



Primare CD32 **£2,200**



Sublime Sweede is understated to behold, but engaging, muscular and tactile with recorded music

DETAILS

ORIGIN: Sweden/China
WEIGHT: 9kg
DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 430x110x385mm
FEATURES:
 • Analogue outputs: unbalanced and balanced (XLR)
 • Digital outputs: optical & electrical S/PDIF, AES/EBU (XLR)
 • Digital inputs: USB A
DISTRIBUTOR: Karma AV
TELEPHONE: 01423 358946
WEBSITE: primare.net

We looked at Primare's latest CD player and its partnering amplifier the i32 in *HFC 344*, so it makes sense to see how it compares with the competition. On paper and in the flesh it's very strong indeed, thanks to a superb OLED display with a crisp Sans Serif style and a stainless front panel with the bare minimum of buttons.

The CD32's natural tendency is to upsample its output to 96kHz via both analogue and digital sockets, but this can be reined in to 48 or 44.1kHz with the remote handset.

Primare has also thought to include a USB input for thumb-drives or bigger storage devices, which is a unique feature in this particular round-up, inconveniently, however, the player can only process MP3 or WMA files.

It has an impressive array of socketry on the back panel; analogue outputs in balanced and traditional single-ended flavours; optical, coaxial and AES/EBU digital outputs; 12-volt triggers; RS-232 interface and the aforementioned USB-A socket.

Under the lid it runs a pair of Burr-Brown PCM1704 DACs through discrete, screened SMD circuit boards. What's unusual

about the design is the use of discrete transistors rather than op-amps for the critical I/V (current to voltage) conversion stage.

The CD32 comes with a system remote that is festooned with small buttons, but a bit of familiarisation provides the key, things like changing sample rate or playing the contents of a USB drive require a bit of work.

Sound quality

The CD32's character is definite, tactile and grounded thanks to taut, muscular bass and a clean and open midrange; open at least in the context of the other solid-state players in the group. Timing is also on the button; it's not overly emphasised by leading edges, but it's precise thanks to the absence of overhang or bloom in the bass. It images well, too, with good height and depth of soundstage if not quite as much width as some.

The Kraftwerk track was considered to have, "good attack and grip in the midrange" according to one panellist and to provide that "all-important sense of emotional attachment" according to another. One listener was less keen on the treble performance, however, describing it as "slightly edgy", but even he had to admit that it had good integration and timing.



In fact, everyone agreed about the high quality of bass and midrange on offer, which inspired comments including "creamy-smooth vocals" and "good musicality". The CD32 is probably the most honest and substantial sounding player in the group, yet remains engaging thanks to its timing and all-round coherence, which are exceptionally strong.

This combined with the large feature-count, high build quality and superb display make it a very hard act to follow.

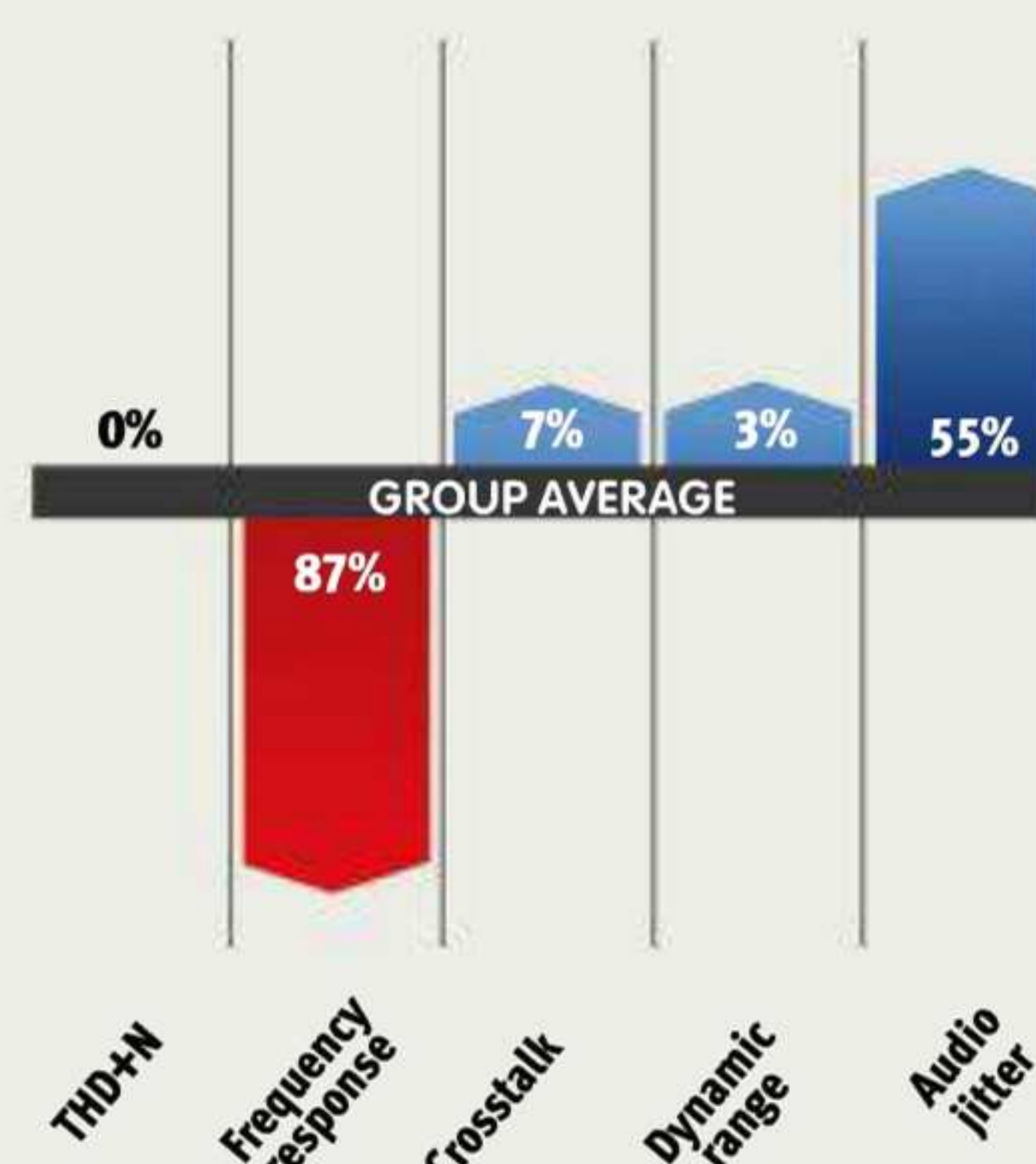
TECH LABS

LAB REPORT

Very close results between the balanced and unbalanced output stages, with slightly better crosstalk measurements through the unbalanced outputs. Perhaps greater care was taken to physically separate the two stages in the layout design. Audio jitter measured about as good as we have seen on any product recently to grace our labs.

The frequency response deviated more than we would expect to see from a modern CD transporter and disparities between the left and right channels suggest some refinement to the design will greatly improve this product. The right channel, for example, measured 0.002 per cent at 0dBFS, against the left performing rather poorly in comparison at 0.02 per cent; the right-to-left crosstalk measured 85dB against the left-to-right 77dB. While both channels plotted the same frequency response, the CD32's saving grace is an impressive 95dB dynamic range.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★
FEATURES ★★★★★

LIKE: Good build combined with strong, dynamic and engaging sound
DISLIKE: MP3/WMA music file restriction is a pity
WE SAY: This makes genuinely engaging music in a product that's built to last

OVERALL

