

Primare PRE30/A33.2



The Primare duo was always going to be a little more expensive than others in the group. This Swedish brand's PRE30 is priced at £1500 and its matching A30.2 power amp £1200. But by happenstance, as we prepared for the group test, Primare announced a new, improved A33.2 power amp – the one we have exclusively here – superseding the A30.2. It has an upgraded power supply with a bigger transformer and improved supply regulation, but the price has increased by £400 too, no doubt exacerbated by today's unfavourable exchange rates.

The PRE30/A33.2 features a balanced line throughout the signal chain, along with adjustable sensitivity of each input to allow for differences in the output level produced by each source. Minimalist in a cool, understated Scandinavian fashion, it ticks all the right boxes for the audiophile.

TRUE HIGH END

Fortunately this combo does not need to apologise for being the most expensive here, as from the opening bars of Leonard Cohen's dark, brooding track it was evident that the sound had moved into true high-end territory. Assured and supremely confident in all areas of performance the combo comfortably tracked dynamic swings in the music to make for

a rousing sonic event. Bass was deep and authoritative, transients were sharp while never edgy, and percussion crisp and fluid.

Hugh Masekela's 'The Coal Train' proved utterly majestic with its gripping dynamic crescendos while never once threatening to become derailed. Rock solid drums and bass underpinned Masekela's soaring trumpet and stirring vocals most convincingly, with the space and atmosphere of the recording venue vividly portrayed.

If not already impressive, the sound improved further when subsequently auditioned using balanced in/outputs, revealing information nuances previously unobserved. This was gripping stuff, with subtle inflections in backing vocals and musical phrasing exquisitely sculpted.

MILLION DOLLAR LOOK

As with all Primare units, the PRE30/A33.2 components are housed in heavy gauge steel chassis with immaculate alloy fascias and chic stainless steel controls. To these eyes they look a million dollars. With its transparent, dynamic and involving sound to match the satisfying build quality, this pair more than justifies its price tag. Indeed it was judged to be the equal of the Levinson amplifier used as this month's 'benchmark'.

Sound Quality: 80%

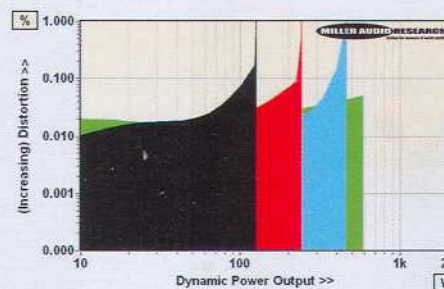


ABOVE: Solid fascia and controls gives the minimalist Primare a high-end look. The most expensive of the group, it's the only combo to offer balanced operation

HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

Tested in balanced mode throughout, Primare's PRE30 offers the lowest noise and distortion of the pair from an output up to 10V from a 190ohm source impedance. THD is as low as 0.00016% through bass and midrange, increasing to just 0.0009% at 40kHz while the input overload margin is sufficient to accommodate sources in excess of 10V. The response is flat to -0.01dB/20kHz and -0.35dB/100kHz, unlike the A33.2 power amp which rolls gently away to -0.15dB/20kHz and -2.4dB/100kHz into 8ohm.

This partnering power amp is certainly more 'colourful' with a distortion that rises almost uniformly with power, from 0.004% at 1W/8ohm to 0.012% at 10W and 0.035% at 100W. It increases with frequency too, from 0.006% at 20Hz to 0.012% at 1kHz and 0.09% at 20kHz. It just achieves its 2x120W/8ohm specification, but the awesomely regulated PSU ensures this nearly doubles to 2x235W/4ohm. The robust dynamic power output is illustrated by the graph, below. PM



ABOVE: Dynamic power output versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm loads (green)

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	125W / 235W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	127W / 243W / 465W / 586W
Output impedance (20Hz-20kHz)	0.038-0.090ohm
Freq. resp. (20Hz-100kHz, pre/power)	+0.0 to -0.4dB/+0.0 to -2.4dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/120W)	180mV / 2040mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (pre/power)	94.9dB (0dBV) / 92.7dB (0dBW)
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, pre/power)	0.0002-0.0006%/0.002-0.088%
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	51W/475W
Dimensions (WHD, pre/power)	430x100x410/430x140x385mm



ABOVE: Any of the five line inputs (RCA) and two balanced (XLR) inputs can be routed to the 'tape out' socket. Another set of speaker terminals would be nice...