

the ear

HI-FI MUSIC GEAR

REVIEW by Chris Kelly

Primaluna Evo 300 Hybrid Power

A wonderful music maker



Primaluna Evo 300 Hybrid Power amplifier

In the interests of transparency let me start this review by stating that my regular amplifier is from the same family as the subject of this review. I have owned the Evo 300 Hybrid Integrated for a couple of years now and it has performed flawlessly regardless of the sources, cables, and loudspeakers with which I have paired it. It is a behemoth, weighing in at around 31kg and thus an awkward load to get in and out of my system rack. I have stuck with this amplifier because I am deeply enamoured of the way it delivers music to my loudspeakers and I have not had any visiting amplifier which has given me that reviewer's curse, an urge to change to something better. When I was approached about reviewing the

stand alone power amplifier version I felt fairly confident that the difference, if any, would be minimal so no threat to the status quo.

It is worth mentioning what Primaluna means by hybrid in these amplifiers, which is that both tubes and transistors are used to amplify the signal. Six 12AU7 triode tubes are used in the first stage prior to handing the signal over to MOSFET transistors in the output stage, this latter part of the amp controls the loudspeaker and it's something that solid state transistors do rather better than tubes. The idea is to combine the musicality of tubes with the power of transistors in the one amplifier.



Obviously a power amplifier needs a preamplifier, so I asked Absolute Sounds, the UK distributor of Primaluna, to send an appropriate companion for the Evo 300 Hybrid Power. Their selection was the all-valve Evo 300 Preamplifier, which made sense. Having stripped down my rack to accommodate these two chunky units I had to rebuild it with one fewer shelf than usual, which in turn meant that I had to bid farewell to the Yamaha CD-S3000 for the duration, leaving my Vertere DGX turntable on top and a Gold Note PH10/PSU two box phono stage as the only source for the review. No hardship really as I prefer vinyl to all the alternatives and the next few weeks gave me a great chance to delve more deeply into my record collection than usual.

The Evo 300 Hybrid Power has a switch to allow it to be used as a single stereo unit or to be bridged to mono. In the stereo mode it can deliver 100 watts into an 8 Ohm load, and 220 watts driving a single channel. I cannot think of any loudspeaker of my acquaintance with which it would not pair brilliantly.

During the review I used my Harbeth Compact 7 ES XD standpoint loudspeakers for the most part, but also brought my the revamped Harbeth P3ESR XDs into the system for a short while. I used Tellurium Q Ultra Silver II speaker cables but also towards the end of the review period the same company's Silver III, which was recently reviewed in the Ear. RCA cables from the PH10 to the preamplifier was Vertere's Red Line, with Tellurium Q Silver III taking on the duty of connecting the pre and power amplifiers.

Once I had flexed my ancient muscles and got the whole system ready to go, I powered it up and was rewarded with the fabulous (to these eyes anyway) sight of a grand total of 14 valves glowing at me across the room. I moved forward to cue up the first record on the DGX, thinking that in fairness to the Primalunas I should play music for a day of two before starting critical listening. The best laid plans and all that...



Listening to the Evo 300 Hybrid Power

I have been a Bob Seger fan since the late 1970s and have most of his albums on vinyl but voted for his Greatest Hits compilation from 2017 to get the party going. The first track on side one is Roll Me Away, a typical mixture of Seger ingredients – strong melody, storytelling lyrics and a driving beat. Immediately I used the chunky metal Primaluna remote control to advance the volume on the Evo 300 preamp, all thoughts of a gentle warm-up period washed away in the first few bars. Then on to Night Moves. Fifty years old this year and just as magnificent now as it was when I used to hear it on FM radio when I lived in LA in 1977. “Waiting on the thunder” indeed – Seger’s heartfelt vocal was electrifying. The combination of the valve preamplifier playing into the hybrid power amplifier, together with the Harbeth’s open, honest sound which perhaps strays a degree of two to the warm side of neutral suited these recordings wonderfully well.

By the time I got to the fourth side of the double Seger album I had already detected that the sound had opened up a little, not that it sounded bad from the outset. My Evo 300 Hybrid Integrated has a wonderfully mellifluous quality to its sound. The Evo 300 Hybrid Power had a similar sonic signature, but the soundstage seemed bigger in every direction, with more three dimensionality and even more

solid placing of musicians within that expanded space. Bass was fast, articulate and yet never overbearing. In fact the whole sound signature is very Primaluna, which is the highest compliment that I can conjure up. It very quickly becomes addictive, and pushed me to sit and listen for hours at a time, and that doesn't happen as a matter of course I can assure you.



From Bob Seger I switched to a 'British Invasion' hero, in the form of Ray Davies who, along with his brother Dave, Pete Quaife and Mick Avory, formed the Kinks in the early '60s. In 2023 BMG issued two volumes of Kinks music, selected by the surviving band members, collectively entitled The Journey. The Bard of Muswell Hill and his group mates created some of the greatest music of that era. I despatched all four sides of Part 1 of The Journey in one morning. You like storytelling songs? Waterloo Sunset is an absolute masterpiece of the genre and through Primaluna Evo 300 Hybrid Power sounded as fresh as when I first heard it as a music-obsessed schoolboy. It was released on 5 May, 1967 that year so celebrate its 59th birthday this year, yet sounded so fresh that it raised goosebumps on my arms.

One last album to mention, before this simply morphs into a playlist. Congo Funk! is another compilation album that merits your attention. Released on the Analog Africa label, the subtitle is Sound Madness From The Shores Of The Mighty Congo River, which sums it up pretty well. Driving percussion, brass, guitars, bass and voices carry you on a headlong ride down the mighty river. It is irresistible music served up brilliantly by this Primaluna Evo 300 Hybrid Power centred system. Joyous.

Thereafter, I ranged far and wide through my record collection and the Primaluna Evo 300 pair served it all up with poise, grace and peerless musicality. From electric blues to solo classical guitar, from jazz to female vocals, I experienced a sumptuous feast of music with this system, which was as musically compelling as any that I have had through my listening room over the years.



Final thoughts

As I disclosed at the beginning of this piece, I was already very familiar with Primaluna kit before the Evo 300 pre and Evo 300 Hybrid Power amplifiers got here. Given that the power section of my integrated is pretty much the same as the stand alone power amplifier in terms of specifications as far as I can tell, the significant upgrade to the sound quality must be attributed to separating out the preamplifier and, in this case, the sheer quality of the Evo 300 Hybrid valve power amp implementation.

There are times when I have no regret that a review period has come to a close but in the case of these two heavyweights I was genuinely sad to see them go. They took everything I love about my Evo 300 Hybrid Integrated and then added at least an extra twenty percent of goodness in every aspect of their performance. From a practical perspective I do not have the space to accommodate the separates within my single system rack, even if I could find the funds to purchase them. However, if space and budget constraints were not a factor I would have my order in already, because these are wonderful music makers.

Pros

- Rich, musical and highly engaging sound with strong emotional impact
- Expansive, three-dimensional soundstage with precise imaging
- Fast, articulate and well-controlled bass
- Excellent synergy with valve preamp, delivering warmth without losing detail
- Powerful and versatile (stereo or bridged mono operation)
- Consistently enjoyable across a wide range of music genres
- Noticeable performance uplift over the integrated version

Cons

- Very heavy and bulky, difficult to accommodate and handle
- Requires a separate preamplifier, increasing cost and space demands
- Generates significant heat due to valve design
- Premium pricing makes it a serious investment
- Not practical for smaller systems or racks

