



Blue note

Cambridge Audio's new Azur multichannel receiver is targeted at the sonically aware

PRODUCT Cambridge Audio Azur 640R

TYPE Multichannel AV receiver

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By common consent, the UK does not make good affordable AV amplifiers and processors. Well here's the exception to the rule – a product from Cambridge Audio, which designs its products in the UK, sourcing them from China to minimise production costs.

The Azur 640R is targeted at those looking for a multichannel solution that can do justice to stereo playback. Much of the design effort has gone into the audio fundamentals, which includes a well built, relatively non-resonant case design, a very well-endowed power supply, and a cooling system that most of the time operates in passive convection mode. When needed, this will progressively introduce forced air cooling using a thermostatically controlled fan. The amplifier is rated at 120 watts stereo, or 100 watts multichannel, and the 640R will drive a 5, 6 or 7.1 channel speaker array, with explicit support for 2.1 (stereo with subwoofer) modes. The amp is supplied with a remarkably clean and therefore more than usually ergonomic remote unit. This makes control simple; you're all set.

The feature set is small, but beautifully formed. Forget the toys – tone controls, all but the most basic DSP effects, auto setup and so on. Everything here is high performance, so there are three HDCP-encrypted HDMI inputs and one output to feed a flat screen display or projector. There's also analogue video transcoding between composite, S-Video and component video, a full set of Dolby and DTS converters, full integration with Cambridge Audio's multiroom systems and so on.

SOUND QUALITY

Sound quality quickly settles down to a very straightforward overall balance. No loose low frequency padding you get from many multichannel receivers. The feel is taut and detailed, and it remains so over a broad dynamic range. Although the 640R doesn't go especially loud, it remains consistent almost irrespective of volume level, a signal perhaps of the careful optimisation that has gone into the design of the power supply.

The new Azur receiver is particularly impressive in stereo. The system sounds clean and agile, but not sanitised, and where there were problems with other equipment or source material, there was nothing to conceal the evidence. That was impressive with well-recorded music of a type that doesn't usually thrive with multichannel hardware.

Multichannel performance is in some ways more impressive still, thanks to well-designed HDMI and HD-ready component video subsystems, and a good if conventional Dolby/DTS decoder.

This is a simple, ungimmicky AV receiver that delivers in stereo, and makes the most of the latest AV interfaces like HDMI. The Azur not only delivers the goods, but it does so with great ergonomics, even better build quality and all at a remarkably equitable price. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT

SOUND >> 86%

>> SUB RATINGS
STEREO 85% MULTICHANNEL 87%

FEATURES >> 80%

BUILD >> 88%

VALUE >> 90%

PRO

Good build inside and out, with an especially well endowed power supply to help deliver the sonic goods. Ergonomically sound, too.

CON

Lacks some niceties such as bi-ampable front speakers, and transcoding from analogue to HDMI digital video, though this may have entailed a performance penalty.

CONCLUSION

There is nothing here you would not expect to find on any other well designed receiver, but experience teaches there are remarkably few that live up to the hype, especially around this price level.

HI-FI CHOICE >> **87%**
OVERALL SCORE