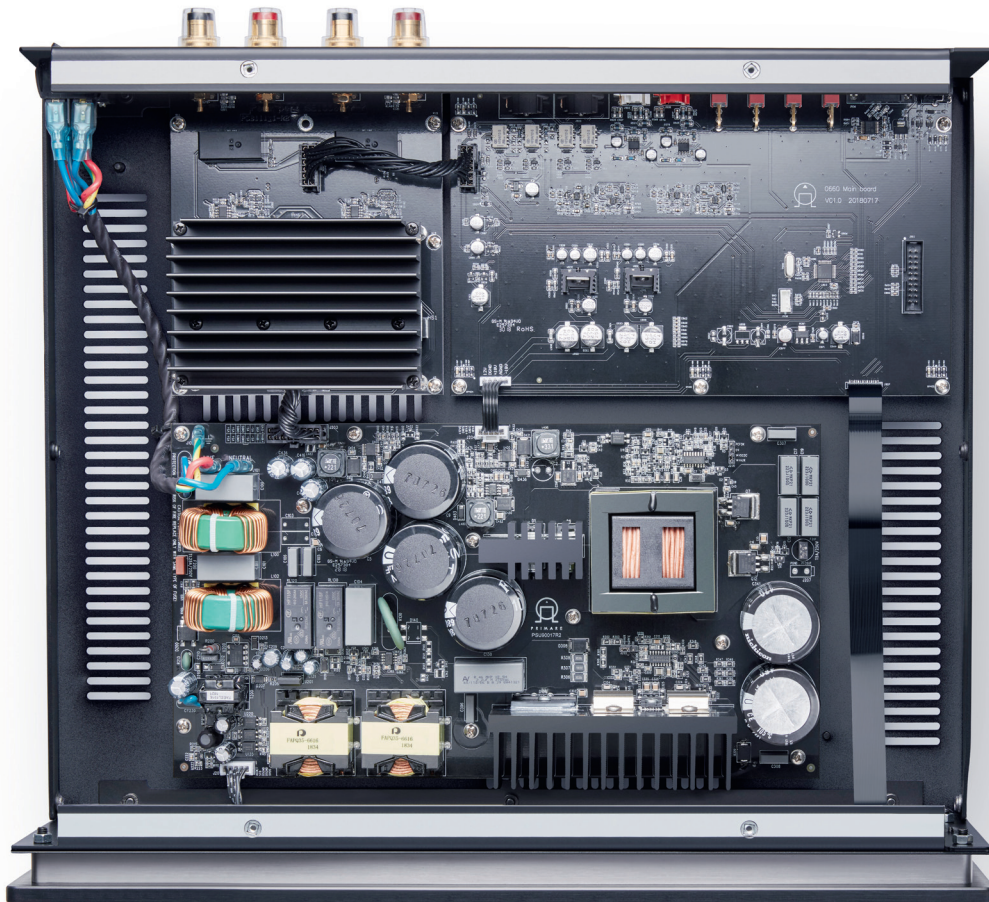
**Bottom line:** This takes courage: for years Primare has relied on a purely digital amplification. And the Swedes became champions at that. Nowhere is harshness or edginess to be found. It's rather swinging as if it were a valve amp. But with inexorable power. Magnificent.

Measured values	Field test	Value
8	9	8

**stereoplay test verdict**



**Overall score** 81 points  
**Price/performance** outstanding



Where is it, the big transformer? There's no such thing. This amp is based on switching power stages. Their layout follows the short signal paths and is intentionally asymmetrical.

and out just the same way, and there are also three RCA ports. As opulent as this may seem on the rear side – inside the housing it looks amazingly tidy. Almost everything has been constructed using miniature parts. The only really big thing is the transformer for the central power supply left at the bottom. The whole control centre is located on two pc boards in the rear section. Two knobs on the front – and that's it. The entire power of this smart pre-amp is best controlled via the proprietary Primare app. It is well programmed, efficient, with no frills.

**The Fifth**

Let's give the duo a listen. With great dynamics: Teodor Currentzis has come to approach Beethoven. This cannot be a

recording with a need for harmony, of course. The younger acts like a Dober-man on a nighttime burglar hunt.

Everything is fast, everything is boiling, there's something going on – there's something at stake. Although this is the most frequently recorded symphony of the world, the Fifth – we experience all new facets. Clever users will go and get the 24 bit/96 kHz data set. Awesome what the two Primares were forming out of it. Mighty was the punch, the rush ahead. Those who, for once, would like to put some real oomph into their speakers – here come the right music and the right electronics. The Swedes have created one of the best class D stagings of our time. Formerly we used to take a rather critical stance towards

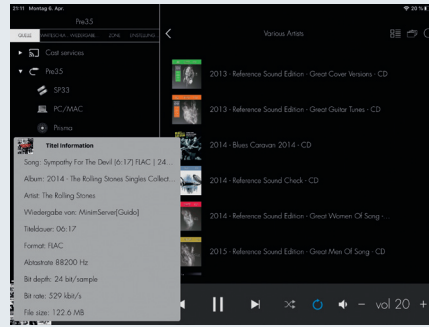
digital amplification. But with Primare it sounds wonderfully purified, designed for speed and yet never harsh. It's this physicalness in the first place

**Word of command:** the pre can be accessed on multiple ways via cable or wireless.



## Swedish system order

Not only a pc board stands behind the Primare claim “Prisma“, but an operating concept. Simply download the app to your smartphone or tablet. The app is elegant and trimmed down. In the best moments this comes close to the standard and aesthetic of Roon. It’s all you need. There is a cover display, comprehensive streaming information and a clear organising concept.



which is surprising and, in the best moments, has valve amp class. But then again always this immense drive – not even the boldest solid-state amplifiers can keep up here. Just pay attention to the presence of the tympanum in the fourth movement – it’s the engine, like the guy who whips in the common rhythm on the galley. The Primare performs it with the right “bang“. Suddenly a piccolo flute over it – the apparent contrastive pair, and yet the Swedes succeed in creating a large inner arc of suspense. This appeals equally to our intellects and our tummies.

Only a very few can do this. We’re already hooked on this combo by now. But who’s the actual hero? The streamer pre-amp or the power block behind it? This question

must not be asked. The two of them are twins in their nature and their art which should not be separated. For the sheer allocation of points we did, of course, crosschecks with various competitors. But as a duo they clearly delivered the most verve.

**This appeals equally to our intellects and our tummies. We were hooked on to the max.**

### Giga-Sound

Now let’s put all subtleties aside. It’s time for massive, real rock. Pearl Jam has brought out a new album – “Gigaton“. The guitars are shredding fiercely, the bass wants to tear down the walls. This calls for very big loudspeakers and high levels. If we had neighbours next to our listening room, they’d call

the police. But it was fun. The second track, “Superblood Wolfmoon“, is really great, this is finest grunge, the drums are pounding, all musicians seem to be unleashed. Likewise the two Primares had completely lost it. This had thrust well over

the top. Amazing how much resolution and brute power this dyad was sending to the diaphragms.

We would like to go easy on our proofs of love. But we have really fallen for these two Swedes. As a mix of control centre and powerhouse we don’t know a better tandem in this price category. **Andreas Günther** ■



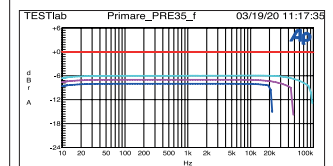
## Primare PRE35 Prisma

3900 Euro

Distribution: in-akustik GmbH & Co. KG  
Phone: +49 (0)7634 5610 0  
www.in-akustik.de

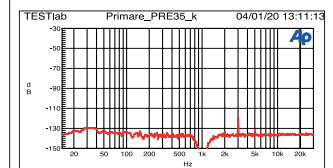
Dimensions (W×H×D): 43 × 10,6 × 42 cm  
(16.9 x 4.2 x 16.5 in.) Weight: 11 kg (24.3 lbs)

### Measuring diagrams



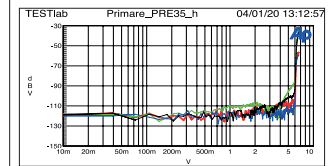
#### Frequency response charts

Broadband and neutral, soft filter effect with HiRes digital formats



#### Distortion analysis k2 to k5 vs. power

Possibly record-breaking low noise floor, distortions only minimal k3 and k5



#### Distortion spectrum (at 1mW into 32 ohms)

Very low distortions and noise floor, hardly rising with increasing drive

### Measured values

<b>Max. output voltage</b> RCA/XLR	2,1/2,1Ω
<b>S/N ratio</b> RCA/XLR	105/92 dBs
<b>Output impedance</b> RCA	120 Ω
<b>Power consumption</b> standby/operation	-/31W

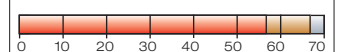
### Evaluation

**Bottom line:** The catalogue lists three model versions of this preamp: plain, with DAC and with streaming. We had ordered the top configuration. The price is more than reasonable. Soundwise a fine, almost sensual preamp, rich in facets, a diamond.

Measured values	Field test	Value
8	8	8

### stereoplay test verdict

Sound analogue/Streaming/USB 57/68/68



<b>Overall score</b>	81 points
<b>Price/performance</b>	very good