

PrimaLuna EVO 300 Hybrid Integrated Amplifier Review

Posted on 22nd November, 2021



Although PrimaLuna is synonymous with tube electronics, this type of amplifier is not for everyone. Some people need serious amounts of output power, whether to drive large listening rooms and/or inefficient loudspeakers. For this reason, the Netherlands-based company has created a new design, the EVO 300 Hybrid, which marries a classic tube preamp section with a sturdy MOSFET power amplifier stage. The result is this fascinating integrated amp, which also offers the additional option of a moving magnet phono stage.

Created in-house by PrimaLuna's Herman van de Dungen and Kevin Deal of Durob Audio (the exporter of PrimaLuna and other brands), the tube circuits were designed by Marcel Croese (ex Goldmund) and the solid-state output stage by Jan de Groot (ex Sphinx). The latter heads up Floyd Design, whose insignia graces the front of the amplifier. "Jan has been Durob Audio's solid-state design department for almost twenty years", Herman told me. "This department has been servicing, designing and modifying solid-state circuits since 2002. Jan has a long history and great experience with JFETs and MOSFETs." He's currently working on new Floyd Design high-end amplifiers for Durob Audio.



stereonet
INTERNATIONAL

UP CLOSE

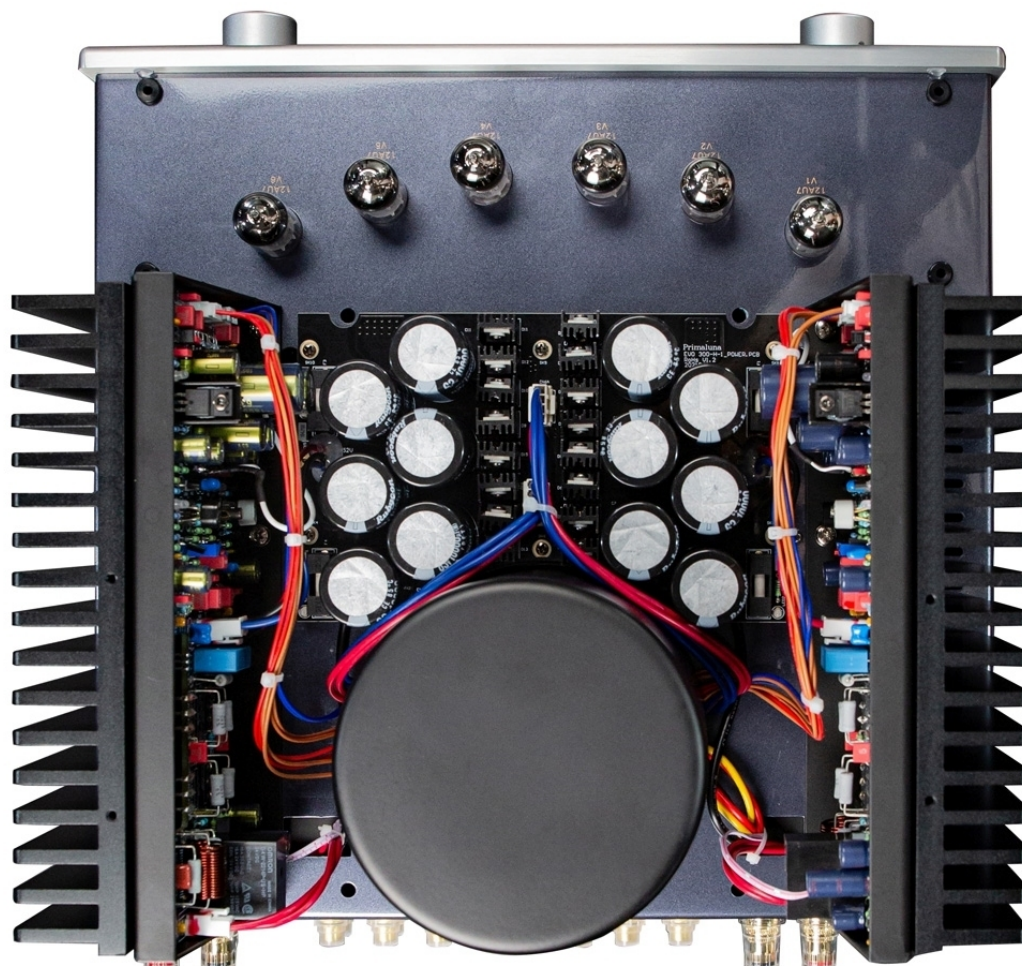
The preamplifier section is actually an EVO 300 preamplifier, but without the tube rectification and choke. Six specially chosen 12AU7 vacuum tubes are used and configured Cathode-Follower (V1 and V6), Driver (V2 and V5) and Gain (V3 and V4). “Floyd Design uses the best JFETs from Linear Systems and MOSFETs specially manufactured to stay as close as possible to the tonal character of tube reproduction. All other components, wiring, PCBs, connectors and switches are of the very best quality as standard”, Herman says.

The EVO 300 Hybrid is a dual-mono design with separate power supplies and potted transformers for each preamp channel and a single 500VA transformer with dual-mono layouts, each with its own power supply for the power amplifier stage. Its power amplifier section is a Class AB design and deploys a JFET and MOSFET circuit making at least a claimed 100 watts per channel (typically 115W) and 150W at 4 ohms (typically 170). That's quite a bit more than PrimaLuna's most powerful all-tube integrated amplifier, the EVO 400, with a rated 70W per side in ultra-linear mode or 38W in triode mode.

Much care has been lavished on the construction, with thick 2.4mm printed circuit boards with 105µm (usually 35µm) gold plated copper tracks. The electronic components are checked and graded for quality with only high-grade resistors, capacitors, inductors, relays and semiconductors used throughout, including Swiss DuRoch tinfoil capacitors. When you peek through the cooling slots in the top cap, you will notice the red glow of specially selected LEDs used as low noise power sources for the circuits. They are used in place of diodes as very low noise current sources to provide the input stage of the power supply (Differential Complementary Cascaded JFETs circuit) with the optimal DC setting.

Five pairs of RCA line-level phono inputs are fitted, plus a Home Theatre input that allows the EVO 300 Hybrid to be used as a power amplifier, bypassing the preamplifier. A Tape Out and a Sub Out with a switchable mono/stereo selector completes the main rear panel. Under the thick 2mm metal chassis is

an underhung phono chassis providing the shielding of an optional MM phono board that can be retrofitted. There's a single pair of multi-way speaker binding posts.



Once each unit is assembled, it goes through an initial test and once passed, it's run-in for a day before being tested again. At that point, and if necessary, it is then retuned. Then there's another twenty-four hour burn-in period and final test before leaving the factory. It weighs some 25kg, so I found it a substantial piece of kit to move, and the heatsink can get warm when left on for a long time. The supplied remote control is all metal, high quality and is a very welcome addition.

THE LISTENING

My PrimaLuna 300 Hybrid review sample was connected to both Acoustic Energy Aegis One bookshelves, and JBL HDI-3800 floorstanding loudspeakers fed by a modified Melco N1A music server and Holo Spring 3 DAC. The amplifier took a couple of weeks of continual use before the top end blossomed and the soundstage filled out properly. Once settled, it proved to be a great sounding amplifier that's enjoyable to listen to with all genres of music. It has excellent control over the bottom octaves and a fun, rhythmic sound that's balanced and colourful.



For example, the instruments used in *Sound & Color* by Alabama Shakes were tonally pure and reproduced with the correct vibrato and timbre. You may be disappointed if you are expecting this amplifier to have a tube induced glow or burnished warmth, as it sounds clean and with a light touch of warmth, but it doesn't dominate. There's a conspicuous lack of harshness, sterility and grain that some poorer sounding transistor amplifiers can be accused of.

Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G Major* by Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin demonstrated the Hybrid's ability to provide lots of treble detail in the strings. These came over as smooth, controlled and balanced, without becoming etched or overly bright sounding. This recording is rather well lit, yet I enjoyed listening to it without any irritation. The midrange is also finely balanced and never overly forward or dominating.

The PrimaLuna has a particular fondness for bass reproduction and does not shy away from difficult loads or complex tracks. It certainly gave my Acoustic Energy Aegis One bookshelves a fuller and deeper bass than I have previously heard while sounding natural and tuneful, with loads of extension. My JBL HDI-3800 floorstanders, with their three 200mm drivers, relished the control, drive and substance that this amp delivered. *Tin Pan Alley* by Stevie Ray Vaughan sounded at ease and comfortable even at extreme volume levels, with a vice-like grip over the bass and a gutsy presentation.



Hearing the well-recorded *Le Biron* by *La Rêveuse* was a pleasure as there were quiet backgrounds and an open window to the performance allowing dollops of detail to be heard. The PrimaLuna's performance retained the natural textures of the strings and harpsichord with space around them in different physical places in the soundstage. After three weeks of constant playing, I found the amplifier to be still evolving; the once-veiled sound began to flourish.

Listening to *Get Lucky* by Daft Punk featuring Pharrell Williams proved that this amplifier has enough power, control and sheer slam to get your neighbours writing letters of complaint. Transient speed was great, and there was a ton of musical drive and dynamics to keep the music interesting. When played very softly, it still sounded great, with the tonal balance unchanged.

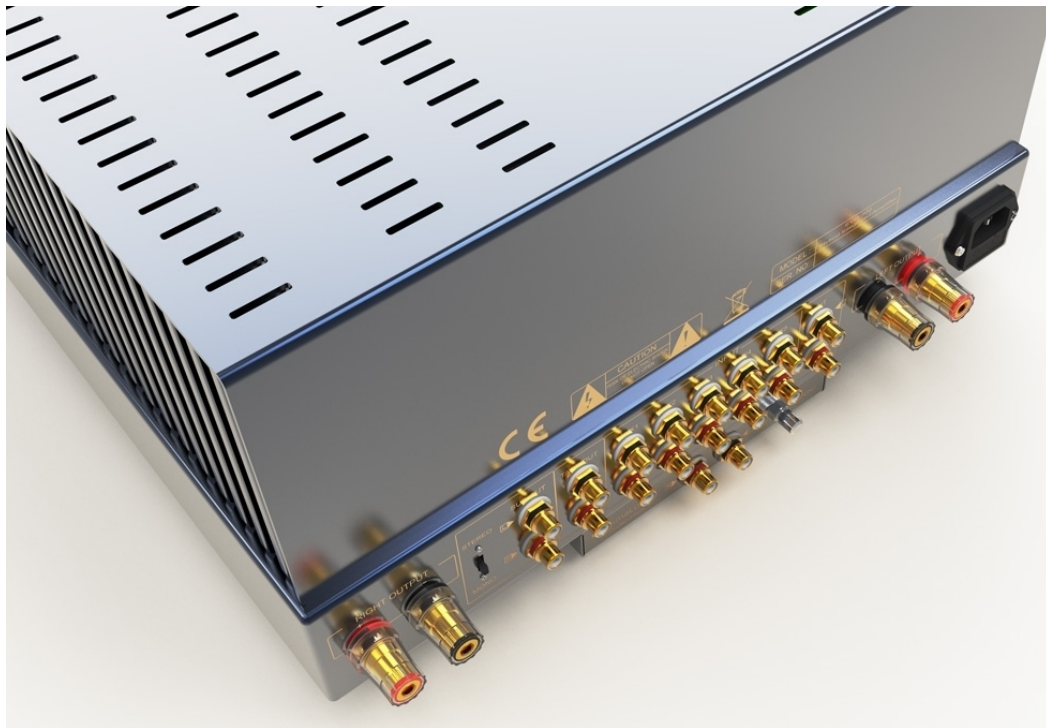
The PrimaLuna 300 Hybrid does an excellent job of producing a wide, tall and deep soundstage. *Better Days* by Baba Ali was reproduced with a great front-to-back depth perspective, the vocal sounding far behind my front wall. I like the elastic presentation where well-recorded music can pop well forward as well as backwards, with space around the performers to present the performance in a genuinely enjoyable manner.

I then tried my excellent Holo Spring 3 amp with an internal solid-state preamplifier module fitted, bypassing the PrimaLuna's preamp by connecting to the Home Theatre input. The sound was very similar but slightly less interesting and involving, with less texture and character; tonally, they were virtually the same. There was a slightly tighter, leaner and more finely drawn image with the Holo preamp, but the differences were small, indicating that the PrimaLuna's valve preamp section is neutral and open.

A 6.35mm headphone output is fitted to the PrimaLuna's front panel but controlled by a switch on the right side of the amplifier. I used Sony WH-1000XM3 headphones and enjoyed the wide soundstage and

sense of depth and space that the amplifier was clearly delivering. The speed, bass response and control proved exemplary for an integrated amplifier.

My complaints are only minor. The exclusion of XLR inputs is an obvious omission and may not suit some users. I found the volume dial quite sensitive to use on low volume settings like background music but was fine when at more typical listening levels. Overall though, I was impressed by the build quality and reliability of the amplifier, as it didn't put a foot wrong, remaining quiet with zero transformer hum. It could be left on for a week at a time and remained perfectly stable.



stereonet
INTERNATIONAL

THE VERDICT

PrimaLuna has achieved a fine feat with the EVO 300 Hybrid, conjoining the best aspects of both valve and solid-state into a reasonably affordable amplifier that sounds thoroughly modern, transparent, open and enjoyable. Its general punch and bass heft will suit those with inefficient loudspeakers or large listening rooms, but this amplifier also works wonders with smaller sized loudspeakers – letting them reach their full potential. The pricing of this amplifier is where it should be and is good value compared to separates but without all the fussiness. Do try to audition it – you may just walk out of your local dealer with it under your arm, if you're strong enough!