



Theory of evolution

Ed Selley is like a kid in a sweet shop as he takes on an integrated that allows you to mix and match the tubes that partner it

Following something of a growth spurt and reorganisation of its product portfolio, PrimaLuna's Evo 200 Integrated falls into the second tier of the company's revised component lineup. As supplied, it is fitted with four EL34 valves for the output stage and a matching quartet of 12A7s for the preamp stage. This is a tried and tested valve combination and one

that works very well in delivering a balance of usable real-world power and delicacy. Dig a little bit deeper beneath what seems like a fairly straightforward integrated design, however, and the Evo 200 Integrated reveals some unusual and useful flexibility, thanks to a technology that PrimaLuna calls Adaptive Autobias that allows you to swap the EL34 output stage valves for a variety of other alternatives.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
PrimaLuna
EvoLution 200
Integrated Amplifier
ORIGIN
Netherlands/China
TYPE
Integrated amplifier
WEIGHT
24kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
365 x 205 x 400mm
FEATURES
• Quoted power output: 2x 44W into 8ohm (EL34s)
• Inputs: 4x stereo RCA's
• Adaptive autobias
• Headphone amp
DISTRIBUTOR
Absolute Sounds Ltd.
TELEPHONE
0208 9713909
WEBSITE
absolutesounds.com

The Evo 200 Integrated claims 2x 44W power output into 8ohm. As well as running valves you might ordinarily expect to be able to swap in place such as the KT88/6550, KT90 and KT120, it can also accommodate more impressive options including the 6L6, 7581 and over-sized KT150, demonstrating its potential flexibility and scope to handle different power output levels within the boundaries of the valve amplification category. PrimaLuna stresses that the Evo 200 Integrated is set up for long-term reliability regardless of the valve you choose, with nothing biased at the "all she's got to give" level.

The rest of the engineering on display is perhaps best described as traditional but rigorous. The entire amplifier is point-to-point wired internally and PrimaLuna uses its own hand-wound toroidal transformers that are then sunk into a resin case to ensure noise levels are kept to a minimum. Other details like the use of sealed relays for the input switches should ensure that the Evo 200 Integrated is both quiet and reliable over time.

unusual in that it makes use of the Evo 200 Integrated's main amplifier stage, which is accessed by flicking a switch on the side of the chassis rather than simply inserting a headphone jack.

The basic design of the Evo 200 Integrated hasn't significantly changed following the product range revision, but this is no bad thing. PrimaLuna has done a brilliant job of ensuring that the main points of contact between the operator and the amp all feel of a very high quality and this extends to the inclusion of a bespoke metal remote that is a joy to use. The price isn't what I'd describe as cheap, but you can see where the money has gone and there are rather pricier alternatives that don't feel nearly as substantial as the Evo 200 Integrated. A black finish is also available, but the silver option as reviewed with its rather lovely metallic blue chassis is by far the better looking of the two.

Sound quality

Connected to a system comprising Focal's £4,500 Kanta N°1 standmount (HFC 454) and a Chord Electronics Hugo TT2 DAC, the PrimaLuna behaves in a manner that won't unsettle anyone embarking on their first valve amplifier experience. It is completely silent at idle and there aren't any thumps or pops when it's switched on or off, while this real-world domesticity doesn't sacrifice any of the traditional qualities that many will associate with a valve design.

Kicking off with the 16/44.1 rip of Gary Jules' *Trading Snakeoil For Wolfickets*, the sparse and lovely *No Poetry* is vibrant and immediately engaging. The PrimaLuna takes the accurate and effortlessly spacious

presentation from the Chord and adds a controlled but welcome dose of richness and tonal vibrancy to the presentation. It's not overblown, but Jules' vocals are richer and carry a little more emphasis than is usually the case with solid-state amps.

There's a tangible boost to the decay on guitar notes too, without any feeling of over emphasis on the midrange that comes at the expense of the frequency extremes. This is largely down to PrimaLuna making good on its promises about the power delivery and general setup. As there is

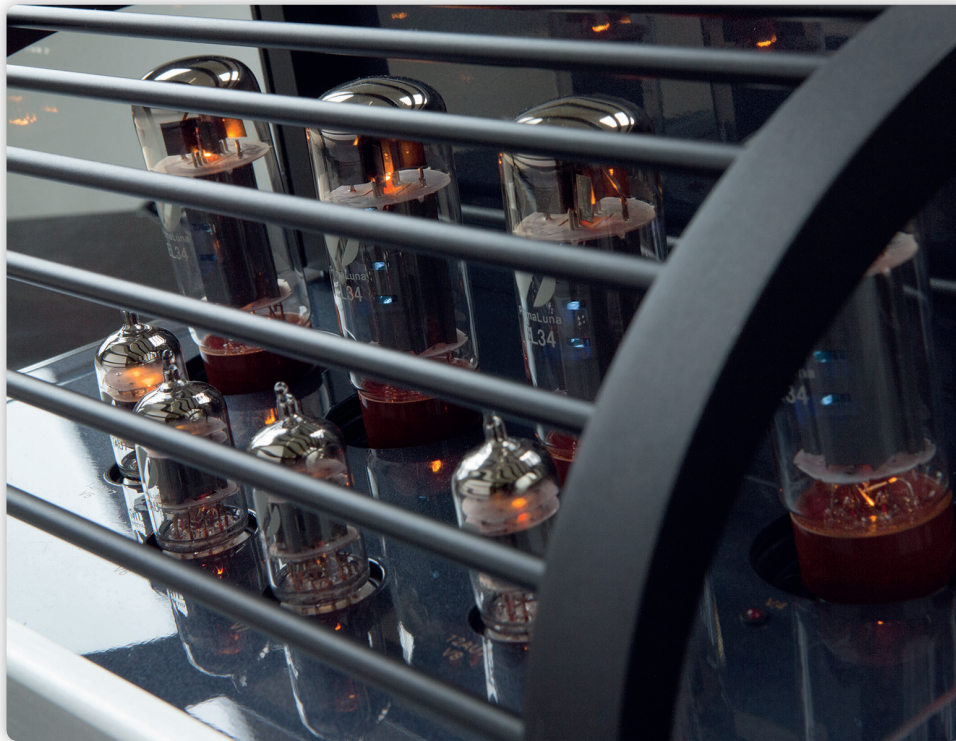
The PrimaLuna has enough power to work with a good selection of speakers

no softening or discernible roll off to the treble or bass, the presentation feels very even and avoids the slightly bloomy sensation that can affect valve amplifiers such as this. It also means that the top end of the Evo 200 Integrated is absolutely sensational. The brooding guitar work in Robert Plant's *Monkey* is detailed and packed with energy, but never sounds hard edged or thin. Indeed, working my way through various content from my Roon library that has been a challenge for some devices in the past presents no difficulty for the PrimaLuna whatsoever.

The bass extension is not quite as successful. The wonderfully deep and potent beat of Dead Can Dance's *Rakim* on the 24/88.2 download of *Toward The Within* has appreciable definition and control, but the Evo 200 Integrated isn't quite as hefty as some similarly priced solid-state models (see How it compares). How ▶

CONNECTIONS





much this is going to matter to you is going to come down to the type of music you mostly listen to, your listening room and the loudspeakers being driven. If you live for the impact of deep notes in your chest cavity, the loudspeaker that partners the Evo 200 Integrated needs to be given careful consideration.

Your speaker options shouldn't be too curtailed, though, and even without opting for beefier output stage valves, the PrimaLuna has enough power to work with a good selection of speaker models and not just high-sensitivity designs. With a quoted sensitivity of 88dB, the Kanta N°1 isn't a hugely difficult speaker to

drive but it benefits from good current delivery and it becomes clear after a little while that the Evo 200 Integrated is well provided for in this regard. Even with the complex and large-scale *Summer 2* from the 24/96 download of Max Richter's reworking of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, the PrimaLuna never hardens up or feels as if it's under any strain.

As well as this general effortlessness, the Evo 200 Integrated can really entertain when you require it to. Playing the magnificent *Free Yourself* by Experience Unlimited on vinyl is truly joyous. This is an album that should always get the head nodding, but here it becomes a far more

immersive and thoroughly invigorating proposition that has you completely lost in the music. The balance of fun and realism is extremely well judged. You are never really aware of there being any significant deviation from the path of true neutrality, but equally there are times when the Evo 200 Integrated has a little bit more magic to the way it handles a piece of music you know well.

As a final welcome ribbon to an already enticing bow, the built-in headphone amp is also well thought through. There is some slight noise at

The presentation avoids the bloomy sensation that can affect valve amps

idle, and I don't think it would be a brilliant choice for driving particularly insensitive headphone designs, but it has the same endearing balance of tonal realism and musical joy as it delivers via its speaker terminals and provided that you choose a sensible headphone design, it should operate perfectly well even for regular headphone listeners.

Conclusion

At under £3,000, the Evo 200 Integrated has to be seen as a very competitive valve integrated. It isn't overburdened with features and it is only fair to point out that re-configuring it with some of the more intriguing valve output options it supports will not be a cheap undertaking. This is an exceptional valve amplifier that is consistently easy to live with, beautifully made and possessed of the power needed to make it practical with many modern loudspeaker designs and is likely to appeal to a far wider spread of potential buyers than might initially have been expected ●

HOW IT COMPARES

Costing £200 less, ATC's SIA2-100 (HFC 455) is also refined and utterly unflappable, sounding more like the PrimaLuna than its topology might suggest. Where they differ is in the subjective details. ATC's extra power gives a better bass response, while the PrimaLuna often finds a little more joy in some music. Both demonstrate that there are some superb options to consider at the price.



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Engaging sound; usefully flexible; build

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Line-level inputs only

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WESAY:** An exceptionally well-realised valve amp that is a tremendously appealing all rounder

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★