

the absolute sound®
2009
PRODUCT
OF THE YEAR
AWARDS

This is the Big One

—our annual Product of the Year Awards in which we honor the very best hi-fi gear we've reviewed in the previous year.

We select components for our most prestigious award on the basis of sound quality, value, or both. In some categories we've chosen more than one item, either because two products were equally worthy or each represented a unique combination of performance and value. In every category, one product was selected purely on the basis of sound quality without regard to price. Finally, our Overall Product of the Year Award honors that special component that is the single most impressive achievement of the past 12 months. —Robert Harley

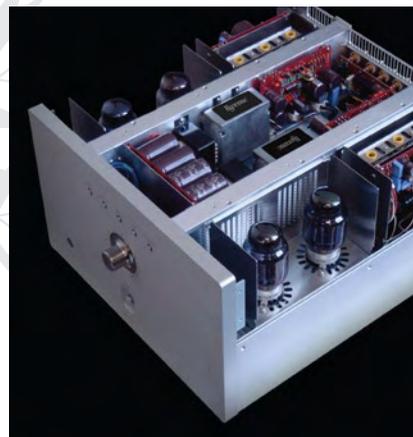
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Tube Amplifier of the Year

PrimaLuna DiaLogue Seven

\$5495

PrimaLuna has built a solid reputation on delivering high-value tube amplifiers, but the new DiaLogue Seven monoblocks take this achievement to a new level. This top-end of the PrimaLuna line offers the listener the choice between 40W of triode power or 70W of Ultralinear output. Unlike most tube amplifiers with selectable operation that force you to make the tradeoff between triode sweetness and Ultralinear heft and dynamics, the DiaLogue Seven sounds beautiful in either mode. And because of a clever new circuit that parallels two output transformers, the Seven combines the purity of a low-powered tube amplifier with the muscle of a high-powered unit. The result is a tube amplifier that is simultaneously smooth and easygoing (particularly on strings), yet doesn't have "tubey" colorations. The DiaLogue Sevens are great amplifiers on an absolute basis, but when you consider their \$5495-per-pair price, they're outright bargains—and TAS's 2009 Mid-Priced Tube Amplifier of the Year. (Reviewed in this issue)



Esoteric A-100

\$22,000

Ostensibly, the A-100 is yet another push-pull amplifier extracting 45Wpc from one pair of KT-88 power tubes in ultra-linear connection. But, in fact, it should be understood as an epic endeavor to make the venerated KT-88 sing like never before. It was conceived and executed without compromise, starting with a rigid H-frame chassis and proceeding through parts-selection and circuit design; the ultimate arbiter was sound quality. A star attraction is a newly designed output transformer that uses silver-plated copper foil for the secondary winding. Output-stage bias is under the control of an advanced active-biasing circuit. This circuit automatically compensates for fluctuations in bias voltage by detecting cathode current and output-level demand. The bias circuit works in tandem with a zero-DC level circuit that balances the push-pull sections of the output stage. This innovative tube design offers fantastic resolution of a recording's origin and acoustic signature. If you crave tube magic, rest assured that the A-100 delivers the goods. But it also breaks through the traditional barriers of tube amplification; low-distortion harmonic textures, transient speed, and resolution are integral to the way it reproduces music. DO declared it to be the state-of-the-art in medium-power tube amplification. We declare it TAS's 2009 Upper-End Tube Amplifier of the Year. (Issue 191)