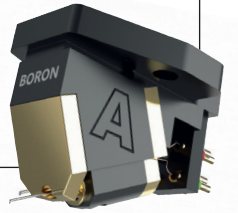




"We're not beautiful people!"
Flashback confessions from
The Smashing Pumpkins

Pure Gold
AVID HIFI's Boron
moving-coil cartridge



Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

Issue No. 519

October 2024

ACE AMPS

GROUP TEST

We conduct half a dozen new integrations
– which are the music maestros?

NEWS SPECIAL:

Launches from
Cambridge Audio,
Rotel, Astell&Kern,
Denon, FiiO, Dyson,
Pro-Ject, OneOdio
& more...

BUYING GUIDE
100+ Essential
Components
p107

PICTURE IMPERFECT?

The pros and
cons of mobile
phones at gigs



UK HI-FI SHOW LIVE!

All your latest
exhibitor updates

AWESOME UPGRADE

Sennheiser's Momentum
True Wireless 4 earbuds

Bargain Of The Month

Triangle's Borea BR02 Connect wireless speaker

LOOK WHO'S BACK!



Tannoy's Autograph Mini is
a dual-concentric classic

BLUES BROTHER



We salute Ray Charles –
the genius king of cool

SMOOTH OPERATOR



McIntosh's C2800 network
controlled preamp/DAC



GROUPTEST INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS
£3,100-£4,000



PrimaLuna EVO 200 £3,100

Launching in 2003, this Dutch company has become a popular brand for value-conscious tube aficionados

PrimaLuna founder Herman van den Dungen knows that buyers in this market want reliable, user-friendly products that are also tweakable. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the EVO 200 integrated epitomises this, by offering lots of sound-per-pound, plus a variety of options. It comes supplied with EL34 power valves as standard, which is a tube famous for its sweet sound – although KT88, KT120 or KT150 can be used thanks to the amp’s Adaptive AutoBias circuit

There’s a surprising amount of detail here, but what counts is its excellent soundstage

It puts out an impressive quoted 44W RMS per channel with EL34s (or 45W with KT88s), meaning that it’s far less speaker sensitive than most valve amps, including the Synthesis overleaf. Although not quite as petite as the Roma 96DC+, it is still compact by valve amplifier standards. The design is neat and functional, with a protective tube cover as standard. Underneath this reside four PrimaLuna Silver Label 12AU7 input tubes, with the EL34s behind. The output transformers and single mains

transformer sit at the back. The brushed aluminium fascia looks clean, with metal knobs for volume and input selection.

Round the back are four pairs of unbalanced stereo RCA line and home theatre inputs, plus speaker outputs with taps for 4 and 8ohm loads. EVO 200s ordered with a phono stage will find an underslung module at the rear – with a pair of RCA phonos and a ground terminal – offering MM cartridge connectivity. The headphone socket works when the rocker switch on the right of the case is clicked out of the speaker position. There’s a high/low bias switch beside this, set to low for EL34s or high for KT88s, KT120s or KT150s. PrimaLuna points out that its tubes are not run at or near their maximum voltages, which extends their life.

► DETAILS
PRODUCT
PrimaLuna EVO 200
ORIGIN
Netherlands/China
TYPE
Integrated amplifier
WEIGHT
24kg
DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
405 x 205 x 365mm
FEATURES
 • Quoted power: 2x 44W RMS (8ohm)
 • 4x 12AU7 input valves, 4x EL34 power valves
 • 2x RCA line ins; MM phono input
DISTRIBUTOR
Absolute Sounds



Sound quality

If you’ve never heard a serious valve amplifier, this is as good a place as any to begin. In absolute terms, the PrimaLuna is tonally coloured and lacks the precision at frequency extremes that’s exhibited by the solid-state designs here. Yet something that it does is on another level, and makes most others in the group sound too straight-laced and uptight. Some call it colouration, others call it magic – whatever label you give, it’s certainly different!

Like the Synthesis valve amp, the PrimaLuna has a lovely midband – both in the way it gets right into the grain of human voices and acoustic instruments, and in terms of timing. The phrasing of David Grant’s vocal on the Lynx track is glorious. This is also discernible via top-notch solid-staters like the Rega and Sugden, but not as apparent. The EVO 200 somehow makes it special.

Its bass is also super, up to a point. Liquid Crystal’s *You’re No Good* is as bouncy as a new rubber ball. Again, you hear this on the Rega and Sugden, but it’s less mesmeric. The PrimaLuna is noticeably better than the Synthesis tube amp in this regard, with much more grit and determination. Treble is silky too, although it always sounds sugar-coated; the Sugden comes close but has more bite and atmosphere.

Switching to Vaughan Williams’ London Symphony, there’s a surprising amount of detail coming through, but what really matters is its excellent soundstage. This is huge like the NAD, but is also tonally smoother and with superior depth perspective. While the M33 tends to sound a little processed, this amplifier feels far more natural. It’s a highly capable performer then, although still not quite perfect. Some might prefer the leaner sound of the solid-state Rega – which is more faithful to the recording – or the crisper Sugden option. Hear for yourself and decide ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Big, expansive, musical sound
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Lacks transparency
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WESAY:** A great-value, user-friendly tube amp
FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL

