

PrimaLuna EVO 300 Hybrid Power Amplifier

Ed Selley

One of the more subtle criticisms I've encountered among hi-fi enthusiasts is the idea of not being a 'valve person.' Some believe that a preference for solid-state amplification means sacrificing a certain implicit and fundamentally more analogue pleasure. Personally, I find this perspective somewhat simplistic. I often enjoy listening to vacuum tube products and have coveted several of them. However, the caveat is that the valve devices I prefer, which tend to have simpler circuits and lower outputs, don't pair well with my favoured speakers, as they lack the necessary sensitivity. By the time a valve amp generates the required power, I typically lean towards the solid-state option.

Into this vacuum-tube-equipped counterpart to a Joseph Heller novel comes the Prima Luna EVO 300 Hybrid Power Amplifier. This 100-watt output is designed to appeal to people like me. Although the speakers I enjoy are not particularly sensitive, they also do not gravitate towards the 'drivers of solid granite' approach that requires a power station to operate. The output is achieved through a combination of valves and solid state, striving to provide a 'best of both worlds' scenario.

Silver label sextet

As such, the new hybrid power amp's front features a sextet of 12AU7 valves from PrimaLuna's Silver Label range. These valves follow the same pattern as the integrated amp and are responsible for the amplifier's input and driver >>





Aesthetically, the EVO 300 Hybrid Power Amplifier embodies the standard design language of PrimaLuna, which is a positive aspect.

» functions. They also have their own power supplies and transformers to help them do their job.

The solid-state section to which these valves connect is an improved version of the one that first appeared in the EVO 300 Hybrid

Integrated Amplifier. Designed in collaboration with Floyd Design – a collective of designers and engineers who have contributed to other PrimaLuna products – this power amp section combines Junction FETs, hand-matched transistors, and a double pair of MOSFETs for each channel.

This configuration gives the hybrid power amp a robust 100 watts into eight ohms, increasing to 150 watts into four ohms. Most prospective owners will find this sufficient, but the power amp, distinct from the integrated version, can take this a step further. It can be bridged and run as a mono amp with another EVO 300 Hybrid Power Amplifier, providing a strong 220 watts into eight ohms and 300 watts into four ohms, which should be sufficient for all but the most willfully power-hungry systems.

This amplifier section offers both RCA and XLR inputs, which feature high and low gain modes. At first, this decision may seem odd because the matching EVO 300 Tube Preamplifier is only equipped with RCA connections (though XLR outputs are available on the 400 model). However, this demonstrates sound thinking on PrimaLuna's part. As many source devices increasingly function as preamps, a significant number of EVO 300 hybrid power amps will likely be connected to non-PrimaLuna preamps, ensuring compatibility with whatever you choose.

Standard language

Aesthetically, the EVO 300 Hybrid Power Amplifier embodies the standard design language of PrimaLuna, which is a positive aspect. By utilising a pattern of chassis components, the company can manage costs more effectively, resulting in an attractive and well-finished piece of equipment. The hybrid design means that there



is somewhat less valve, causing the trademark curved valve cage to appear slightly

truncated compared to its more conventional counterparts, and there is somewhat more 'transformer' at the back, which, in reality, is also the amplifier in this case.

It still matches well with an all-valve PrimaLuna preamp and won't look completely out of place alongside other equipment. Internally, the shift to partial solid-state operation has not altered the straightforward approach to the power amp's construction, featuring high-quality components arranged logically. The transition to solid-state hasn't reduced the mass either, as the amp still weighs a hefty 31 kilos unboxed.

UK distributor Absolute Sounds supplied the review sample with a EVO 300 Tube Preamplifier (a device we have previously reviewed alongside the pure valve, non-hybrid EVO 300 power amp in Issue 177). Initially, I set them up together with the resident Kudos Titan 505 standmount, a speaker that might not be the best match for more conventional PrimaLuna offerings. Right from the start, this combination fulfills the fundamental premise of delivering a sound that incorporates a degree of 'valve character' along with the current delivery needed by a device like the 505.

Impact and confidence

What this means in reality is that the heroically overdriven guitar amp at the beginning of T-Rex's *Mambo Sun* [Fly Records] is a huge and invigoratingly scuzzy sound that frames Marc Bolan's sultry vocals. The vocals are underpinned by percussion with a very solid state level of impact and confidence. This is not the sort of bass that





This is how a good power amplifier should behave; its performance remains constant, even if it is shaped by the devices that feed it.

» should make your vision wobble, but there is a heft and potency to the kickdrum that really only results from the Kudos being driven properly.

If you ask for more heft, particularly with regard to the brooding and majestic *Songs of Silence* by Vince Clarke [Mute], the PrimaLuna is still capable of delivering the force and scale of these electronic musings. Simultaneously, there is an almost liquid quality to the upper registers and a sense of three-dimensional space that often surpasses what exclusively solid-state options can provide.

The caveat to this happy balance of attributes is that a significant portion can be attributed to the preamp. I used the all-valve EVO 300 from the PrimaLuna range to great effect. However, if it is replaced with the resident Chord Electronics Hugo Mscaler and TT2 combination—an excellent preamplifier but perhaps the epitome of ‘unvalvey’—it alters the presentation of the power amplifier. This device remains an invigoratingly potent-sounding unit. It powers through the driving rock of Rival Sons’ *Pressure & Time* [Earache] with a confidence and dynamism that is very likeable, but the more delicate *Blue Heron Suite* by Sarah Jarosz [Rounder Records] loses some of its tangible presence and sweetness in the process. That is how a good power amplifier should behave; its performance remains constant, even if it is shaped by the devices that feed it.

Solid with a twist

If you reframe your view of the PrimaLuna as a solid-state amp with a unique twist, it starts to charm you all over again. While some of the glorious fluidity of the all-valve PrimaLuna designs is lost, what remains is an amplifier that balances a forgiving edge with a delightful ability to provide great fun when the moment arises. This is further enhanced by an impressively detailed retrieval of material, which is particularly evident when the extremely forensic Chord duo controls it directly.

It also retains the ability to work with speakers that are not usually a perfect match for a 100-watt solid-state amp. During its time here, the PrimaLuna ran with the Tannoy Turnberry GR-OW, and the result sounded happier and more cohesive than when the Tannoy was connected to a Cambridge Audio Edge A, another solid-state amp boasting 100 watts. At times, it feels like the PrimaLuna hasn’t forgotten how to generate the emotional response akin to that of a valve amplifier, even if it isn’t technically a valve amplifier anymore.

It’s this chameleonic character that makes the EVO 300 Hybrid Power Amplifier so likeable. I believe it serves better as a power amp than as an integrated. When paired with the company’s matching preamps, it offers a genuine ‘best of both worlds’—a presentation convincingly infused with vacuum tube richness and a level of power delivery that surpasses most pure valve solutions.

Outside this pairing, it becomes a characterful yet highly capable device that, while perhaps not as identifiably valve-infused as it is with the preamp, still offers a presentation intriguingly distinct from most solid-state amps and is compatible with speakers that some of those designs simply won’t mesh with. I might not ever be a natural ‘valve person,’ but I recognise clever applications of the technology when I see them, and the PrimaLuna EVO 300 Hybrid Power Amplifier is indeed a very clever one. +

Technical specifications

Type: Hybrid bridgeable stereo power amplifier

Inputs: 2x RCA, 2x XLR

Outputs: Stereo/Mono loudspeaker output, 12V rigger output

Tube Complement: 6 x 12AU7

Frequency Response: 10Hz – 80kHz ±3dB

Power Output (8 Ohm): > 100 Watts per stereo channel (typical 115 Watts) > 220 Watts per mono channel (typical 245 Watts)

Power (4 Ohm): > 150 Watts per stereo channel (typical 160 Watts) > 300 Watts per mono channel (typical 303 Watts)

Damping Factor: 300 (1kHz) for stereo, 150 (1kHz) for mono

Input Impedance: 32 kOhm (RCA), 49 kOhm (XLR) for stereo
18 kOhm (RCA), 50 kOhm (XLR) for mono

Input Sensitivity: 805 mV (RCA), 901mV (XLR) for stereo
1330 mV (RCA), 1340 mV (XLR) for mono

Total Gain: 30 dB (H), 24 dB (L)

THD with AABB: < 0.2% 100W @ 8 Ohm (stereo) < 0.2% 245W @ 8 Ohm (mono)

S/N Ratio: -105dB (A-Weighted)

Front panel finish: Black, Silver

Dimensions (L x W x H): 40.5 x 38.5 x 20.5 cm

Weight: 31kg

Price: £6,498

Manufacturer PrimaLuna

🌐 www.primaluna.nl

UK distributor Absolute Sounds

🌐 www.absolutesounds.com ☎ +44(0)207 971 3909