

£2300 - £3450

Densen B-200/Densen B-310



£1100/£1200

DENSEN'S SLOGAN IS 'life's too short for boring hi-fi', and dull is the last thing this pairing is. The B-200/B-310 duo delivers a direct, lively performance that positively brims with energy.

Straight from cold, the Densens sound a touch bright and enthusiastic, but once things settle down there are few better entertainers for the money. The B-310 power amp is rated at just 80 watts per channel, but you'd never guess from the explosive way it delivers the seismic dynamic shifts of Holst's *Mars* or the plunging basslines of Massive Attack's *Angel*.

Dvorák in a dinner jacket

But don't get the impression that this is just some inarticulate powerhouse: yes, it'll pound out the latest hip-hop beats with plenty of vigour, but change from Dre to Dvorák and the Densen won't have any trouble swapping a baseball cap for a dinner jacket. Its soundstaging is expansive and detail resolution impressive.

However, it isn't the Densen's hi-fi attributes that will stick in your mind after a demo: you're more likely

↑ FOR

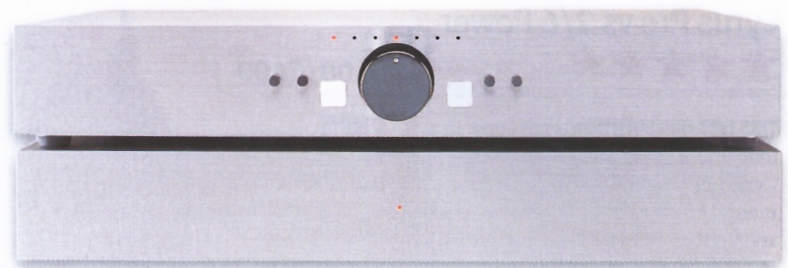
Crisp, dynamic and entertaining sound; clean-cut looks; superb build apart from...

↓ AGAINST

...unreasonably sharp casework edges; the price of the optional remote handset

→ VERDICT

Another fine product from Densen, this pre/power is right up there with the very best at this price



to remember how good the music was, because that's what this amplifier does. It plays music, rather than trying to impress with superfluous demonstrations of how hi is its fi.

"Some might prefer it more relaxed, but the Densen's enthusiasm suits us fine"

So are there any downsides? Well, some listeners might prefer a more relaxed presentation, but for us the Densen's enthusiastic balance suits just fine, doing a fine job of letting the music – any music – communicate.

We've no complaints when it comes to build, either – apart from some slightly sharp edges on the corners of the fascia panel. And if the design of the preamp isn't minimalist – or should that be

idiosyncratic – enough for you, if you want remote operation it'll cost £150 more because Densen refuses to supply a cheap plastic handset with the preamp, and wants you to use its rather fine chunky metal remote control instead. Or to put it another way, you could have the classy remote thrown in as standard, but then we'd be looking at a preamp with a £1250 price-tag.

So there you have it: this is a smart, well-built amplifier that entertains without fail. The Densen Beat B-200/B-310 combination isn't cheap, but it is good... very good indeed.

AT A GLANCE...

- PHONO STAGE
- HEADPHONE SOCKET
- TONE CONTROLS
- REMOTE CONTROL

Primare Pre30/A30.2



£1200/£1200

SOUND APART, THE great thing about Primare's components is that they look a lot more expensive than they are (yes, even at £1200 per box), thanks to solid, rigid casework and controls with a smoothness and precision that makes them a delight to use.

Inputs on the preamp are available both on standard phonos – three line-ins, a tape loop and an AV bypass – and two sets of balanced XLRs, while the twin-mono 120W power amp can also be hooked up using balanced or conventional phono cables. Use balanced wherever possible – it brings extra focus, and greater control to the bass.

Enjoy their spirited delivery

The C31 remote handset – a chunky metal-cased device, again with precise buttons – controls the Pre30, and can also drive a range of other Primare products. Through small touches like this the overall impression of quality is maintained before you even listen.

After a few hours' warm-up the amps showed their considerable mettle with a spirited delivery of Primal Scream's *Evil Heat* disc, allowing the

↑ FOR

Winning combination of power and poise; impeccable build

↓ AGAINST

Works best with balanced inputs and connections

→ VERDICT

Combines generous power with a warm yet informative sound



raw edges of the recording to shine through. They were similarly accomplished with Pearl Jam's *Riot Act* set, the

"...That almost tangible presence that separates fine stereo from the merely 'hi-fi'"

guitars roaring out of the speakers, and sounding 'in the room' real. Spin Tori Amos's *Scarlet's Walk*, and the way the Primare place the singer's voice and piano centre-stage is glorious, with that almost tangible presence that sets fine stereo aside from the merely 'hi-fi'. The delicacy with which each vocal nuance is elicited is refreshing – forcing the issue

is more common with so many amplifiers – and while this may make some feel the Primare are understated, in fact they're just accurate, and a much more enjoyable listen long-term.

At this level of the market, the Primare finds itself up against some serious rivals. However, on this showing the Pre30/A30.2 has the ability to take on the best and shine through, with a sound that's as fresh as it's substantial.

AT A GLANCE...

- PHONO STAGE
- HEADPHONE SOCKET
- TONE CONTROLS
- REMOTE CONTROL