



Prime time

Don't be fooled by the small size and plain design, Primare's new streaming bridge is a thing of sonic beauty says **David Vivian**

Of you own a recent Primare amp incorporating its modular Prisma streaming system, you're good to go and can stop reading now. If you own a Primare amp without on board streaming – or an old standalone Primare network player – you can buy the Prisma platform in the form of the NP5 MK2 you see here for half price. If you don't own any Primare kit but fancy a well-featured streaming transport that won't break the bank even at full price (£550), read on.

Our story begins with an untimely fire at the AKM chip factory in China. Primare's original NP5 used AKM's critical sample rate converter chip at the heart of its design. Still, every cloud... Primare re-sourced the component from Texas Instruments and took the opportunity to redesign it to incorporate some additional features. Perhaps most useful is native MQA pass-through for full unpacking of the format if hooked up to an MQA capable DAC. It's the only way you'll get to listen to anything like a full-fat Tidal Master. Primare's Terry Medalen explains: 'Tidal Master file playback is limited to AirPlay (16-bit/44.1kHz) or when using Roon to the first unfold (24-bit/88.2kHz or 24-bit/96kHz). Master file playback is not currently available with Chromecast, which the NP5 Prisma MK2 accommodates. Using the Primare M Connect app, Master files default to 24-bit/48kHz.'

The second upgrade concerns the ability to stream DSD128 over PCM, though, again, this requires Roon. Carried over from the original NP5 are AirPlay 2, Spotify Connect, built-in Chromecast, Roon Ready certification (pending), DLNA/UPnP and Bluetooth. Future free updates aim to fix the current inability to enjoy the potential of MQA Master files other than with an MQA-capable DAC and to add Qobuz at full 24-bit/192kHz resolution.

The rear panel also packs in a USB-A input, coaxial and optical outs, a LAN Ethernet port, RS232 connection for updates and a 5v socket for the supplied switch-mode wall-wart power supply.

Sound quality

As my Chord Hugo TT2 (HFC 468) DAC doesn't do MQA, Tidal streams via the Primare app on iPad are pegged to 24-bit/48kHz, but I hardly feel short changed by what I hear. Fed by Ethernet and connected to the Chord with a Nordost Blue Heaven digital interconnect, the Primare shows the gains to be had over tethering your laptop directly to a DAC's USB input. My initial impression is that its coaxial connection to the DAC results in a more luxuriously furnished presentation – a cleaner, smoother and more refined sound with greater warmth, tonal texture and acoustic 'air'. The Hugo TT2's

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Primare NP5
Prisma MK2

ORIGIN
Sweden/China

TYPE
Digital network
bridge

WEIGHT
500g

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
143 x 36 x 125mm

FEATURES
• Digital outputs: 1x
coaxial; 1x optical
• Supports up to:
DSD128 (DoP);
24-bit/192kHz PCM
• DLNA; AirPlay 2;
Chromecast; Roon
Ready; Bluetooth

DISTRIBUTOR
Karma AV

WEBSITE
primare.net
karma-av.co.uk

remarkable talent for resolving low level detail gets lots to play with here, but it isn't delivered in quite such a stark, spotlight fashion, dissolving unobtrusively into the larger musical picture with a more fluid sense of nuance, intelligibility and, consequently, musical insight.

Comparing the NP5 2/Chord Hugo TT2/Chord TToby power amp combo to the Primare i25 Prisma (HFC 461) integrated with its internal streamer and DAC, the results appear to be cut from the same sonic cloth. Handling a Tidal stream of Anita Baker's *Sweet Love*, both setups communicate the intention and emotional impetus behind the singing and playing, though the more expensive Chord ancillaries allow Anita to hit the high notes with a more aerobic energy. In matters of timing, focus and rendering of micro dynamics, though, both the i25's internal streamer and the NP5 2 are playing from the same charts and, again, we're back in high-end territory.

Conclusion

No larger than it needs to be, devoid of fanciful boasts, the NP5 Prisma MK2 has all the functionality most of us will ever need teamed with ease of use and seriously good sound ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Small size; no-nonsense design; sound quality

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Full MQA requires an MQA-capable DAC

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: As painless and affordable a path to quality streaming as it comes

FEATURES



OVERALL

