

DENON AVR-2803 AV receiver £650

Value added

Denon's AVR-2803 offers an upgraded spec for the same price as its predecessor. Alvin Gold finds out more



Denon's modernisation of its extensive range of home cinema amplifiers continues with the AVR-2803. It replaces the AVR-2802, with improved clockwork under the skin, but sells for the same price.

One of the main changes is to the digital section, which has acquired a new and very powerful 32-bit Analog Devices Hammerhead SHARC Melody 100 DSP (phew!) to perform the surround sound decoding. This is the processor at the heart of some of the most exotic home cinema processors and amplifiers around, some costing several times as much as this one. It also allows some new surround formats to be added. These include DTS 96:24 and Dolby Digital EX in 6.1 and 7.1 channel guise (neither available on the AVR-2802), along with DTS-ES.



Full system remote is busy looking but offers good grouping of controls by colour and shape

The 7.1-channel replay options still use 6.1-channel processing, the extra speaker delivering a greater spread of sound and reduced localisation. Changing the digital data off disc to analogue is a bank of 16 (count 'em!) 24-bit 96kHz D/A converters in a 'doubled up' dual differential configuration that delivers increased resolution and lower noise.

In charge of the speakers are seven channels of amplification rated at 90 W/channel when measured in a reasonably rigorous way, though Denon claims a 120W rating according to their more relaxed yardstick. The amplifier remains unchanged from the previous model.

As you might expect, the AVR-2803 is well equipped with a range of useful major and minor features. Among them is the ability to divert the two extra rear channels to play a second source to a second zone. This is backed up by an input for an external wired system controller and a trigger to synchronise exterior equipment, a dropdown screen for example. A range of subwoofer crossover settings allows the use of speakers of arbitrary size. SACD and DVD-Audio are catered for with an extended frequency range 5.1-channel bypass input.

PERFORMANCE

The control system is flexible and easy to get to grips with, requiring

minimum user intervention; surround modes can be memorised for individual inputs, along with the type of input (digital or analogue, for example), or whether a component video input has been linked to that input. Bypass features are available to help reduce interference to quality audio sources. They are useful for increasing the apparent dynamic range, reducing noise and adding image depth and 'air'.

The AVR-2803 doesn't sound particularly muscular, but in a largish room it goes more than loud enough driving a Mission m5 system. This speaker system is not spectacularly efficient and it has a well extended frequency response to challenge the electronics. The balance errs on the side of agility and detail. This is reinforced by the powerful surround sound decoder engine which gives the system explicit image placement, and image movement around the soundstage. Thanks to this, the AVR-2803 faithfully reflects the action on screen.

Overall, this is a no-nonsense, solid workhorse of an amplifier. The AVR-2803 is ideally suited to mid-range home cinema systems. Hard to fault and at a good price, we don't hesitate to recommend the Denon AVR-2803 ■

Verdict ★★★★★

Excellent value package with added refinement over its predecessor

Specification

FEATURES

7.1-channel FM-RDS/MW; 40 preset tuner; LFE crossover frequencies 40Hz-120Hz in 20Hz steps; tone defeat; onscreen display; Dolby Surround, Dolby Digital, Dolby Digital EX 6.1, Dolby Pro Logic II, DTS, DTS-ES 6.1 Matrix & Discrete 6.1, DTS Neo:6; rock arena, jazz club, video game, mono movie, matrix, virtual; black or champagne gold finishes; multi-component coded remote control

SOCKETS

Audio only: 1 x line, 1 x tape, 1 x 5.1 channel AV; 5 x line, 2 x tape inc composite & S-video; 2 x 100MHz HDTV-compatible assignable component video inputs; (digital) 3 x optical, 2 x coaxial in, 1 x optical out; seven pairs loudspeaker terminals (main); serial port, system control in/out, trigger out (all 3.5mm minijacks); aerial inputs

WEIGHT

13kg

DIMENSIONS

171(h) x 434(w) x 416(d) mm

CONTACT

☎ 01234 741200, www.denon.co.uk

TEST DATA

Manufacturer's rated output: 90W (20Hz-20kHz, 0.05% THD, 8Ω)
Measured output: 115W (8Ω, 1kHz, 0.1%THD)
Measured power output: 50W (8Ω, 1kHz, 0.1%THD, 5 channels driven)
Fidelity Firewall: 115W, 8Ω, 1kHz, 0.05% THD
Distortion at 50W: 0.003% (1kHz, 8Ω)
Frequency response: 20Hz-20kHz ±0.2dB

What we think

WHAT'S GOOD

Excellent mid-market receiver with improved image steering and ease of use

WHAT'S BAD

Daunting remote control, lacks muscle

SOUND ★★★★★
FEATURES ★★★★★
EASE OF USE ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★

Also consider...

SONY STR-VA333ES

DVD-A and SACD connect via twin multichannel inputs, combines subtlety and muscle
Reviewed December '02

PIONEER VSX-D2011

State-of-the-art sub-£1000 receiver with powerful and effective auto-setup feature
Reviewed Jan '03