



Primare CD35 £2,700

This flagship with space for a streaming module proves that excellence is more than just a state-of-the-art DAC

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Primare CD35

ORIGIN
Sweden

TYPE
CD player

WEIGHT
10.8kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
430 x 106 x 385mm

FEATURES

- ESS Sabre ES9028PRO DAC
- Outputs: RCA; 1x coaxial; 1x optical; balanced XLR

DISTRIBUTOR
Primare

As well as clean, minimalist design and meticulous build quality, Sweden's Primare is all over the idea of modularity, a philosophy that invites system flexibility and, very Scandi this, internal harmony. For example, buy its flagship CD35 CD player and you can add its SM35 Prisma network player module at any point. There's also the DD25 transport – essentially the CD35 sans DAC – to consider in a wider system context. Whichever way you cut it, all bases are covered.

A strong inkling of the CD35's intentions starts with the classy, isolated TEAC CD502A-AT transport mechanism (vastly superior to any off-the-shelf drive) and a linear power supply with separate regulation for the mechanics, digital and analogue circuits. A memory buffer is used for improved performance. Decoding is handled by a 32-bit, 8-channel ESS Sabre ES9028 Pro DAC with its remarkable 129dB dynamic range and set up in double-differential mode, feeding both single-ended

(RCA) and balanced (XLR) outputs via a hand-selected FET input section.

Much effort has been poured into the CD35's power supply design. Primare's reasoning is that for all the elements of any design to work effortlessly and effectively demands unique power supply solutions, be they linear or switch mode. For the CD35, individual discrete power supplies are strategically inserted into the circuit to deliver the right amount of power exactly where it's needed – to wit a custom linear power supply combined with a switch mode standby supply (turned off when in playback mode to minimise noise) capable of delivering the precise power needed on demand.

Prize for the best display goes to the CD35 by a breezy margin. An OLED display, with big, bright, off-white characters not only looks incredibly smart, but is ridiculously easy to read from a distance. The Primare also scores highly for the thoughtful spacing of its rear panel sockets, which can easily accommodate cables with oversized connectors.

Sound quality

A clear round? I doubt any *Group Test* will ever witness one, but here's the Primare CD35 and that's close enough. Think reverse perfect storm, a rare union of positive attributes – let's call it best-of-all-worlds syndrome – that combine to nail 'dead right'. First off, the CD35 is supremely confident and comfortable in its own skin and its sonic assets are truly all-encompassing.

It can sound like the Rega, but with more beef and balls. It has the Roksan matched for smoothness and refinement but trounced for dynamics and fine detail. The Cyrus runs it closer, but again the Primare pulls ahead with an even clearer and more transparent presentation, which is also too good for the similarly well-rounded but ultimately less well-endowed and insightful Musical Fidelity offering.

Naturally 7 really live up to their name via the CD35. Far from being an

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artfully blended but amorphous vocal mass, the Primare's powers of resolution and separation more accurately portray an ensemble of fewer singers in a larger space with more lung power, tonal nuance and easily understood expression. No blurring or artificial smoothing – it all just sounds stunningly natural.

Moreover, the CD35's skills are seamlessly transferable. As you might imagine, *Goodbye Pork Pie Hat* sounds stellar, Jeff Beck's dizzying speed, dynamic tension and effortless melding of delicacy and bite aren't just thrilling, but truly jaw dropping. The urge to lean heavily on the volume is irresistible ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Transcendent sound quality; cool Scandi style; fine build

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Nothing of any note

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** We expected a middle-ranking performance from the CD35, we were wrong

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL
★★★★★

Group test verdict

Having walked miles from sofa to rack and back, **David Vivian** snaps shut the final jewel case convinced CD is here to stay and ready to reveal the results

DESPITE OR MAYBE because of all the legwork, I really enjoy this month's roundup. My CD collection has always grown, never flown, and to enjoy a handful of favourite discs in the presence of six cracking premium players – some madly talented and all packing serious DAC tech – is a rare joy. And, once again, top-drawer CD replay simply sounds better and more substantial to my ears.

We'll start with the Roksan, a stylish player of which I had high hopes. They aren't quite realised, the luxurious-sounding blak CD Player never quite getting its rocks off when

required. A refined and sophisticated low-fatigue listen, nonetheless that can frequently sound charming with the right material and never offends. I'm going to declare a draw between the Marantz and Musical Fidelity because I can't decide if I prefer the steely grip and studio-like analysis of the SA-12SE or the slightly more relaxed, colourful and expansive sound of the smart-looking M6scd. Their sonic profiles are quite different. The choice is yours.

Which takes us to the podium and one of the toughest tussles I've ever had to adjudicate. Sonically, the spry

and punchy Cyrus is right on the money and trades close range blows with the remarkable and seductively analogue-flavoured Rega. Both invite listeners to take the Pepsi Challenge – can it really be digital? – and it's a super-close swings-and-roundabouts affair. They're intriguing, stylish players that let you hear CDs at or close to their best. But whereas the Saturn MK3, with its beautifully damped flip-up top, is an absolute joy to use, the CDi-XR is somewhat hamstrung by its ergonomic foibles. The Rega grabs runners-up spot.



WINNER

The Primare CD35 looks rather self-effacing. Neat, clean, minimal. It doesn't sound it. If you want to discover just how glorious your CDs can sound, this is the one to get. For hub convenience, the Rega is a better bet, but as a CD player the Primare CD35 takes the gold.



Make/model	Cyrus CDi-XR Phantom Black	Marantz SA-12SE	Musical Fidelity M6scd	Primare CD35	Rega Saturn Mk3	Roksan blak CD Player
Price	£2,200	£3,200	£2,500	£2,700	£2,000	£2,950
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
	The half-width form factor might divide, but if you love music this is right on side	Weighing more than many muscle-bound amps, the Marantz mostly delivers	Not MF's mightiest CD deck, this wants for nothing and hits high marks all round	Oozing Scandi cool, the CD35 is an out-and-out winner in every way	It looks good, is fun to use, can act as a true digital hub and sounds fabulous	The blak doesn't quite hit the heights of previous Roksan disc spinners
Website	cyrusaudio.com	marantz.com	musicalfidelity.com	primare.net	rega.co.uk	roksan.co.uk

Key features	Cyrus	Marantz	Musical Fidelity	Primare	Rega	Roksan
Transport	Slot	Tray	Tray	Tray	Top-loading	Tray
DAC input	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Balanced output	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
SACD	No	Yes	No	No	No	No

TRY WITH THESE

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER:
Naim Supernait 3 **£3,500 HFC 456**

All the buzz about the latest Supernait may have concerned the phono stage, but improvements throughout have made this an even more powerful and detailed integrated amplifier



FLOORSTANDING LOUDSPEAKER:
Neat Iota Xplorer **£3,500 HFC 435**

Yes, it looks downright odd, standing just 74cm tall and with its mid and tweeter drivers positioned at an angle, but the Xplorer delivers remarkable low frequencies and a delicious free floating soundstage



NETWORK AUDIO PLAYER:
Auralic Altair G2.1 **£4,600 HFC 482**

Not just a network-attached DAC/preamp, with the addition of on-board storage the Altair morphs into a self-contained music hub that reveals itself to be a deliciously neutral and clean source. It presents high levels of detail without sounding mechanical or artificial in any way

