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‘The perfect 21st century starter amp?’
Budget Esoterica, p68

Primare 60-series
Pre/power for hi-res music media

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Musical Fidelity’s mammoth amp

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• SHOW BLOG We report from Hong Kong’s Hi-Fi Show • READERS’ CLASSIFIEDS Hi-fi bargains galore
Primare PRE60/A60

The long talked about flagship pre/power amplifier from Primare is finally in production and it’s a dream combo, with a plethora of inputs for the 21st century audiophile.

Everything is now manufactured locally. From the Far East back to its native Sweden. PCB production for its entire product range has spent the last year managing a shift of everything DOnE in sWEDEn.

When in standby; this is disabled as the switchmode supply facilitates very low mains over a larger period of the sine wave. The PRE60 employs a matched’ JRC resistor and balance controls. As on Primare’s旗舰 stands, also reminiscent of the new breed of this technology, cool-running high efficiency PWM amplifiers. The UFPD Class D modules at the heart of Primare’s power amps are representative of the new breed of this technology, cool-running high performance analogue PWM amplifiers inspired and given ‘audophile credibility’ by the likes of Hypex’s UcD units (www.hypex.net). While Primare’s UFPD amplifiers are proprietary they share many important features with the single-ended Hypex modules rather than the floating IC power modules from B&O – both brands are still implemented in various current hi-fi amplifiers, of course. Distortion is very low and fairly uniform with frequency [see Lab Report, p33] but their biggest claim to fame is almost total load-invariance. While most Class D amps are ‘tuned’ to offer the flattest response into 8ohm, with variations into higher and lower impedances, the UFPD’s response, like that of the Hypex modules, is almost unchanged, regardless of speaker load.

The PRE60 is far more than just a preamp. It covers all bases as a modern control hub for a high-end system, incorporating an onboard DAC with an asynchronous USB-B input for direct computer hook-up, a USB A socket at the rear for USB HDDs and memory sticks, with the option to bi-amp with single-ended or balanced signals by a conversion stage for bi-amping or surround processing. The PRE60 with a surround processor can be configured as a ‘pass-thru’ for integrating the PRE60 with a processor. For its power supply, the PRE60 employs a custom made C-core transformer and 43,000uF capacitor bank, with discrete regulated supplies separately powering the preamp’s analogue and digital sections. A further switchmode supply facilitates very low power consumption (0.2W is claimed, when in standby; this is disabled as the linear supply takes over once the PRE60 is powered up.

Circuitry is fully balanced throughout and DC coupled from input to output, unbalanced inputs being converted to balanced signals by a conversion stage buffered by Burr-Brown OP2134 op-amps and fed to volume and balance controls employing ‘closely matched’ IRC resistor ladder attenuations in a balanced configuration. Source selection is via signal relays.

As on Primare’s less ambitious 30 Series components, the PRE60 features a white OLED status display that adds a real touch of class. The electronics driving the display are shielded between the 15nm thick aluminium front panel and the unit’s main steel chassis to shield them from the preamp’s analogue and digital circuits.

Via an intuitive set-up menu the preamp’s inputs can be custom-named (and disabled when not in use), each input individually trimmed for volume and balance in 1dB steps, the power-up volume set to a desired level, and the display’s intensity adjusted in four brightness levels. Analogue Input number 6 can be configured as a ‘pass-thru’ for integrating the PRE60 with a processor. Where Primare’s I32 integrated and Class D amplifiers are ‘tuned’ to offer the flattest response into 8ohm, with variations into higher and lower impedances, the UFPD’s response, like that of the Hypex modules, is almost unchanged, regardless of speaker load. PM
it is a pure sine wave with the same frequency and phase as the mains voltage. Even if 1000W is taken from the mains, other equipment in the replay system will not be affected, as its presence becomes virtually invisible to the mains voltage. ‘The isolating stage of the converter works in a ZVS mode and, as a result, the switch flanks contain a lower quantity of harmonics, providing lower EMI and a clean environment for the amplifiers to work in.’

The A60’s rear panel sports XLR and RCA inputs which are selected via a miniature toggle switch alongside two sets of WBT Nextgen speaker terminals for easy bi-wiring. Internally these are connected from the amplifier’s output stage using Van den Hul SCS-12 cable.

A BOLD ATTITUDE
As I’ve spent the last couple of months basking in the awesome power and refinement of T+A’s three-box 3000HV pre/power/PSU combo [HFN Sep ’14] which costs almost two-and-a-half times as much as this Primare duo, I could easily have been underwhelmed hearing the Series 60 components driving my Townshend monitors. But the A60 packs a serious punch and exhibits tremendous low-end ‘grip’, the combo delivering impressive weight and scale to musical performances combined with striking detail and precision across the frequency spectrum. Indeed, it took very little time to determine that they’re exceptional components for the money too, music charging along with a bold and energetic attitude, full of rich, clear detail with open soundstaging.

‘Vigorous drum thwacks were delivered with immense power’

The vigorous drum thwacks by percussionist Manu Katché in Robbie Robertson’s ‘Somewhere Down The Crazy River’ from his eponymous album of 1987 [Mobile Fidelity ‘UltraDisc II’ remaster, UDCD 618] were delivered with immense power, the combo’s fast and agile timing enabling Tony Levin’s bass playing to be clearly discerned throughout the piece, where it can all too easily become swamped due to the recording’s ‘busy’ production quality. Percussion details and the swirling keyboard embellishments way back in the mix were exposed beautifully thanks to the Series 60’s crisp and vivid sound character.

I thought the combo sounded mightily impressive used as a pure analogue amplifier system fed by the balanced

LARS PEDERSEN
Primare Systems’ Lars Pedersen has been at the helm since 1996. As a young entrepreneur Lars was the Scandinavian importer of British-made Target speaker stands, and by the 1990s had a business (Xena Audio) that owned the Primare, Copland and QLN brands before choosing to focus solely on Primare. Says Lars: ‘The PRE60/A60 has been coming for over two years. As well as being our new flagship amplifier you could say it represents something of a turning point for our company, as part way through its development we decided to shift all of our manufacturing back to Sweden. This has been a major undertaking, however the statement “Made in Sweden” is highly appreciated in many markets around the globe as it represents a high level of quality assurance.’

Lars has built a fabulous media room in his home situated a short drive from Primare’s HQ in Malmo where he and his engineers can assess prototypes. Fitted out with a state-of-the-art projection system and high-end JBL Project loudspeakers, it’s a dream set-up – and all driven by Primare electronics, naturally.

So what’s next for Primare? ‘We keep a keen eye on market demands. And we expect to make several new product announcements at next January’s CES. We have already finalised an optional Bluetooth (AptX) receiver/decoder board for the PRE60 and our other Wi-Fi enabled products. In the UK it will be priced around £175’.

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and subjectively ‘fast’ leading edge ultra-precise, with no overhang playing via the PRE60’s USB input.

...whether we were streaming or of us could reliably determine tonal colours and textures. That was quite spectacular, rich in harmonics to ring with crystal claritytreble allowing the guitar strings’ definition. The sound had bags of air and detail and dynamic explosions were created with apparent ease. I was constantly entertained by this Primare duo’s razor-sharp clarity and its explicit rendering of musical recording’s elements.

I found Primare’s ‘digital media’ implementation appeared to differentiate very little between data pushed in via USB or pulled over a network via Ethernet connection. With the Gaelic-influenced ‘The Awakening’ from The Pat Metheny Group’s Imaginary Day [Polydor 517 135-2] and was presented with a cavernous sound image, the amplifier combo’s vivid clarity allowing forensic inspection of the recording’s elements.

Look elsewhere if you crave a big-bosomed, cushy and romantic sound. Primare’s flagship audio components tell it like it is, their honesty raising goose bumps with common regularity.

Primare's flagship audio components tell it like it is, their honesty raising goose bumps with common regularity.

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Exhibiting Primare’s excellent build quality these Series 60 components ooze style and sophistication. They are also beautifully voiced, delivering a super-clean sound brimming with detail alongside ample muscle to drive all but the most powerful, hungry speakers. In the high-end arena they represent outstanding value, especially as you’re getting a high-res DAC and network player included in the price!

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power output (&lt;1% THD, 8/4ohm)</th>
<th>300W / 755W</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic power (1kHz/8/4/2/1/4/8ohm)</td>
<td>352W / 675W / 685W / 350W</td>
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<tr>
<td>Output imp. (20Hz–20kHz, PRE60/A60)</td>
<td>140ohm / 0.014–0.005ohm</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-wtd S/N ratio [PRE60/A60]</td>
<td>95.9dB (+0dBV) / 80.1dB (+0dBW)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distortion [20Hz–20kHz, PRE60/A60]</td>
<td>0.0001% / 0.0002%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Digital jitter (48kHz/96kHz USB)</td>
<td>13psec / 12psec / 50psec</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power consumption [PRE60/A60]</td>
<td>31W/56W (26W idle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimensions (WHD, PRE60/A60)</td>
<td>410x142x38.5mm/435x108x365mm</td>
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