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Primare's eight-channel amplifier aims to make sure no watts go to waste as it beefs up your system, discovers **Mark Craven**

Pick your power

Eight channels? When I first saw the spec sheet for Primare's new power amplifier I did wonder if I'd read it wrong, because in the home cinema arena we're used to odd numbers. Yet the A35.8, thanks to flexible internal engineering, considers eight to be just the right amount, whether you're interested in movies or music.

Yes, music. Sweden's Primare has been so focused on hi-fi hardware recently (its current Prisma range of two-channel devices extends to DACs, network players, CD decks and integrated amps) that I wouldn't have expected it to suddenly unleash a power amp solely aimed at home theatre installs.

So the A35.8, a new stablemate for the pre-existing A35.2 stereo power amp, intends its eight channels to be put to use even by someone using just a pair of speakers.

How so? The eight channels are arranged in four bridgeable pairs, giving you a four-channel amp if you desire. Those four channels can then be used to bi-amp a pair of speakers if they have the appropriate split crossover and terminals. Eight becomes four into two.

You'd only do this if your speakers were sufficiently high-end to justify the A35.8's £4,500 ticket, of course. Not to mention power-hungry, because you'd end up with a claimed 750W going to each speaker.

Channel hopping

In an AV rig, the Primare's eight channels can, naturally, be used independently – each promises a hefty 150W. This is where those odd numbers come in. A 7.1 system would have a channel left over, to which Primare's answer is to bridge it and give the centre enclosure some extra clout. Or, in a 5.1 setup, bridge the L/C/R speakers and use the remaining two amplifier channels for the surrounds. And if you have

15 channels of Atmos to handle, well you could just buy two of these amps...

Making all this potent power available in a well-proportioned (430cm-wide, 14.5cm-high) pressed steel chassis that will fit easily on an AV rack is Class D amplification from Hypex. This has the benefit of being compact, with no requirement for a toroidal transformer the size of a bowling ball. It also runs relatively coolly, meaning that while the A35.8 does have heatsinks, these are mounted internally.

Indeed, take a peek inside Primare's new power pusher and it all looks rather neatly laid out. An APFC (active power factor correction) switch-mode power supply unit, with custom wound transformers, lurks behind the thick aluminium face-plate. Further back are the eight Hypex modules. Signal paths have been kept as short and pure as possible, even to the extent that the speaker binding posts are directly connected to the amps without the use of solder.

These binding posts are nicely spaced along the bottom of the A35.8's rear panel, and labelled Channel 1, Channel 2, etc. Above each set of binding posts are the inputs for your pre-amp (or the pre-outs from an AVR), which are available on both balanced XLR and unbalanced RCA. For each 'pair' (Channels 1 and 2, Channels 3 and 4, etc) there's a switch to instigate bridged mode, and the corresponding speaker terminals to then be used are clearly labelled.

Further connections are 12V trigger in/out, plus RS-232, for system integration. Even if these aren't used, the A35.8 has the wherewithal to wake from standby when an input signal is detected, and to enter standby after 20 minutes

of no signal. Both these modes (Auto Sense and Auto Standby) can be defeated if desired.

As for the A35.8's overall styling, it's on the right side of functional. Some power amps adopt a black box persona, which is fine considering they're often likely to be sat out of sight, but Primare instead offers a very smart brushed-metal fascia in either silver or black. The company logo, central to the front panel, also serves as the power button, it's tiny white light glowing when it's ready to roll. During bootup, eight red LEDs inside the chassis illuminate momentarily as the amp's clipping detection system activates. Apparently these will also come on if you do overdrive any of the A35.8's channels, but this isn't something I experienced.

Ready for anything

I auditioned this amp with both a two-channel Primare PRE35 pre-amp (with balanced XLR output), and via the multichannel RCA pre-outs on my Arcam AVR850 AV receiver. In both setups, its high-output delivery was easily apparent, as was the performance boost you can get from really giving loudspeakers a kick up the backside. Nor is this just a case of having extra grunt to help drive tough loudspeaker loads; the A35.8 has its own, welcome, sonic attributes.

As a Class D design, I was prepared for it to have that familiar sense of snap and attack, but this amp doesn't come across as all fury and no finesse. It both leaps into transients and keeps a steady hand on the tiller, so that smoother soundtrack and movie moments aren't relegated to also-ran status. Just as vitally, listening to it you get the feeling it has more power to give if needed. Surely playing a part here is the clever engineering of those Hypex NCore amplifier modules, which are designed to maintain the same level of (low) distortion regardless of the impedance fluctuations of the partnering speaker. There's a pure, uniform flavour to its sound across the frequency range.

Beginning with a five-speaker Q Acoustics Concept setup, using single-channel amplification, the A35.8

AV INFO

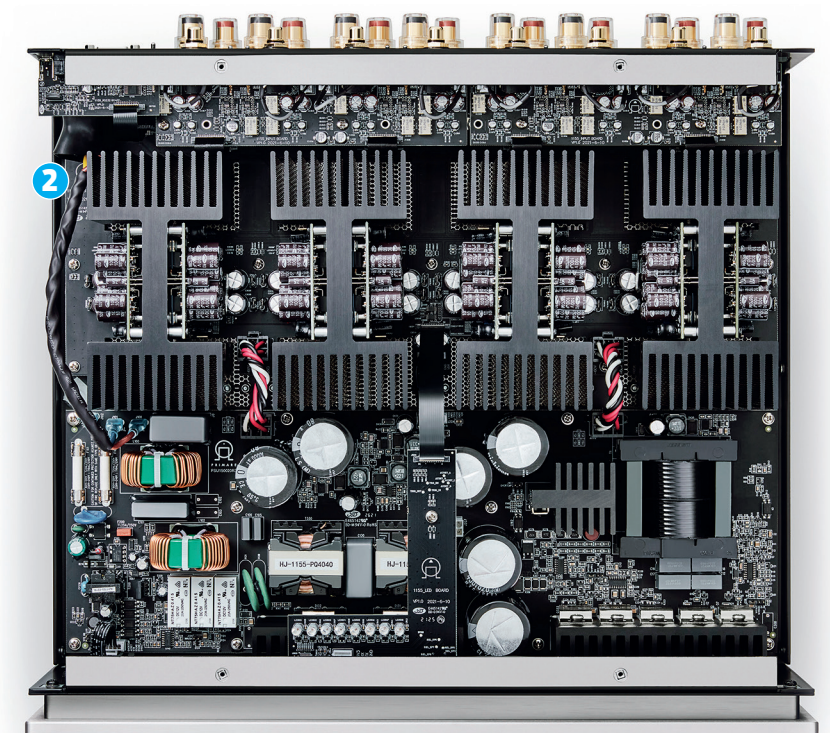
PRODUCT: Eight-channel Class D power amplifier with balanced input and bridged output

POSITION: Primare's highest-spec power amp

PEERS: NAD Masters M28; Emotiva XPA-DR3

1. Styling adheres to the brand's minimalist but classy ethos

2. The A35.8's eight Class D Hypex amplifier modules are arranged in bridgeable pairs



REVIEWS



proved capable of effortless entertainment with the bombastic soundmix of *The Suicide Squad* (4K BD). The DC gang's beach landing on the island of Corto Maltese, and subsequent firefight/massacre, benefitted from the amp's fast, lively and powerful delivery. Gunshots gained a dramatic leading edge, each effect sounding punchy and precise. This frenetic sequence was conveyed without slurring, and became all the more immersive because of it.

The soundtrack here starts off with driving drums and guitars, and it pounded purposefully from the front soundstage. Yet when Savant (Michael Rooker) decides it's time to retreat, composer John Murphy segues into a more traditional orchestral score with strings and brass, which revealed the musical bent of the A35.8. The instrumentation swelled with a gorgeous, unfettered tonality.

The impact on the system performance from bridging the L/C/R channels was impressive. The same speed and transparency was there, now joined by extra heft and a more fulsome feel to lower-frequency details, such as the timpani drums accompanying *Peacemaker* and Bloodsport's infiltration of the rebel camp, and the throaty roar of Starro the Conqueror.

Likewise, the sheer sense of scale and drama this amp wrought from its full eight channels with the blockbuster audio of *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (Sky Cinema) was a delight. As the various robots (they really need name tags) do battle in Giza, the huge, bassy metallic tone of their mechanical whirrs and clanks, plus the portentous baritones of their bickering dialogue, emphasised the effect of being a tiny human dwarfed by Autobots and Decepticons.

The A35.8's available power is arguably even easier to discern during music playback (and I suggest anyone investing in this amp should use it for this too). With the unit focusing its energy on just two of its amplifier pairs, and feeding a set of Bowers & Wilkins 705 S2 speakers (standmount models, but not an easy drive), it brought a thrilling energy, plus revealing transparency, to a playlist

SPECIFICATIONS

POWER OUTPUT (CLAIMED): 8 x 150W (8ohm); 8 x 300W (4ohm); bridge pairs rated at 740W (8ohm) **CONNECTIONS:** 8 x phono inputs; 8 x balanced XLR inputs; 8 x speaker terminals; 12V input; 12V output; RS-232 **DIMENSIONS:** 430(w) x 145(h) x 400(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 15kg

FEATURES: Hypex NCore 500 Class D amplifier modules; bridgeable channel pairs; maximum 1,500W total power output across eight channels; Auto Sense mode on/off; Auto Standby (defeatable); status LED; 6dB gain selector (bridged mode); clipping sensor

TESTED WITH



THE SUICIDE SQUAD: With the HBO Max spin-off series *Peacemaker* now streaming via Sky (p96), what better excuse to revisit James Gunn's hilarious and ultra-violent superhero/villain reboot/sequel? Warner's 4K Blu-ray does battle with a thunderous, effects-heavy Atmos mix, grimy visuals and a witty chat track.

ranging from blues and rock to electronica and jazz. The crunchy riffs of AC/DC's *Back in Black* (CD) almost pinned me to my seat, accompanied by thunderous kick drum and snare, while the more mellow beats of Bob Dylan's theme to *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (Tidal Master) showed a sweet side to the A35.8, as it presented the resonant guitar strings, delicate percussion and gentle basslines without harshness.

Making the grade

Overall, Primare's A35.8 is a classy bit of kit, with a performance (plus a luxurious design and build) that feels commensurate with its not inconsiderable asking price. It's more than capable in terms of power output to handle hungry speakers, and does so while keeping distortion or unwanted colouration at bay. Being able to bridge its amp channels to suit your requirements is another feather in its cap, as is its refined and insightful nature with music. I rate this an A-grade amplifier ■

3. The front-panel logo doubles as a power button, and includes a small status light

4. This 15kg amp is supported by a trio of feet – two at the front, one central at the back

HCC VERDICT



Primare A35.8

→ £4,500 → www.primare.net

WE SAY: Primare marks a return to multichannel with a highly impressive, and cleverly configured, power amplifier that brings pure, potent, fleet-footed grunt to your movie room.

