

When you hold the Primare kit, you're treated to a sensational feeling of quality



Primare I21 POWER AMPLIFIER



£750

Primare CD21 CD PLAYER



£800

Revel M22 SPEAKERS



£1700

TOTAL SYSTEM



£3250

THIS PRIMARE/REVEL set-up immediately looks and sounds among the most expensive systems here. The sheer fidelity of sound and meticulous build is as impressive as any competitors in this test.

Both the CD player (*First Test*-ed in last month's issue) and the equally new amp are beautifully built components. Winningly finished in moody titanium, both machines exude solidity, understatement and classic good-looks. Every switch feels painstakingly damped and the casework is substantial.

The standmount Revel speakers feel equally over-engineered, the real-wood veneer and micron-perfect panel gaps creating a sense of money-well-spent that isn't always a given from small,

↑ FOR

Titanic build quality, lustrous finish; effortless scale; civilised character

↓ AGAINST

Speakers and electronics are, fundamentally, different types

→ VERDICT

This system appeals on many levels and works well, but it's frustratingly mismatched

expensive loud speakers. It's a gratifying impression, one that lasts right up until you dig the Primare remote control out of the box – it's logical enough, but feels cheap and ordinary next to Cambridge Audio's lovely remote control handset.

Although recklessly expensive when judged alongside the Primare devices, the M22s turn out to be an ideal foil for the amp and CD player. Our *First Test* enthused about the Primare's civilised voice, effortless scale, dynamic reach and seemingly limitless headroom; when working in tandem with its amplifying sibling, those observations become doubly true.

“Natural and neutral, this Primare set-up is capable of creating a deep soundstage”

Natural, neutral and painting a wide, deep soundstage, the Primare kit musters a very persuasive sense of performance: The Blind Boys of Alabama's (*Jesus Hits Like*) *An Atom Bomb* swings unstopably and communicates in deluges.

Our biggest reservation concerns the rather fastidious and reticent character

of the electronics: though there's no shortage of low-frequency information (and it's all well-controlled), the sound lacks the punch and attack a song like Lyn Collins' *Rock Me Again And Again* demands.

Strident and serious approach

The speakers do a better job of injecting drive into proceedings, but their high-frequency reproduction can veer close to stridency and, in any case, the Primare front end is not to be swayed from its rather strait-laced attitude that music-making is an extremely serious business.

This system works sympathetically: the electronics manage to tame the baser instincts of the speakers' tweeter (which are base, no matter how we fiddled with each speaker's active treble control) while the Revels refuse to allow the Primare pairing to settle into any kind of sedentary, undemonstrative comfort zone.

Taken purely on a performance basis, this is one of the best-sounding systems on test. But the elusive synergy isn't there: there's a pragmatic co-operation between each item. Somehow, the set-up is less than the sum of its parts. So on a per-pound basis, there are better systems around.