



Primare I22



Swedish audio brand Primare has been making waves with its well-crafted range of specialist audio products in South Africa, although it could be said that much of the publicity has gone the way of its bigger, dearer models.

At *AV Magazine* we've reviewed almost the entire 30 Series and flagship 60 Series models, and perhaps because those components performed exceptionally well, we neglected some of the brand's more accessible models.

The I22 is a good case in point. The integrated amplifier adopts a no-frills approach, focusing on aspects that really matter: robust, all-metal casework, meticulous signal paths and separate power supplies for the audio, display and control sections.

The steel chassis not only feels strong and rigid, but also offers useful shielding against electronic interference, while providing a stable platform that effectively addresses external vibration.

The casework isn't only solid, but also handsome in the sleek and minimalist

way that Scandinavian brands have made their own for so many years. The thick alloy faceplate is separated from the main enclosure, and has rounded corners, both of which add visual interest.

The fascia is uncomplicated, with a large blue fluorescent display taking pride of place. The display shows volume level and the selected source. A rotary controller on the right adjusts volume in tidy, incremental steps, while source selection is via push buttons on the left. A third button toggles between on and standby modes.

The rear panel continues the minimalist theme with an array of four line-level RCA stereo input sets. A set of pre-outs, also single-ended, allows the I22 to act as a pre-amp when partnering a separate power amp, or to accommodate a bi-amped configuration combining the I22's own amps with those of an external power amp.

For system installers, the I22 offers a RS232 control port, as well as IR in and out links. The gold-plated five-way binding posts are nicely engineered, while an IEC kettle plug power socket with a system on/off rocker switch completes the list of facilities.

An interesting upgrade option is a digital-to-analogue conversion board which slots in, computer style, on the rear panel and then adds coaxial RCA and Toslink optical digital inputs (both 192 kHz/24-bit compatible), as well as an asynchronous USB input for connecting a laptop computer.

The I22 nominally employs Class D switch-mode amplification technology, although the company's implementation, which it calls Ultra Fast Power Device (UFPD), is said to be devoid of the glare and harshness early Class D amps were accused of. It uses integrated output filtering, and rapid switching, to deliver a sound that's anything but digital.

All of this will be old news to Primare fans, but the question is whether the UFPD implementation here is as successful as it is in the company's larger, and dearer models. The answer is an unequivocal yes. This is an integrated amplifier that easily punches above its weight, sounding impactful and generous beyond its 80 watts-a-side rating.

A quick word on running in, though: the I22 review sample arrived brand new,



and sounded uncharacteristically cool and impersonal. It took a good 50 hours before that trait made way for something smoother and fuller, and by the 100 hour mark, the trademark Primare sound was in full attendance.

I ran the I22 with its CD player stable-mate, the CD22 (review pending) for much of this evaluation, but also fed it source signals from our Oppo BDP-95EU universal deck via Bryston's BDA-3 D/A converter and a Musical Fidelity V90 DAC. Speakers were the lovely KEF LS50s we have on hand as one of our references.

Acoustic Alchemy's *The New Edge* (GRP CD) is a lavishly produced collection of easy-on-the-ear jazz, and it can sound a bit too lush on some systems. The I22 delivered 'The Liaison' with a smooth, seamless composure that was very approachable, but never oversaturated.

The acoustic guitar's rich timbre was faithfully rendered, linking a nicely textured, but not overly rounded midrange to clean, silky trebles. All of this was pinned to a punchy, muscular bass, and an athletic, incisive delivery that offered loads of pace and sparkle.

Indeed, the nicely balanced tonality of the I22, together with its athletic delivery, made for an instantly appealing, foot-tapping sound that really reflected the essence of the performance and made it come alive.

The I22 spread its musical wares wide and high on a generous, inviting sound-stage, with plenty of air ensuring that individual elements and finer details remained clearly accessible. The KEFs were a good match here, contributing their lucidity and lower frequency presence to a sound that was hugely entertaining.

I tried to catch out the I22 by opting for Audioslave's eponymous debut (Sony BMG CD). On 'Show Me How To Live', Chris Cornell's vocals sounded sleazy, Tom Morello's electric guitar strutted its stuff with intent, and Tim Commerford's bass was bone-jarring in its intense engagement with the thundering drumwork of Brad Wilk.

The Primare was not in the least intimidated by the urge and anger of the music, easily maintaining its composure while delivering the full impact and



momentum of the music.

But it also wasn't scared of revealing subtler, more delicate nuances. Listening to George Coleman's rendition of 'There Is No Greater Love' from *Four Generations Of Miles* (Chesky 96/24 FLAC), also featuring Jimmy Cobb, Michael Stern and Ron Carter, the I22 faithfully captured the ambience and the intimacy of the performance, creating a pervasive sense of honesty and realism in the process.

Even the sweeping symphonic vistas of the New Symphony Orchestra of London and the lyrical violin of Jascha Heifetz performing Bruch's *Violin Concerto No. 1* (Living Stereo 176,4/24 FLAC) couldn't trip up the Primare: it accurately and compellingly afforded the music the scale and momentum it demanded. The violin sounded intense and downright glorious: detailed, rich, urgent and yet lyrical.

The Primare I22 is a fine integrated amplifier with its sights set firmly on making music. It's clear that the appealing aesthetics apart, the execution is focused on delivering a finely rendered performance with real soul and integrity.

Of course, that's exactly what makes the I22's larger, more powerful stablemates so appealing – but the I22 proves that those traits remain available even at the more affordable end of the Primare product offering.

Deon Schoeman

VITAL STATS

Power output 2x 80 watts (8 ohms)
 2x 160 watts (4 ohms)
 Frequency response 10 Hz – 20 kHz
 (-0,5 dB)
 Signal-to-noise ratio 95 dB
 Inputs 4x stereo RCA
 Outputs 1x stereo pre-out,
 1x stereo record, 2x binding post sets
 Dimensions (WxHxD)
 430 x 106 x 420 mm
 Weight 10 kg

Verdict

An amplifier that puts the music first. A smooth, accessible sound underscored by plenty of impetus and open, inviting staging. Beautifully built, too.

Price R29 900

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OUR RATING: 81/100

