

Cambridge Audio 640R 1345,00 Euro



Brilliant Brit amp is a balls-out bargain

Despite successfully mixing it with the big Japanese manufacturers there is still something quintessentially British about Cambridge Audio. Its 640R was first mooted to HCC some 26 months ago but Cambridge was determined not to launch this mid-market receiver until it was deemed perfect. Ofcourse, the AV industry waits for no manufacturer, so the 640R's two year gestation has seen not only a range of developments, including damped chassis and A-bus multiroom, but has had to encompass HDMI switching as well.

Talking about specs alone does not do the 640R justice though, because the build quality, fit and finish comprehensively trashes every mid-price receiver on the market. It is as solid and heavy as 2400 Euro amps, has a superbly dead feel to the chassis and comes with a sexy metal topped remote control. Better still, there is a range of multiroom features that would not disgrace AV exotica. Okay, you don't get roomEQ, auto setup or video upscaling, but its sonic merits and

flexibility make up for the lack of video trickery. And then some...

Design and features

The 640R claims a solid 100W per channel (...but read on for more about that!), ticks all the surround sound decoding boxes and offers a handy 20 percent power boost when used in two-channel mode for music.

The back panel is a neatly executed swathe of inputs and outputs, including three-in and one-out HDMI specified to 1080p and component video connections with upscaling from composite and S-video. The downside is that the HDMI is only a pass-through switching implementation, so you can't produce the OSD menus on

HDMI, which rather complicates the setup.

So the 640R is a no-frills receiver then? Not exactly. From the outset Cambridge wanted the 640R to be the heart of a multiroom system and fitted it with a complete A-BUS hub suite. Not only does this include twin video outputs, IR repeaters and 'RJ45 Keypad ports' for A-BUS compatible keypad/amplifiers, but Cambridge offers an entire range of A-BUS peripherals under its Incognito sub-brand, potentially making this the easiest DIY multiroom system of them all.

Around the front the cosmetics are somewhat suspect, but the array of fascia buttonry is well thought-out.

One-touch access to 7.1

analogue input, as well as 'stereo direct'. proves to be a godsend for those with DVD-A and Super Audio CD music, or players offering the new DTS HD and Dolby HD surround formats.

On the debit side, the onscreen menus are bland, setup is functional rather than tweaky and the 640R is tardy in responding to the remote control - but this is a British design, so I think that's called 'charm'.

SPECIFICATIONS		
ITEM	SUPPORT	DETAILS
Dolby Digital	○	DD 5.1, DD EX 6.1/7.1, Prologic II/IIx 5.1/6.1/7.1
DTS	○	DTS 5.1, DTS ES 6.1/7.1, Neo:6 6.1/7.1
THX	×	No THX post-processing, sadly
AV Inputs	○	5 composite/S-video
Audio Inputs	○	7 inputs
Component Inputs	○	3 inputs
Tape Loop	○	1 input, 1 output
AV Monitor output	○	3 (main + 2 Zones)
Component output	○	1 output
Video upconversion	○	Composite to S-video/S-video to Component
HDMI input/output	○	3 inputs, 1 output
DVI input/output	×	Not here
Multichannel output	○	7.1 configuration
Subwoofer output	○	1 output
Digital Audio input	○	5 optical, 5 electrical
Digital Audio output	○	2 optical, 2 electrical
Phono input stage	×	Vinyl verboten
Speaker out	○	7-channel
Headphone	○	1 output, front-mounted
Amplification: 7 x 100W (claimed); Tuner: AM/FM		
Dimensions: 425w x 150h x 420d(mm); Weight: 15kg		
Also featuring		
Heat sink tunnel; A-BUS Type II Incognito multiroom suite, 192kHz/24bit DACs for all channels; RS232 port; IR emitter In, Control Bus In/Out; front-mounted AV input; stereo direct mode; 7.1 direct mode		

LAB REPORT				
	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Manufacturer's Output 100W per ch into 8Ω				
Measured Power @ 1kHz 2ch driven: 175W into 8Ω	✓			
5ch driven: 135W into 8Ω	✓			
2ch driven: 240W into 4Ω	✓			
5ch driven: 170W into 4Ω	✓			
Fidelity firewall @1kHz/2ch 140W into 8Ω (0.03%THD)	✓			
Distortion @ 1kHz 0.005%THD @ 50W (8Ω)	✓			
Frequency response 20Hz-20kHz +/-0.2dB		✓		

Power crazed

Significantly, there is something very wrong with Cambridge Audio's claimed power figures. As a John Woo bullet-fest ripped into my viewing room, dislodging bits of plaster from the ceiling, I suspected the 640R might be a little more 'pokey' than the paperwork might suggest. In two-channel direct mode the effect is even more dramatic, the 640R offering the sort of control, grip and sheer undistorted über-volume that one experiences just before the ASBO.

In the HCC Tech lab we discovered that the 640R delivers over 130W with all channels driven into 8Ohm and a massive 170W in two-channel mode. Cripes!

As if to prove the point the lab coats also noted that at full output the 640R drew nearly 2Kw of mains electricity as well. Not too good for your carbon footprint... but wayhey!

The 640R crafts the searing action scenes of *Casino Royale* with superb attack and punch and,

although the ability to finetune speaker positioning and subwoofer crossover would have been handy, the effect is still spectacular. The dynamic attack easily sets a standard at the price and the true grunt on tap is not simply gung-ho bas boost -it's real thoroughbred horses with finesse and passion aplenty. The low frequencies are drum-tight and dialogue is rich, detailed and supremely articulate. The top end has sparkle and presence -although forward sounding speakers might prove a little bright overall if you like to go large with that prodigious volume.

In quieter moments the 640R continues to impress. At family listening levels the balance remains pancake flat and there is a good sense of space and atmosphere. Nudge up the volume a notch or two and the Azur gets into its stride and impresses with just about every DVD you throw at it.

The neutral balance and great power reserves prove their worth with music too, and the 640R turns out to be a great tw-channel amp

at a touch of the stereo-direct button. it's genuine, well-balanced hi-fidelity soundmixing -the sort of passion and clarity in a multichannel amp that I haven't heard since Arcam's AVR-350 hit met my home cinema last year - and that's E 2695,00!

Conclusion

For E 1345,00 you will certainly find receivers with HDMI upconversion and upscaling, Room EQ and auto-set-up mics, so there's advanced high tech out there, **but you have to look at the priorities. If you can live without the gadgetry and simply want a first-class receiver for movie and music entertainment, then the Azur 640R stands head and shoulders above anything else at its price point and quite a bit above it too!** Highly recommended,



*'The 640R crafts the searing action scenes of *Casino Royale* with superb attack and punch'*

 <p>A slim, well-built remote keeps things under control</p>	 <p>Build-quality is considerable for such an affordable amp</p>	 <p>Backside connectivity is comprehensive</p>	<h3>RATINGS</h3> <p>Highs: Power output; sound performance; build quality Lows: No HDMI upconversion or RoomEQ</p> <table border="1"><tr><td>Sound</td><td>★★★★★</td></tr><tr><td>Build</td><td>★★★★★</td></tr><tr><td>Features</td><td>★★★★</td></tr><tr><td>OVERALL</td><td>★★★★★</td></tr></table>	Sound	★★★★★	Build	★★★★★	Features	★★★★	OVERALL	★★★★★
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