



## Primare SPA23

I am a gear junkie. I mean, why else would I choose a profession that lets me play with toys the whole day and get paid for it?

Doing what I do means I come into contact with a lot of kit, packed with features. Some of these features are brilliant and absolutely necessary. Others are there to pad out a spec sheet and make the product look more desirable to those who base value on a product's features tally.

Basing value, or performance, on specifications would be like me asking readers the following question:

I can close the windows of my sedan via remote control, while my convertible doesn't have windows. Which car is more fun to drive?

Those that know me well would answer that while I like my old Audi, it's my even older Austin Healey Frogeye that puts a smile on my face when I drive it.

In a similar vein, the spec list for the not inexpensive Primare SPA23 AV receiver reviewed here is a fairly short one.

It doesn't hook up to the Internet, doesn't have an app that lets you control it with your phone, and (shock! horror!) in today's automatic-everything world,

it doesn't even have an auto calibration feature. You have to set it up manually. Oh dear, what is the world coming to?

What the SPA23 *does* have is the kind of build quality that is leagues better than the average – and you can see it from the other side of the room. Its feature set includes everything you really need (including both DTS and Dolby HD audio decoding), video scaling and a heart that is all about making movies sound as good as they can.

And then there is the aesthetic design of the receiver, which in typical Scandinavian style is minimalist and attractive...

the Primare is  
truthful and neutral.  
It doesn't really care  
what you feed it:  
music or movies, stereo  
or surround sound:  
everything gets treated  
the same way – and with  
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a receiver.



### VITAL STATS

and both at the same time.

Out back the look is by necessity a little busier. There is simply no getting away from the fact that you need a good spread of inputs and outputs on an AV receiver that is going to be used with more than one or two source components. Again, the look and feel of the inputs, outputs and speaker terminals is top notch.

Despite not offering an auto set-up feature, receiver installation and set-up didn't really take any longer than it usually does when I run auto calibration on opposition products.

The reason for this is that even when I run auto calibration, I always reconsider the automatically calibrated settings and tweak them until the receiver sounds good to my ears. In this respect, not having to move through a series of calibration settings to see which one was the best and ending with all equalisation off anyway, saved some additional time.

I should mention that the menu structure of the SPA23 is not as flashy as that of many of its competitors. But what it

Channels .....	5.1
Power output.....	120 watts per channel, all channels driven
Surround sound formats .....	DTS Master Audio, Dolby TrueHd and below
Frequency response .....	10 Hz – 100 kHz
Signal-to-noise ratio .....	110 dB
HDMI inputs/outputs .....	5x in, 2x out
Audio inputs/outputs .....	8x stereo in, including 7.1, 7.1 out, record out, Zone 2
Digital inputs/outputs .....	3x optical in, 3x coaxial in, 1x coaxial, 1x optical out
Dimensions (WxHxD).....	430 x 180 x 385 mm
Weight .....	15 kg

PRICE..... R78 000

#### VERDICT

With the Primare SPA23 you get an AV receiver with a soul rooted in musical performance. Relatively few features when compared to the competition could be positive or negative, depending on your specific requirements.

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OUR RATING: 85 / 100







lacks in fancy overlays or icons it makes up for by being easy to navigate. Besides, unless you're an audio reviewer who has to endure the joy of setting up receivers all the time, you only need to do set-up once.

The Primare is also one of the few models I've come across that looks at video as closely as it does at audio. For example, I don't recall using a receiver that has as many built-in video test signals. The presence of these makes

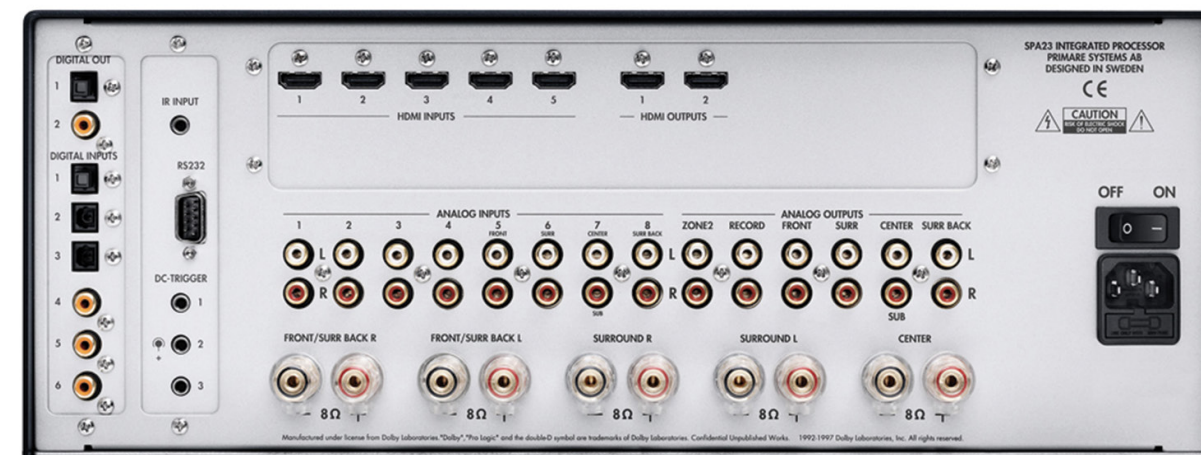
video calibration easier.

I'll also mention at this point that while the receiver only has five channels of amplification — which in most cases makes sense, as few people I know run their AV systems in more than 5.1 mode anyway — it can be configured to run as a 7.1 system.

To achieve this, the front amplifier outputs are assigned to surround back speaker duty, and you would use the front channel line out from the receiver

into a separate power amp to run your front speakers. Primare's own A34.2 power amp would fulfil that role nicely.

The last aspect worth mentioning before moving on to performance are the somewhat cryptic eight analogue stereo channel inputs (including 7.1) mentioned in the Vital Stats panel. What this means is that you could connect eight stereo analogue devices to the SPA23, or inputs 5, 6, 7 and the 8th could be set up for 7.1 input.



In practice, the SPA23 must be one of the smoothest sounding AV receivers around, and one that simply gets on with the job of playing audio.

Another way of putting this would be to say that audio is unobtrusive at all but silly volume levels, and when driving the most demanding of speakers. In fact I found it difficult to put a label on the audio performance of the SPA23, and this is high praise. So while some AV receivers can be called bright, dark, shrill or dull,

the Primare is truthful and neutral.

It doesn't really care what you feed it: music or movies, stereo or surround sound: everything gets treated the same way — and with more grace than one usually hears from a receiver.

It should come as no surprise that I found the SPA23 to be dynamically sound. It handled movie transients (explosions, gun shots and the like for normal people) well. Its low noise floor meant quiet moments in movies or music were not

lost in a hash of just audible noise, and better than usual channel separation meant that both movies and music sounded detailed and spacious.

The only area where the SPA23 fell just a little short was when it was hooked up to a pair of Vivid Audio Giya G2 speakers that were in the studio at the same time.

While the SPA23 drove these speakers well at low to mid-levels, it did lose a little bass control at higher volumes — but then, it has to be said that the challenge of driving the Giyas was an unusually tough one that it's unlikely to face in any normal application. There were no control authority issues with the sub/sat systems we used for much of the review — even at high listening levels.

Was there anything I didn't like about the receiver? I thought that the remote control, while aesthetically pleasing, could have been better. It felt a little light and wasn't backlit. But that's really the only negative I can think of, and it's hardly a deal-breaking one.

So there you have it: the Primare SPA23 is a great receiver that, in reality, has all the features anyone will probably ever need. Most of all it's superbly built, and sounds terrific with both music and movies.

Joel Kopping

## Associated Equipment

*Oppo BDP-95EU universal deck*  
*Primare BD32 universal deck*  
*DStv HD PVR*  
*Atlantic Technology surround sound speaker system*  
*KEF E305 surround sound speaker system*  
*Vivid Audio Giya G2*

## Software

*Dolby HD demo Discs*  
*Lira — Live (Blu-ray)*  
*Man Of Steel (Blu-ray)*  
*End Of Days (DVD)*