

# Emotional content

Great hi-fi is partly about making you feel special and **Ed Selley** reckons that this compact combination is a master of the art

**E**arly on in the magnificent film *Enter The Dragon*, Bruce Lee exclaims to a young apprentice “Don’t think, feeeeee!” For the avoidance of doubt, Mr Lee was referring to the emotional state required to knock the stuffing out of your opponent with martial arts rather than anything pertaining to hi-fi, but within that gloriously over enunciated statement is something

that is entirely relevant to the concept of *Beautiful Systems*. We seek out engineering integrity, technical wizardry and stunning aesthetics, but over and above these things we celebrate their ability to feel special and, by extension, to make you feel special using them.

Often, this comes at a substantial price, and is easier to create when you have the budget. The system you see here, however, is notable

because it has this quality in spades and while it’s not what you’d call cheap, it is very keenly priced. It also goes a long way to fulfilling the more definable constructs of engineering and technical ability.

Of course, as the electronics in this system are from Primare, this should not be too surprising. The DD15 CD transport and I15 Prisma integrated amp are from the lower levels of the company’s range, but

## COMPONENTS

### PRIMARE I15 PRISMA £1,600

Primare’s smallest integrated is a useful combo claiming 2x 60W amplifier with network ability via wired and wireless connections, controlled by a slick UPnP app with the support of both digital and analogue inputs.

### PRIMARE DD15 £1,140

As the I15 already has all the decoding required, the DD15 is a dedicated CD transport that combines a slot-loading mechanism with Primare’s immaculately finished casework for a modern take on the amplifier/CD combination.

### FALCON ACOUSTICS RAM STUDIO 10 £1,495

The Studio 10 is the most compact member of the RAM family of speakers and combines a 150mm polypropylene mid/bass driver with a 25mm soft-dome tweeter in a rear-ported cabinet finished in a rather lovely walnut finish.



**BEAUTIFUL SYSTEM**  
PRIMARE/FALCON ACOUSTICS



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still encapsulate everything that Primare consistently does so well. This is a 21st-century take on the amp and CD player combo. The I15 does most of the heavy lifting as it contains both the amplification and decoding. The Class D amp claims 2x 60W into 8ohm and 2x 100W into 4ohm and is compact enough to ensure that the extra functionality can be comfortably accommodated in the compact chassis.

**Format friendly**

Five digital inputs are joined by a UPnP network section that supports AirPlay and Chromecast. Decoding is handled by an AKM AK4490 DAC, which ensures that the I15 Prisma deals with pretty much any format that you care to throw at it. In direct contrast, the DD15 is splendid in its simplicity. As the I15 has decoding on board, it is simply a CD transport and exists to perform one role.

Partnering the Scandinavian electronics is Falcon Acoustics' RAM Studio 10 standmount. Unlike the Primares, the Studio 10 is more about pedigree than radical specifications. Falcon is, after all, a custodian of the BBC LS3/5a monitor and the DNA of

the RAM Studio 10 with its soft-dome tweeter and polypropylene mid/bass driver is firmly in that vein, even if its impedance and general behaviour is more in keeping with 2019 than 1969.

Where the two companies are absolutely as one is succeeding at the magic business of influencing how you feel. Lacking a knob on either component, the DD15 and I15 reflect that in reality, more than a single,

**Viceless to live with, it has a spec that performs almost any role you can think of**

well turned control, Primare does casework and points of customer contact at a level that makes many rivals feel homemade. Simply extracting them from their packaging generates a feeling of considerable well-being. There's no unnecessary flourishes here, but the execution is so good the product feels like a flourish in itself. The crisp white-on-black displays and lovely Prisma control app only strengthen the sentiment.

**Above left: The RAM Studio 10 uses traditional materials in a way that feels modern**

**Above: Primare offers extensive connectivity where you need it and minimalism where you don't**

**Above right: Exquisite Scandinavian design and metalwork is the order of the day**

The RAM Studio 10, by contrast, takes traditional materials and still manages to feel contemporary. Walnut and leather in combination bring to mind British sports cars or maybe an antique bureau, but here – thanks to leaving the walnut without lacquer and encasing more of the cabinet in leather – the standmount feels bang up to date. The system as a whole is a perfectly judged balance of subtlety, elegance and functionality. It is possible to spend a great deal more and end up with something a whole lot less satisfying to spend time with.

**Keeping it real**

With the DD15 feeding Yazz Ahmed's *La Saboteuse* to the I15 for decoding and amplification, the Primare duo is the sonic manifestation of its wonderful externals. This is a great piece of music granted a superb recording and every nuance is delivered with an effortless feeling of realism and presence. Ahmed's trumpet has the breadth of expression of a voice and here is effortlessly reproduced.

Listen for 30 minutes or so and the really clever part of this starts to make itself felt. Balancing the desire

for realism and immediacy with the consideration you want presentation to be something you can enjoy long term without feeling fatigued is one of the great balancing acts of hi-fi. This duo shows Primare is an absolute master at it. At every stage, across a huge variety of music, there is never a trace of softness or lack of dynamics, but equally you can spend a whole day in their company and feel it is no great undertaking to do so.

**The right stuff**

Of course, the Falcon plays its role in this too. This is my first meaningful interaction with the brand, but based on this I'm going to have to seek it out more often. It offers an intriguing blend of the classic British monitor speaker with something rather more invigorating. The monitor bit is easy enough to experience. Hayden Thorpe's *Diviner* is unforced and superbly immediate. The combination of his falsetto and supporting piano is simply and unfaillingly right. There is never anything less than a compellingly real take on the music being played.

Where the RAM Studio 10 goes the extra mile is the endless feeling of joy



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it brings to music. It's exceptionally agile, but combines this with a level of bass weight that is impressive for a cabinet this size. It manages to convey the feeling what you are hearing is an accurate and unvarnished take on the music being played, but it also has a midrange that has you revisiting music that you love time and time again because it gets the hairs on the

**The DD15 and I15 do casework and points of contact so well that rivals feel homemade**

back of your neck standing up. Combine this with electronics that are as consistently joyous to listen to as the Primares, and you have a setup that constantly makes you want to try different albums on it.

And it is here that the details combine to make this system more than the sum of its parts. Things like the Falcon's impressive ability to sound just as compelling at low levels as it does with the volume cranked up or the way that the Primare Prisma

app allows you to add the services you want to the main page so your listening experience is as slick as possible, add to the overall experience. I like that there's a remote to support the app because not every single instruction you give your setup should be preceded by firing up your iPad. Individually, each is welcome, together they make you feel like you own something designed by people who think like we do.

**Role play**

What we have here is a system that consistently shows that character is not a polite excusing of flaws or faults. It is utterly viceless to live with and has a specification that allows it to perform almost any role you can envisage from an audio system in 2019. Thanks to the materials involved and the care and effort in their construction, the result is an almost perfect physical manifestation of equipment that generates the feeling that has me referencing kung fu movies. Every time I've sat down to listen to this system, I've ended up happier than when I started... and it doesn't get much better than that ●