

hi-fi **news**

The **No.1** for Home Entertainment Tests

2008

YEAR BOOK

We choose this year's ultimate hi-fi

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- The Studio: Absolute Sounds' bespoke system**
- IFA Show Report: The technology of tomorrow**
- Hi-Fi @ Home: We visit the ultimate bachelor pad**



UK £4.00 US \$9.50 Aus \$9.95



Prima Mover

PRIMALUNA DIALOGUE TWO (£1999)

It takes a mix of valves with a choice of modes selectable via a remote. But it's not solely tube-tweakers that PrimaLuna's new integrated has in its sights...

PrimaLuna has its products made in China, but to European standards. With its Prologues PrimaLuna single-handedly established and provided credibility for the lower entry-level price point for rock-solid valve products, also showing that China was ready to compete with the rest of the world in hardware manufacture.

With its DiaLogue Two, PrimaLuna is attacking the next price point with just the same vigour. That in itself should be enough to make the DiaLogue Two a fascinating prospect for those with up to £2000 to spend on amplification.

The Two boasts five line inputs, a home theatre input bypassing the preamp section, and both 4 and 8ohm speaker taps. But here Prima Luna has also introduced Adaptive AutoBias. It's not the first amplifier to allow tube changes without manual re-biasing. Plenty of others have allowed users to swap tube types within a given category. AudioValve's amps even let you mix tube types in the same channel. But PrimaLuna has made valve changing a big feature of the DiaLogue Two. I was informed that I could also use KT66s, KT77s, 6550s and a bunch of others in addition to the KT88s and EL34s supplied for review.

Even better, and multiplying the possibilities, is the choice of triode or ultralinear operation switchable with the remote control. Thus you get to A/B triode vs ultralinear from the listening seat, with a green/red LED telling you which is playing. And the differences are not subtle.

This meant that the DiaLogue Two almost begged four

conclusions, because each mode sounded quite distinct. And while experience will lead most of you to anticipate certain traits (eg, added warmth in triode mode), choosing among the four possibilities is not that straightforward. Power, by the way, was never an issue with any of the four set-ups.

The ease with which you can flick from triode to ultralinear – which you will do with much regularity when you discover how each deals with different recordings – makes for a perfect and instantaneous selection process.

MIXING 'N' MATCHING

Let me spare you some of the suspense: although I used this amp with LS3/5As and PMC DB 11 speakers, the majority of my listening

involved the Sonus faber Cremona Auditor Elipsa.

And with that loudspeaker, the KT88s certainly had the edge over the EL34s: greater coherence, command and force.

Conversely, I preferred the EL34s when using the LS3/5As, and in ultralinear mode. This choice tightened up the bass, added some mass and left the vocals intact. With either valve in triode mode through the LS3/5As, the midband grew too warm – almost goopy. Which is fine if you think Joss Stone should sound like Elaine Paige.

With hard rock, louder material, punchy brass, I opted for ultralinear. With fragile material, prominent vocals, acoustic strings, triode was preferred. As to the intrinsic character of the amp regardless of

valve choice or mode, it blatantly sounds like a more robust yet more sophisticated Prologue. Which is how it should be.

Fed some analogue from a fine US mono LP of *Connie Francis Sings Jewish Favorites*, the PrimaLuna delivered a flood of schmaltz that would render even Ahmadinejad philo-semitic. It possesses a rich yet natural midband ideal for vocals of this calibre, and with detail that caresses every nuance.

Better still, and certainly augmented by the KT88, is its openness – both its recreation of three-dimensional space and its clarity/transparency. True, this is not the most wide-open of valve amps but neither is it smudged.

'The PrimaLuna delivered a flood of schmaltz that would render even Mahmoud Ahmadinejad philo-semitic'

VERDICT

PrimaLuna joins the big boys. Value is still incredible, but performance, build and styling take things up a notch. Besides, this amp makes hi-fi fun again – especially if you get a kick out of valve swapping! ⚡

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<2% THD, 8/4ohm, EL34 ultra/triode)	50W/50W / 30W/30W
Dynamic power (8/4/2/1ohm, EL34 ultralinear)	65W/63W/19W/9W
Output impedance (20Hz–20kHz)	4.7–4.35ohm
Frequency response (20Hz–100kHz, 8ohm)	–0.3dB to –5.4dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/38W)	44mV / 269mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (for 0dBW/38W)	82.2dB / 98.2dB
Distortion (10W/8ohm, 20Hz–20kHz, EL34 ultra/triode)	0.14–1.79% / 0.50–2.9%

hi-finews
HIGHLY
COMMENDED



AUDIO FILE

Ultralinear / triode mode integrated valve amplifier. Rated at 38W/8ohm

Made by: PrimaLuna

Supplied by: Pistol Audio

Telephone: 020 8971 3909

Web: www.absolutesounds.com