



## Primare PRE32 and A34.2

**Y**ou have to hand it to the Scandinavians: they have a knack for design that is elegant, stylish and functional, topped with a healthy dollop of desirability.

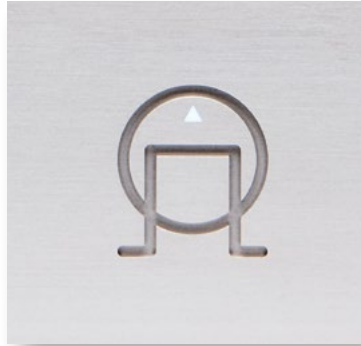
From architecture to furniture and almost everything in between, the combination of aesthetic balance and intuitive use has been a universal benchmark of enduring – and endearing – contemporary design for decades.

Swedish audio brand Primare is a good case in point. Its line-up of classy electronics, embracing both stereo and home theatre components, exudes a typically Scandinavian sense of class and substance in both physical and sonic terms.

Under scrutiny here is the marque's latest PRE32 pre-amp, linked to a pair of A34.2 power amplifiers. The A34.2 is a stereo power amp, but can be bridged to operate as a monoblock.

I tried out both configurations, initially partnering the PRE32 with only one A34.2 running in stereo mode, before adding the second A34.2 and operating the pair in bridged mode.

The power amp uses Primare's Ultra-Fast Power Device (UFPD) amplifier



design, a proprietary variation on switch-mode Class D amplification. According to Primare, UFPD addresses the Class D shortcoming of increasing noise and distortion at higher frequencies by applying a consistent feedback loop across the audio range.

The Primare design allows for integration of the demodulation filter in the amplifier stage to achieve quicker and more accurate active feedback control, ensuring constant loop gain and maintaining performance regardless of impedance variations. In addition, the UFPD switching frequency is above 300 kHz, well outside the audible frequency band.

The result, according to Primare, is

a wide-bandwidth amplifier displaying a flat, load-independent frequency response, together with low output impedance, noise and THD across the audio band. Rated power output is 2x 150 watts in stereo, and a prodigious 550 watts when running in bridged mono mode.

Other traits of the A34.2 include a fully balanced circuit design with two discrete power amplifier modules – one for each channel – and short, optimised signal paths. Construction is robust in the interests of creating a stable, vibration-free platform for the electronics, although it also contributes to the tactile appeal of the amp.

Visually, the thick, floating faceplate with its engraved Primare logo and small illuminated power light creates an impression of smart, understated design, while three large, round feet ensure positive, stable location.

The rear layout is straightforward and cleanly laid out, with a choice of balanced or single-ended inputs, and nicely executed, gold-plated binding posts that accept both spades and banana plug termination. Small toggle switches allow selection of balanced or single-ended mode, and switching

### PRIMARE PRE32



## VITAL STATS

between bridged and stereo operation.

The PRE32 is the perfect aesthetic match for the A34.2, with the trademark floating fascia and identical enclosure proportions. Dual, turned-metal rotary controls look after volume adjustment and source selection, and are located on either side of a bright, high-resolution OLED display.

The alphanumeric display uses a menu-based user interface and navigation buttons to access a comprehensive features list that includes renaming inputs and setting gain offsets for each. The slimline remote control handset makes the process even easier.

The PRE32's list of facilities includes two XLR balanced input sets, in addition to four single-ended stereo RCA inputs. Both balanced and single-ended pre-outputs are provided, together with a fixed-level record output.

Interestingly, the PRE32 includes a media module slot that will accommodate a slot-in board for digital streaming functionality. The MM30 uses Burr-Brown's PCM 1792 DAC, and offers coaxial and optical digital inputs, as well asynchronous USB and both Wi-Fi and Ethernet network connectivity.

I'm hoping to review this aspect at a later stage – the review sample came in

PRE32	
Frequency response .....	20 Hz – 100 kHz (-3 dB)
Signal-to-noise ratio .....	-115 dBV
Inputs .....	2x balanced XLR, 4x RCA, 1x phono
Outputs .....	1x balanced XLR, 2x RCA 1x RCA tape loop
Dimensions (WxDxH).....	430 x 385 x 105 mm
Weight .....	10,5 kg

A34.2	
Power output .....	2x 150 watts (8 ohms, THD+N <0,1%) 1x 550 watts (bridged, 8 ohms, THD+N <0,1%)
Frequency response .....	20 Hz – 20 kHz (-0,5 dB)
Signal-to-noise ratio .....	105 dBV (20 Hz – 20 kHz)
Inputs .....	1x stereo balanced XLR, 1x stereo RCA
Outputs .....	1x pair of five-way binding posts
Dimensions (WxDxH).....	430 x 385 x 105 mm
Weight .....	10,5 kg

## PRICE

PRE32 pre-amp: ..... R34 990

A34.2 power amp:..... R35 550

## VERDICT

Unexpected speed and slam from these slim Scandinavians, linked to rich tonality and adept treatment of detail. Punch above their weight on all counts.

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OUR RATING: 93 / 100



## PRIMARE A34.2





PRE32 – Rear

standard trim, without the optional module.

Like the A34.2, the PRE32's signal topology is fully balanced, and unbalanced input signals are converted to balanced via a conversion stage. The control and display components are located between the front panel and the main chassis to ensure isolation from the analogue boards. Source selection, level control and channel balance are effected in the

analogue domain.

With a single A34.2 driving our KEF R500s in stereo mode, the initial impressions were of a bold, almost tactile sonic presence, linked to an agile delivery and a smooth but detailed tonal character that sounded lavish, but never smeared or attenuated.

The bass was a revelation, linking speed to slam and authority and providing the kind

of solid foundation that ensured the music was rendered with substance and realism.

All of these traits were retained when I added the second A34.2, but with even more muscle to control the speakers, while the enhanced efficiency and authority allowed the sonic standards to be ramped up a further few notches.

Staging became even more expansive and enveloping, allowing ample space for every element of a performance to be rendered with care and musical accuracy, while the system's ability to translate timbre and texture was further enhanced, so that the listening experience became utterly compelling.

US violin virtuoso Anne Akiko Meyers' reading of Vivaldi's all-too-popular *Four Seasons* doesn't break any new ground, but the combination of her dazzling technique, the tonal breadth of the instrument used here, and the recording's huge dynamic swings make for a stern sonic test.

The effervescent 'Presto' from the suite's 'Summer' Concerto No.2 in G Major sounds deceptively simple, but the high tempo and extreme arpeggios require speed and pathos in equal measures. The Primare combo never lost its composure, always sounding fleet-footed and precise, and allowing the music's energy to flow and tumble with unencumbered enthusiasm.

## Associated Equipment

*Oppo BDP-95EU universal player*  
*Electrocompaniet PI-2D integrated amplifier*  
*KEF R500 loudspeakers*  
*GoldenEar Technologies Triton 7 loudspeakers*  
*Ayre QB-9 USB DAC*  
*13-inch MacBook Pro/i7 2,7 GHz/8 GB RAM/*  
*Audirvana Plus 1.12.5*

## Software

*Anne Akiko Meyers – The Four Seasons: The Vivaldi Album (EOne 24/96 FLAC)*  
*Beck – Morning Phase (Capitol EMI 24/96 FLAC)*  
*Calexico – Algiers (Anti/Epitaph 24/96 FLAC)*  
*Cassandra Wilson – New Moon Daughter (Blue Note 24/96 FLAC)*

The violin's timbre and attack were vividly, almost startlingly rendered, with the shimmer and impetus of the English Chamber Orchestra's accompaniment providing a glistening, immersive backdrop. The soundstage was airy and generous, allowing ample scope and space for the music, and creating a realistically dimensioned sonic picture.

Beck's Grammy award-winning album, *Morning Phase* is a lush, full recording with layers of sound that swirl and eddy across a huge, all-embracing soundstage. The Primares easily recreated those individual layers, but also presented them with coherence and purpose, and created a compelling listening experience in the process.

The acoustic guitars were presented in full-bodied glory, while the synths and strings filled the soundstage to the brim, with Beck's vocals soaring majestically above the tapestry of sound.

Eclectic rockers Calexico's live performances, captured on *Spiritoso*, are a feast of textures and nuances, mixing folk-infused guitars and orchestral crescendos with plaintive choruses and foot-tapping Tex-Mex innuendos. The Primares managed to reflect the scale of the accompanying orchestra, while maintaining the focus on group's delivery.

Again, it was the speed and the pace of the amps that impressed, but never

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to the detriment of the recording's broad tonal range, and its full harvest of textures and details. The overall sound was always eloquent and convincing, with an authentic treatment of voices and instruments that made for riveting, satisfying listening.

The magic of the PRE32/A34.2 combination is that ability to reflect the soul and the intent of the music while also doing full justice to scale, scope and pace. The sonic delivery is effortless without ever sounding forced or hurried, the scale expansive without resorting to exaggeration and the tonal range full and balanced.

It's the kind of sound that is utterly, compellingly convincing in a way that

is unmistakably high end, but with real musicality at the core. And that's perhaps this pre/power combo's most outstanding, and most endearing achievement.

Much of that is already on offer with a single A34.2 on duty, but for those with difficult speakers, or very large rooms and an appetite for high SPLs, the extra impetus, authority and headroom of two A34.2s running in mono is a very attractive upgrade.

Add their heirloom-standard build quality, aesthetic appeal, ease of use and outstanding value, and the Primare PRE32 and A34.2 are topclass in every respect.

Deon Schoeman

#### A34.2 – Rear

