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## PRIMALUNA DIALOGUE HP

integrated amplifier

**COMPETITION**

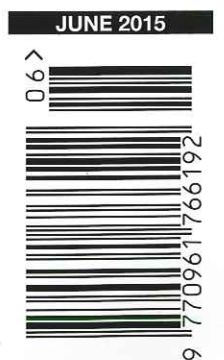


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# Luna Landing



**PrimaLuna's Dialogue HP integrated amplifier aims to combine the great sound of valves with convenience and versatility. Jon Myles assesses its strengths.**

**P**rimaLuna has made a name for itself since the company launched at the dawn of the millennium. Founder Herman van den Dungen's aim was to manufacture valve amplifiers that were both affordable and as reliable and simple to operate as their transistor counterparts.

Its initial series of integrated

amplifiers achieved that goal – the ProLogue One debut product garnering an enthusiastic recommendation from ourselves way back in 2004.

Since then the range has expanded to include pre-amps, power amplifiers and even CD players. Indeed, the ProLogue Premium CD player is a particular favourite of mine – combining valves with a very good DAC section and a sophis-

ticated USB input which utilises the M2Tech hiFace interface to produce a fluid and involving sound.

At the top of the PrimaLuna tree, though, is the Dialogue range – and the new Premium HP is the flagship integrated amplifier priced at £3598.

The HP in the title stands for high power – and here things get interesting. Because the Premium is designed to be used with a variety of

output tubes.

In its standard form it comes supplied with eight EL34 valves. But buyers can instead opt for KT88s, KT120s or even KT150s if desired. As the DiaLogue features auto-biasing changing between differing tubes is as easy as flicking a switch on the side of the chassis. Choosing the wrong setting is said to do no damage to the amplifier – apart from in terms of performance.

In front of the output tubes sit six 12AU7 driver valves – which PrimaLuna claims gives lower distortion and greater bandwidth than the four used in their ProLogue models.

The DiaLogue also gives users the choice of using their chosen valves in either triode or ultralinear mode – which can be switched on the fly via the remote control for easy comparison.

Style-wise the DiaLogue is typical PrimaLuna – an understated black (or silver) chassis with a curved valve cover incorporating glass sides, and a rear housing that encloses the in-house, hand-wound transformers. Alongside the tubes sits a bank of small lights that illuminate when a valve needs replacing.

The front fascia features rotary volume and input selector controls, a headphone socket as well as the power-on indicator with two small lights above to indicate whether triode or ultralinear mode is in use.

Round the back are five unbalanced RCA inputs, a home theatre pass-through option as well as a subwoofer output and 4 and 8 Ohm loudspeaker outputs.

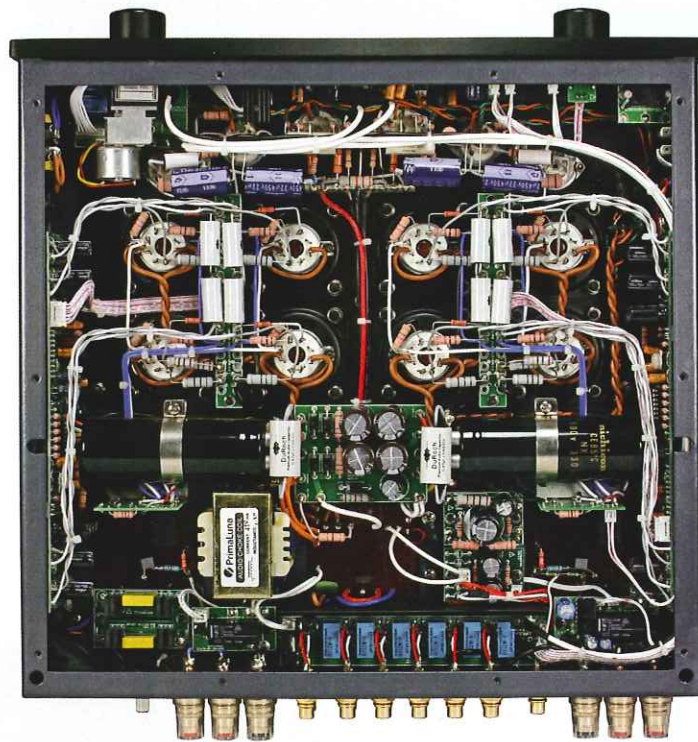
Inside PrimaLuna uses relay-based input selection alongside French-made SCR tinfoil capacitors in the critical signal paths and an ALPS Blue Velvet motorised volume control.

The fully-featured remote gives access to volume, input selection as well as ultralinear/triode switching and other functions.

Although relatively compact at 15.9" x 8.1" x 15.2" (WxHxD), the DiaLogue still weighs in at a hefty 30kgs (66.3lbs) – a testament to its substantial build quality.

## SOUND QUALITY

Faced with the choice of valves we opted for the robust KT88s – whose output was more than enough to drive our reference Tannoy Definition DC10 Ti loudspeakers using the 4 Ohm 'speaker connections.



*Internal wiring uses silver-plated, oxygen-free continuous crystal (OCC) copper with a Teflon dielectric while all inputs are relay-based to minimise crosstalk.*

At switch-on the PrimaLuna defaults to ultralinear mode – which was how I started listening.

With Goldfrapp's 'Let It Take You' there was a dynamic, forward nature to the DiaLogue that is not what I'd always expect from a valve integrated.

Bass notes had emphasis while the rhythmic piano sounded vibrant. Here the PrimaLuna seemed tuned to impress with a determinedly exciting sound.

Switching to triode operation on the same track, things took a slight step back. There was not the same forcefulness, but the music was more relaxed, with a greater sense of organic flow. Here the piano had improved midrange tone and body while the bass – while not as prominent – sounded much more natural.

The same goes for the driving jazz of 'Rooster Was A Witness' from

the Neil Cowley Trio's 'The Face Of Mount Molehill' where the staccato drum backing is placed in perfect proportion to the rich keyboard melody. The DiaLogue also handles the switch from the quiet passages to the more raucous sections with aplomb – never seeming phased even when the volume is turned up.

The DiaLogue didn't grip the big Tannoy's with the conviction of a similarly-priced transistor amplifier but it makes up for that with a smooth musicality and – especially in triode mode – an easy-going nature that can be beguiling.

The lush jazz/electonica sounds of Jan Garbarek's 'In Praise Of Dreams' seem almost made for the PrimaLuna's talents. Garbarek's saxophone was tremendously well etched, while the subtle backing sounds were richly detailed without ever being too intrusive. All in all,



*The PrimaLuna DiaLogue's rear panel includes five RCA inputs, a home theatre pass-through, subwoofer output and 4 and 8 Ohm loudspeaker outputs.*

it was a sonorous and sophisticated sound that swept over me in a wave.

Not that that means the DiaLogue can't put its foot down when required. Feeding it more raucous material it was not afraid to raise itself to the task.

On Skunk Anansie's 'Hedonism (Just Because You Feel Good)' Skin's voice is dripping with emotion while the drums had a real thwack to them. Importantly the instruments were portrayed in realistic proportion, with a lifelike soundstage and good sense of scale. Timing was also commendable, the DiaLogue tracking

**To produce high power, two output pairs are used per channel - eight valves in all. We chose to use KT88s, seen here.**



### EL34 POWER OUTPUT VALVES

Swapping out the KT88s for EL34 power valves proved a fascinating experience. While I lost some of the former's glorious midband creaminess, the latter brought an extra degree of definition and detail to the sound.

On Antonio Forcione's 'Meet Me In London' there was an extra snap to the leading edges of the notes which strengthened vibrancy of the sound.

Sonic images were starker and the EL34s pushed the music a little further toward me than the KT88s. This characteristic would suit those looking to hear right into the mix of a recording.

They do lose a little in the low end, though - not having quite the rounded, resonant character that the 88s bring to the party. Having said that, Squarepusher's 'Damogen Furies' didn't lack for bass power, sounding suitably forceful.

Switching between Ultralinear and Triode mode, I once again had a firm preference for the latter - the delivery sounding smoother and more organic. Having said that, if you are looking to play music seriously loud then Ultralinear undoubtedly carries more power.

So which valve to choose? It's impossible to make a definite recommendation - it all depends on which presentation you prefer and the kind of music you like to listen to.

But that's the beauty of the PrimaLuna Dialogue; it gives you the choice and makes it easy to switch valves. And, of course, you could also buy both sets of tubes and swap between them depending on your mood!



the beat extremely well with a pleasing tempo to the overall sound.

In the final analysis the PrimaLuna perhaps isn't the creamiest valve amplifier you'll ever hear - others have a slightly richer midband and a more mellifluous overall sound.

But the DiaLogue, by contrast, is extremely adept at highlighting details in a recording. In New Order's 'The Perfect Kiss' I could hear the subtle cymbal taps that underlie the main electronic melody - something other valve amplifiers commonly fail to pick out. But it does so without losing any of the richness and depth that makes the track such a joy to listen to.

### CONCLUSION

As easy to use and maintain valve amplifiers go the PrimaLuna DiaLogue takes some beating. The option to use a variety of output tubes also offers the user great flexibility in tailoring the sound to their personal taste - as does the ability to switch between triode and ultralinear mode. Add in fine build quality and it offers fine value for money at the price.

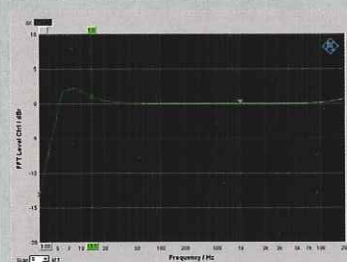


*Ultra-linear or Triode mode can be selected from the remote control.*

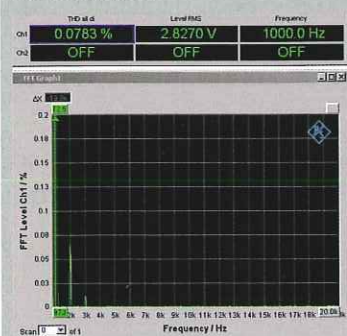
### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

In Ultra Linear (UL) mode power measured 78 Watts into 8 Ohms for 1% distortion limit, and 72 Watts into 4 Ohms, so the 4 Ohm tap is slightly

#### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



#### DISTORTION



lower in coupling efficiency, since both should produce the same power. The amplifier meets its quoted power specification of 73 Watts (1% thd / KT88s). Full power was achieved at bass frequencies. Switching to triode mode the figure fell, as expected, to 36 Watts.

In the midband UL distortion was low at low power levels, measuring 0.08% at 1W, 1kHz for example. It rose steadily with increasing power output however, and was higher at low and high frequencies too. Bass distortion measured 0.4% at 1W, for example, but close to full output it had risen to 1%. Although this result isn't uncommon in valve amplifiers, better is possible, if from monoblock amplifiers with bigger output transformers. Triode mode was slightly more linear throughout its output range, and second harmonic predominated.

In Ultra Linear mode frequency response peaks up by +1.5dB at 40kHz our response analysis shows, and this causes rising upper treble in the audio band, suggesting a slightly bright sound. The effect was identical with 8 Ohm or 4 Ohm loads fed from their respective taps.

There was some low frequency peaking too, bass rising by +2dB at 8Hz and this also produced some in-band lift that will strengthen bass. Peaks like this subtly affect sound quality.

Circuit conditions changed for the better in Triode mode, frequency response becoming flat and smooth.

Damping factor was very low, measuring 1.5, so the HP will not exert much electrical damping, being best used with loudspeakers having good acoustic damping.

The DiaLogue Premium HP measures well, but it does not excel in Ultra Linear mode. It behaved better in triode mode and is likely to sound smoother and more balanced here. It offers plenty of power and valve flexibility in a smallish package, as valve amplifiers go, ignoring weight. **NK**

<b>Power</b>	<b>78/36watts</b>
<b>Frequency response</b>	<b>14Hz-26kHz</b>
<b>Separation</b>	<b>80dB</b>
<b>Noise</b>	<b>-92dB</b>
<b>Distortion</b>	<b>0.1%</b>
<b>Sensitivity</b>	<b>400mV</b>

**PRIMALUNA  
DIALOGUE HP  
£3598**



**EXCELLENT - extremely capable.**

#### VERDICT

Fine-sounding valve amplifier that offers great versatility along with easy maintenance.

#### FOR

- smooth triode sound
- choice of tubes
- autobias function

#### AGAINST

- ultralinear mode slightly forward
- bass not the deepest
- tough competition

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