

AUDIOCONTROL

CONCERT AVR-1 A/V RECEIVER Reviewed by DANIEL KUMIN

2009 **SOUNDVISION**
CERTIFIED & RECOMMENDED

CONCERT AVR-1 Theater Receiver

AudioControl

STANDBY MENU V INPUT INPUT A < INFO MODE > SELECT
ZONE DIRECT DISPLAY MUTE

Class
H
Design

GO RETRO

A retro black-gloss and blue-light front panel combines with an enormous control knob to give the AC AVR-1 a classic look.



KEY FEATURES

- +7 x 120 watts (all channels driven)
- +5 HDMI (v1.3a) inputs, 2 outputs; 5 component-video inputs, 1 output
- +Transcodes component-, composite-, and S-video to HDMI
- +Upconverts lower-res video to 1080p format via HDMI
- +Decodes Dolby TrueHD, DTS-HD Master Audio, and DSD (SACD)
- +Networked audio-capable (MP3, MP4/AAC, WMA, WAV, FLAC, OggVorbis)
- +Advanced system-integration potential via RS-232 and infrared facilities (no remote controller is included)
- +Hi-res, text-based onscreen displays
- +FM/AM tuner with 99 presets
- +Sirius satellite-radio-ready
- +Assignable powered-zone 2 or front-biamp amp channels; 3-zone (analog, line-level) A/V-capable
- +7.1 pre-out; multichannel analog line input
- +IR in (3), out (1), 12-v trigger (3, by zone), RS-232 serial port

Dimensions

17 x 16½ x 7 in; 60 lb

Price

\$5,500

AUDIOCONTROL.COM

We've long since grown accustomed to A/V receivers that deliver more — more features, more options, more complication. So encountering one that takes a contrary approach seems a bit perplexing at first. AudioControl's new Concert AVR-1 is, relatively speaking, just such a less-is-more proposition; with the exception of its Dolby Volume special-DSP option, it has decidedly fewer bells, whistles, and buttons than flagship models from any of the major Pacific Rim brands. Instead, the company, based in Washington state, has focused on the factors it clearly considers key for its U.S.-designed-and-made receiver: power, customizability, and simplicity of use.

Power is the one sphere in which the AVR-1 could be taken as a "more" proposition. AudioControl rates the big receiver as delivering 120 watts to each of its 7 channels with any or all driven simultaneously, a claim bolder than all but a few competing receivers can answer. (This comes thanks in part to the firm's own Class H amplifiers

the ground up for acoustic neutrality — more extensive auto-correction, which to some extent always incorporates a degree of sonic compromise, is less desirable.

To run Auto Setup, I placed the unusually beefy supplied mike at the listening position (the AVR-1 takes data from a single position only), selected "Run" from the on-screen menu, and waited out the circulating noise bursts and brief processing delay. The entire process took just a couple of minutes.

The AudioControl accurately calculated my speakers' distances and identified their sizes. But despite the displayed results, I discovered that it only applies a single crossover frequency, determined by the "smallest" speaker in the system, to all channels. (Any manually selected settings, including that one crossover choice, will override the auto settings.) When I checked channel levels using my handheld sound-pressure level meter, however, I found that the cen-

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— a sort of "smart power-supply" layout that conserves bulk, weight, and waste heat.)

While the AVR-1 is not nearly as huge as some other flagships (Denon remains the champion in that regard), it is an imposing object just the same. Its 60-pound bulk and single enormous alpha-wheel knob make a decided impression, while its somewhat unconventional, faintly retro black-glass and blue-lights simplicity will grab some and leave others indifferent. I liked it.

SETUP

The AudioControl's auto-setup and calibration routines, again, concentrate on less. Whereas other recent A/V receivers heap on the adjustments, here you get just channel bandwidth (crossover settings), level matching, and delay ("distance"), plus a single-band "Room EQ" filter that targets the primary peak measured at the prime listening position. AudioControl points out that since the AVR-1 is largely targeted to the high-end custom market — where the room itself will be treated and, in many cases, designed from

ter and surrounds were "hot" by as much as 6 dB. It's possible that the setup mike included with our sample was damaged or out of spec. In any case, a diligent installer would check and adjust such results against an external SPL meter, regardless of the hardware being set up.

AudioControl offers unusually complete setup customization for each input, allowing you to fine-tune all of the AVR-1's available video-processing adjustments — brightness, contrast, edge enhancement, three different noise-reduction algorithms, and more. There are also bass and treble adjustments, along with uniquely flexible handling of bass and subwoofer signal routing for stereo and multichannel listening. You could, for example, set a CD player to play full-range stereo with no subwoofer, a SACD player to deliver full-range plus sub from all channels, and a Blu-ray Disc player to use fully crossed-over main channels plus subwoofer output. You also get full control, by input, over Dolby Volume, including individual access to its Leveler function (this mitigates perceived loudness differences among sources or channels) and

calibration offset, all of which makes this valuable feature even more so.

PERFORMANCE

It took me all of about 30 seconds to glean my first impression of the AVR-1, which was (if you'll forgive a bit of inelegant audio vernacular), "Whoa, this baby's got some serious nuts." In terms of sheer mass of sound — high-quality, musical sound — the AudioControl is among the top two or three receivers I've auditioned, regardless of price. (By "mass" I mean high-volume clarity, definition, and low-frequency punch, without any sacrifice of midrange articulation or treble transparency. And also, especially, with plenty of dynamic headroom for unfettered transients.)

Lyle Lovett's *Live in Texas* is one of the more convincing high-quality venue recordings I know, and the AVR-1 effortlessly reproduced it, via my rather modest-sensitivity speaker array, at concert-like levels. The snare-drum punch and percussive stride piano on the opening to "I've Been to Memphis" sounded very impressive, evincing no differences between the AudioControl and my everyday power source, a separate amp rated at 150 x 7 watts.

I was pleasantly surprised to find that the AudioControl includes a network jack and an on-board media player compatible with any "universal plug-and-play" server, including Windows Media and my chosen Macintosh alternative, TwonkyMedia. This worked without a hitch and sounded just fine. And while the navigation was a bit leisurely, I've seen worse. The AC AVR-1's media streamer accepts FLAC lossless files (hooray!) but not, alas, 24/96 files (boo!) such as the

hi-rez offerings of HDTracks.com.

The Proposition, an Australian Western ("Southern"?), written by songwriter Nick Cave, is an engrossing riff on the Ned Kelly legend — a sort of antipodal Jesse James tale in the *Unforgiven* vein. The AVR-1 reproduced its sweeping, dense images with superb impact and detail via HDMI by way of my Optoma 1080p front projector. Yet when I went back and sampled scenes sent via lowly S-video and upconverted to HDMI by the AudioControl's onboard video processing (the AVR-1 employs Pixelworks silicon), I was impressed by just how un-horrible the results looked. Subsequent checks of the AVR-1's video processing using several test DVDs showed no unusual artifacts or resolution stumblings.

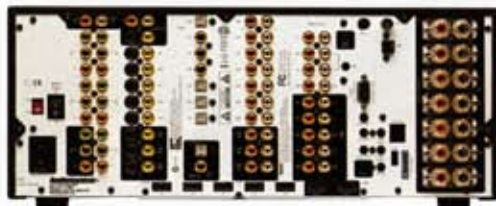
ERGONOMICS

The AVR-1 includes no remote control, leaving installer and customer to select from myriad available control schemes — touchscreens, wall panels, multiroom remotes, RF/infrared systems, whatever. This makes a certain amount of sense, since a substantial percentage of the handsets supplied with high-end receivers remain in the box anyway.

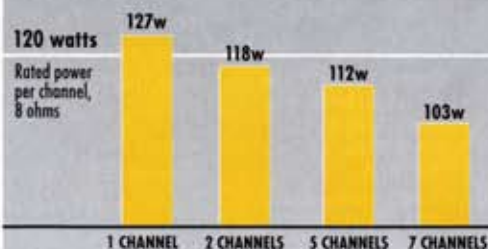
The "native" operations of the receiver itself were uniformly satisfying. The AVR-1's simple but handsome onscreen displays are sensibly designed and beautifully sharp, and its menu navigation response time was quite quick. However, switching from one HDMI audio-video source to another could require more than 10 seconds for both sound and picture to return. While this is to some extent characteristic of all HDMI-switching components, 11 or 12 seconds is nevertheless a long time to wait.

I loved the Concert AVR-1's classy, useful high-rez displays for volume and channel levels, tone, lip-sync delay, and more, which pop up relatively unobtrusively along the screen's bottom edge. There's also a nifty, informative screen that shows incoming and outgoing signal and bit rates (audio) and formats (audio and video), although you have to travel through the main menu to reach it.

TEST BENCH



MEASURED POWER OUTPUT



The big AudioControl AVR-1 very nearly met its all-channels driven power claim, producing just over 100 watts with all seven channels driven to the clipping point, about a half-dB shy of its 120-watts spec. More impressive still, it did so with only a modest pull-down of the AC line voltage, which suggests that users will get more real-world power at high volume settings than with many other receivers. Frequency response and noise performance were consistently good, though the

analog multichannel inputs' signal-to-noise ratio of -84.6 dBW was a bit short of the best we've seen. On the other hand, frequency response from the multichannel inputs extended well beyond 40 kHz with only minimal rolloff. The AVR-1's subwoofer crossover proved only 12 dB/octave rather than the more usual 24 dB/octave, which suggests that some by-ear adjusting of subwoofer levels and crossover frequency may prove useful in some rooms and setups. — D.K.

BOTTOM LINE

AudioControl publishes no "suggested retail price" for the AVR-1, while allowing that "around the mid fives" is a fair estimation of a typical custom-install contract line item. Price-wise, this puts the unit squarely among the top echelon of A/V receivers — an exclusive neighborhood, but one that the AVR-1's outstanding performance in every important audio and video matter lets it inhabit without fear of prejudice. Whether you choose to move in with its particular combination of high-end excellence and relative feature austerity is between you and your installer. Those who do will certainly not be shortchanged of intrinsic quality or performance by this U.S.-designed and, far more unusually, U.S.-made, component. [SV](#)

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PERFORMANCE



VALUE



OVERALL SCORE

