

£1400 - £1895

Densen Beat B-400 Plus



£1400

THIS SMART PLAYER from Densen was on the market for a little while before we had a chance to review it, but once we did it was clear the slim-yet-chunky B-400 Plus was well worth the wait.

It's not uncommon for us to get ever-so-slightly tetchy about the quality of remote controls in general – and more so with products like this, which couldn't be described as cheap. In the case of the Densen's remote (named 'the Gizmo'), however, our complaints don't concern the poverty of the handset. It's a tactile, finely finished, metal device that can control a whole host of Densen components.

No, we're marked by the fact that the B-400 Plus costs £1400 without the Gizmo – but £1550 with. Also, the

↑ FOR

Finger-poppin', toe-tappin', rug-cuttin' listen; bags of detail

↓ AGAINST

Low end isn't the last word in definition; remote costs £150

→ VERDICT

A fine-looking party animal of a CD player – the Densen is a good-time device if ever there was one

narrow display is slightly reminiscent of a late-1970s digital watch – but that's it as far as the complaints are concerned.

Even the briefest listen to the Densen is enough to soothe our moral outrage. Right from the off, it's an impressive

“The Densen is a rocking listen – it's one of the best for sheer brio and attack”

performer: with Saint Etienne's winsome *Sun In My Morning* spinning in the tray, the B-400 Plus generates a fast and dynamic sound. Detail is plentiful, tempo and timing is extremely well judged, and music fairly sprints along.

Within this vigorous and enthusiastic presentation the top frequencies scintillate, without threatening to veer into stridency. Voices, and the midrange in general, enjoy decent space.

Down among the low-frequency action is where our only slight reservations about the Densen are. Bass information isn't regimented enough: there's plenty of presence, and the information doesn't overstay its welcome, but the leading and trailing edges of the bass aren't as rock-solid as rivals. Eric B & Rakim's timeless *Paid In Full* wants for nothing in the way of drive or attack, and there's ample solidity to the sound, but the iconic bassline is left fractionally fuzzy around the edges.

Densen delights in wide dynamics

The Densen Beat B-400 Plus is an indisputably rocking listen. Its enthusiasm is infectious, and it's the best in class where sheer brio and attack are concerned. In addition, it rampages through testing dynamic shifts without batting an eyelid. All this, plus its winning way with timing and acoustic instruments and voices, mean that it's a very agreeable proposition. It's not the best in its class, but it's a great machine.

AT A GLANCE...

- ELECTRICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT ✓
- RCA OUTPUT ✓
- BALANCED OUTPUT ✗
- OPTICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT ✗



Primare CD31



£1500

BEAUTY MAY, AS they say, be in the eye of the beholder, but we're mightily struck by the outward appearance of the CD31. Of course, sound is the most important thing, but when Oscar Wilde declared, "It's only shallow people who don't judge by appearances," we reckon he had a point.

We've judged a fair bit of Primare equipment lately, and found it all to be good, competitive, value-for-money stuff. And if one thing has become apparent from these recent tests, it's that Primare is pretty consistent in its audio signature.

Revel in a big soundstage

Loading a disc into the CD31 hints at its credentials early on: it's a painless process which illustrates the Primare's superb build quality. Neither does the sound disappoint. It's not the most immediate listen, but the CD31 is a subtle and insightful device that produces a big, well-defined soundstage and fine ambient detail.

There's possibly less raw power to dynamically testing material than is ideal, but the Primare communicates

↑ FOR

Fine build and svelte looks; forthright, but not overbearing sonic presentation

↓ AGAINST

Can sound a tiny bit tentative through the RCA outputs

→ VERDICT

Primare's surefooted progress continues – fine sound and good looks should ensure plentiful sales

in spades without ever getting right up in your face. Switch to the CD31's balanced outputs and it's an even more impressive story: sound separates yet further, making music easier to follow, and the previously reticent character

“The Primare sounds a treat, and won't be overly fussy about the kit you pair it with”

gains plenty more crunch and bite.

Sheena Is A Punk Rocker by The Ramones sounds genuinely insolent, packed with all the attitude and ropey musicianship for which the band are famous.

With the balanced output, things step on decisively in the dynamic area too: there's greater attention to detail, better

grip on transients and lovely broad-stroke definition. Voices benefit as well, becoming ever-more natural. At the bottom of the frequency range, there's ample weight and speed.

So what Primare has served up is a well-made, competitively priced, impeccably finished and handsome CD player that sounds great and won't be overly fussy about system partners. Primare seems to have hit the bulls-eye in every area of the manufacturing process. Can you tell we're impressed?

AT A GLANCE...

- ELECTRICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT ✓
- RCA OUTPUT ✓
- BALANCED OUTPUT ✓
- OPTICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT ✓

