

“What makes the Primare so good is that it makes listening to music fun”

Primare CD31 BEST CD PLAYER £1500-£2000

OUR HIGHEST PRICE recommendation is by no means cheap, but its cost still falls well short of true high-end prices: think double this money upwards. No matter, the Primare's CD31 is a massively capable machine that still delivers a large slice of the high-end performance pie while keeping the asking price at relatively sensible levels.

Sonic performance is always key to us, and as you might guess by this Primare's Award, the CD31 sounds breathtakingly good at the money. Put it into a system, even something outlandish like our £20,000 reference Krell/PMC set-up, and it still won't sound out of its depth. You'd expect and get high levels of detail, balanced tonality and strong dynamics.

What makes the Primare so special

VERDICT

If you want an elegant, superbly built top-end player Primare's CD31 is an excellent place to start. It sounds fabulous and is built to sky-high standards

is that it also makes listening to music so much fun. Now that might sound like an odd thing to say, so let us explain. For us, there are just two types of product: those that make music and those that don't. The ones that don't can still dig up plenty of detail, but never manage to arrange it into a musical whole: rhythms lose their crispness, and voices lack the final degree of emotion.

It's too good to be a background listen

The result is the listener never gets touched by the music. If your system tends to be used for background listening you probably own such products. We'd prescribe the purchase of CD31 to cure such ills. This player does it all. Like loads of bass? This is your machine due to a fearsome combination of power and agility that works wonders with the hardcore dance of Roots Manuva's *Witness Dub*. Stereo imaging? Yep, that too is excellent, it's pinpoint and precise

enough to enable you to know just how far the horn section is from the string in John William's *Jurassic Park* theme. We could go on, but we're sure you get the point that this is an extraordinarily talented disc spinner.

Just as importantly, this player is easy to live with, too. It's simple to use thanks to a clear and logical front-panel layout and has both balanced XLR and unbalanced RCA connections to ensure system connectivity is never an issue.

Built to last a lifetime

This price level dictates the CD31 should be well built, and it is to the extent where it could comfortably be compared to far pricier machines without embarrassment. Add up all the plus points and the conclusion is simple. The CD31 is fully deserving of this award.

The CD31 continues where the excellent I30 amp left off – Primare is on some roll this year



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PRIMARE I30

“If there’s even a small element of goodness in a recording, the I30 finds it”

“The Primare manages to extract every last drop of detail from a soundtrack”

Dynamic duo

PRIMARE I30 BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER £1500-£2000

PRIMARE SRA21 BEST SURROUND AMPLIFIER £1500-£2500

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PRIMARE SPA21

Primare gallops to glory

VERDICT

This is a smart, luxuriously built amp that never puts a foot wrong. Good enough to shame many pricier alternatives

IT MIGHT SEEM odd to describe our most expensive Award-winning amplifier as something of a bargain, but that’s exactly what this is. Primare’s I30 is, in essence, high-end kit wrapped up in a sensibly priced package.

Luxurious isn’t a word you’ll find too often in these pages, but the I30 justifies its use with its rock-solid casework, its immaculately machined front panel, and chunky controls. We’ve come across amplifiers at triple this price from world-respected manufacturers that lack the Primare’s class.

Don’t make the mistake of thinking the I30 is just a pretty box: take off that heavy lid, and you’ll find carefully designed, fully balanced circuits and

a beefy power supply. The result is a superb amplifier that’ll happily live with components well beyond its already hefty price tag. It’s also hard to fault sonically – which is why it gets a gong.

Crystal-clear sound quality

The I30 has a transparent, insightful sound that gives a crystal-clear view into the recording and performance. As with all the best amplifiers, if either of these is below par, you’ll not be shielded from the truth. That said, if there’s even a small element of sonic goodness in a recording, no matter how bad the rest of it is, this is one amplifier that’ll let you appreciate it, where other

amps might bury it within a clutter of sound.

The Primare doesn’t care if you listen to Springsteen or Stravinsky: it has the drive and timing to satisfy Boss fans, and the scale, power and finesse to make the *Rite of Spring* magical.

Think of all the things you’d want from a class-leading £1500 integrated amplifier – Primare’s I30 fulfils them all with ease. It has the kind of performance that products in the next price class upwards would envy, yet has sacrificed nothing in build, finish or usability in the process. If you have this kind of money to spend on an amplifier, buy the I30 with confidence, and look forward to many years getting to know your CDs again.

We don’t always describe our most expensive Award-winner as a bargain, but this certainly is

WHAT HI-FI?
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STEREO AMPLIFIERS

BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER £1500-£2000

PRIMARE I30



Primare AV amp is simply sensational

VERDICT

The Primare is an immensely talented design. It looks great, it’s built superbly and you’ll just love the way it sounds

OFTEN, THE HOME cinema market can place too much emphasis on features – but while certain niceties can be essential, we’ve always felt that sound quality should come first.

So what if the SPA21 doesn’t have automatic set-up, HDMI up-conversion, or for that matter, Dolby Pro-Logic IIx processing? It’s still the best in its class – which is some achievement for a comparatively small outfit like Primare.

While the feature count may be lower than a limbo-dancer’s bar, the SPA21 more than makes up for it in other regards.

First, it looks like no other surround amplifier: rather than the festooned fascias of most rivals, the Primare opts for cool, minimalist simplicity. It’s also built to remarkable standards – as anyone attempting to lift one will swiftly discover...

But the Primare’s biggest asset is immediately apparent as soon as you crank the volume. The Primare sounds superb, full of energy and confidence – and it manages to carry that brilliance through to its music reproduction, too.

Spin the action-packed soundtrack to *Alexander*, and the SPA21 enralls with an intoxicating, invigorating performance.

The battle scenes boast great dynamics, and the Primare relishes the sonic challenge of stampeding horses, swash-buckling sword-play and blood-thirsty, bone-crunching action. It’s quite simply unflappable: the top end sounds pure and refined, while lower down the scale, bass is tight, precise and powerful enough to hit the spot.

Every sound effect is treated with relish – this amp manages to extract every last drop of detail to keep you locked in the moment.

However, when you come to a film

that demands a more relaxed approach, such as *The Machinist*, the SPA21 still creates such an engaging soundstage that you can’t take your ears, never mind your eyes, off the screen.

As we’ve already said, the same sonic qualities are also evident when faced with music. The Primare serves up lashings of detail, and music rolls along nicely thanks to its fine rhythmic ability. Kraftwerk’s *Minimum – Maximum* album ensures the Primare’s bassline agility is given a thorough test – one it passes with flying colours.

If you’re after the Holy Grail of home cinema amps – great sound with both music and movies – then the SPA21 is it. The queue to pay homage starts here.

