

Cambridge Audio

azur 640R  
AV Receiver

# Azur like it...

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 640R E 1345,00

An AV receiver aimed at the audiophile on a budget. With no fewer than seven 100W amps, is this the bargain it looks?



**Tested by Richard Stevenson**

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The Azur range has wholly revitalised Cambridge Audio's fortunes in recent years and singularly rekindled its revered, nayloved, status for budget audiophile bargains not seen since its '80's heyday. With multi-channel receivers one of the best sellers in the Azur range, launching a new model in the all-important mid-market (E 900 - E 1500) was key to CA. Important enough to warrant a dedicated two-year R&D program. Enter the E 1345,00 Azur 640R.

Straight out of the crate it is immediately apparent that this is a solid, weighty and beautifully put together beast. The chassis is robust, 'acoustically damped' and, particularly in the silver finish, has an

extraordinary dimensional and cosmetic kinship to Arcam's E ζ AVR-350. A claimed 100W for each of its seven channels, a full complement of Dolby and DTS processing and unfettered HDMI pass-through switching is likewise strangely familiar. If CA did not claim at the AVR-350 benchmark when designing the Azur 640R I'll eat my subwoofer. Still, no harm in aiming high.

**WHAT THERE'S NOT**  
Unlike the majority of middle-market AV receivers, the 640R is not a catalogue of gadgetry. It

**'Susie Suh is charged with an articulate poignancy that will have grown men snuffling into a Kleenex.'**

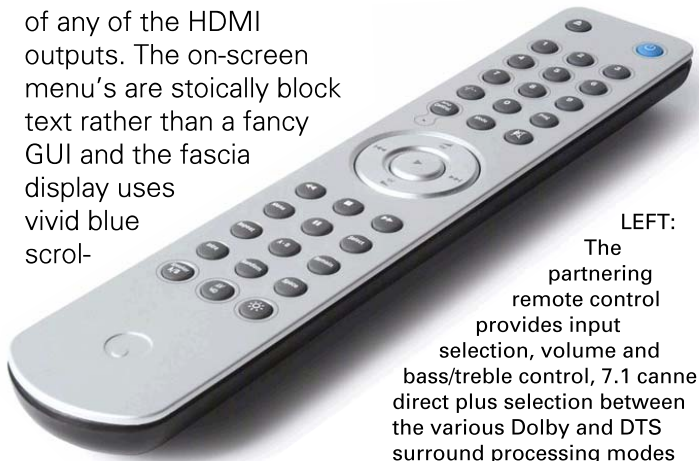
doesn't have auto set-up, there's no room EQ system (thankfully), there's no video scaling and you can't break audio

of any of the HDMI outputs. The on-screen menu's are stoically block text rather than a fancy GUI and the fascia display uses vivid blue scroll-

ling text, unfortunately reminiscent of a London Transport bus sign. Moreover, the depth of its multichannel tweaking options are basic to a fault. The fault, in my

speakers. That said, the 640R is not completely devoid of operational niceties. Alongside two-zone audio and video output, IR repeaters and coaxial control bus inputs for multiroom duties, it has twin Ethernet ports for integration into Abus 'whole house' distribution system. Better still. CA offers a wide range of affordable Abus control hubs and interface devices under its Incognito sub-brand.

The ten minutes it takes to set up the 640R using its rather fetching aluminium topped remote control means your first audition is likely to be some six to 24 hours too soon. While it isn't an acoustic catastrophe from cold, the performance simply gets much better as it warms. Hooked up to the Tannoy TD12s is



**LEFT:**  
The partnering remote control provides input selection, volume and bass/treble control, 7.1 channel direct plus selection between the various Dolby and DTS surround processing modes (digital inputs only)



# A GREAT BRITISH SUCCESS STORY

Like a lot of British hi-fi makers, Cambridge Audio's fortunes have waxed and waned over its near 40-year history. From humble beginnings in the late 1960s, the original P-series amplifiers soon set new standards for budget audiophile designs and, along with other great marques of the era like NAD's 3020, brought true high fidelity to the mass market for the first time. At the beginning of the 90s, cult CA products like the DACMagis DAC saw the company flourish, but later it

began to lose ground to feature-laden Japanese competition in the AV-sector.

Poenix-like, Cambridge Audio's 2003 Azur range has been a stonking success, representing one of the biggest purple patches in the company's history. Profits from these incredibly well executed and affordable designs have been ploughed back into research&Development and CA finds itself back at the cutting edge of hifi and AV technology. In the last two years it has

developed and introduced features such as the Incognito Abus multiroom system, ClassXD amplifier technology and Adaptive Time Filtering - alongside the continuous improvement of its fundamental audiophile credentials. This heady mix has ensured success and turned CA into one of the UK's biggest hi-fi concerns with over 70 staff, including 20 design engineers, at its London HQ and sales in excess of GBP 40 million worldwide. Now that is what I call a Great British Success story.

something of a budgetary mismatch, but the 640R is far from financially embarrassed.

Using the 7.1 analogue direct function (which turns it into high-quality all analogue multi-channel amp) it offers a dynamic scale and drive that could embarrass receivers with much more grandiose power claims. My personal penchant for rock and classical music on the more vigorous side of the genre is well served by the 640R, lending Mendelsohn's Violin Concerto on multichannel SACD plenty of drama. The opening allegro has excellent pace and projection into the room and the surround soundstage is crafted with an admirable lack of obvious speaker positioning. There is the

merest hint of smearing and congestion in the mid-range that robs the piece of some of its pin-point instruments positioning but -pinch myself again- this is a E 1300 receiver not several thousand pounds of multi channel exotica.

## ROMPING HOME

The performance immediately inspired an excited romp through my music collection (always a good sign) to enjoy the 640R's eminently musical nature. Elton John's re-mastered version of 'Candle in the Wind' on the *Yellow Brick Road* SACD is recreated

with superb transient edge to the percussive piano and a rich detail that adds an historic texture to this 1970s recording. The top end is incredibly well extended for an AV

receiver at this level and the 640R unearths everything with blood hound tenacity - from Elton John's breaths between lines to the analogue master tape hiss.

It is this facet -creating a vista of emotional detail across a well balanced background- in which the 640R really excels. Star tracks from Susie Shuh's eponymous first album (US import), including 'Al I

Want; and 'Light On My Shoulder' come across simply charged with expression and the sort of articulate poignancy that will have grown men snuffling into a Kleenex. Diana Krall's reworking of *Cry Me A River* on SACD continues with a marvellously neutral balance that sounds oh-so sensual right through her entire vocal range. I have heard renditions of this track with more spatial scal and warmer bass but this does not detract from the successful overall presentation.

Moreover, Leonard Cohen's *Ten New Songs* CD is recorded with a fat an bulbous bass and the 640R sets about creating just that -low frequencies at the front of the mix with huge reverb and overhang. One must

**FOR:**  
**Beautifully balanced music and movies**

**Against:** Limited video tools; that blue display



## AV RECEIVER TEST

conclude that the 640R is in fact highlighting the balance of the recording rather than its own character -a trick usually reserved for dedicated two channel amps with more zeros in the price tag.

### AT THE MOVIES

Engaging the 640R's DSP and switching to movie soundtracks does not dissapint either, for here it mixes a dry and tight bass with plenty of dynamic attack and panorama of top end detail. Dialogue is snapped tightly to the screen and the 640R simply excels at crafting the moodier, suspenseful moments in films like *Mission Impossible 3*. This is a receiver that appreciates reasonably enthusiastic use of its volume to really get the sound projecting out into the room and with it comes a superb dynamic urgency even if the bass never gets your trousers flapping.

Compared to the 7.1 direct analogue inputs, the processing introduces some minor rough edges to the otherwise impeccable smoothness and a gentle increase in high-frequency hardness at ASBO-inducing volumes. Combined with the dry bass one could perhaps level a 'slightly lean' description at the 640R's movie abilities -but this really is being incredibly picky about what is otherwise an excellent all round performer.

# Hi-fi news | 9/20

overall rating

## Hi-fi News lab specifications

Power output 8/40hm(<1%THD).....2.x155 W / 220 W  
Multichannel power output into 8ohm.....7.x 125W  
Dynamic power output, into 8/4/20hm.....190W / 300W / 240W  
Output Impedance 20Hz-20KHz.....0.11.to 0.12 Ohm  
Frequency response 20Hz-100KHz.....±0.0dB -5.9dB  
Distortion, 20Hz-20kHz (Analogue 10W).....0.007-0.05%  
Distortion, 20Hz-20kHz (Digital, -10dBfs).....0.003%-0.009%  
Multichannel separation, 20Hz-20KHz.....

## Hi-fi News lab report

Rated at 6 x 100W/80hm but capable of so very much more, the 640R clocked up a full 2 x 155W and 7 x 125W/80hm in the lab, with dynamic power outputs increasing still further to a maximum of 300W/40hm with all seven channels driven. This really is a little powerhouse and more than capable of wrestling with speaker combinations far outside its anticipated league. The amplifier's frequency response shows an extreme HF roll-off (-5.9 dB at 100 kHz) and the output impedance is a moderate 0.11 Ohm. Distortion is consistent at ~0.007% through the midrange, on all channels, from 1W through to 100W but picks up slightly to 0.05% at 20kHz. There's a bigger difference via its digital inputs where, thanks to the top-class CS43 122 DAC used in stereo mode, distortion is lower on the L/R channels through the treble (0.009%) than via the centré-surrounds (0.1%, see graph above) which use a CS52526 multichannel CODEC. Bass management is correctly implemented with LF content from 'Small' channels being re-directed to the sub or, in the event of the sub channel being set to 'Off', delivered in parallel with the main front channels. Readers may download full QC Reports detailing the 640R's analogue, LPCM and Dolby Digital performance in more detail by logging onto [www.milleraudioresearch.com/avtech.com](http://www.milleraudioresearch.com/avtech.com). **PM**

## Review system breakdown

**SOURCES:** Sony SCD1 SACD player, Denon DVD-3910 Universal DVD **LOUDSPEAKERS:** Tannoy DimensionTD12, TDC, TD8, REL R-505 **CABLES:** TCI and Puresonic interconnects, Tech+Link HDMI

## Hi-fi News verdict

**Proof of the Azur 640R pudding is in the listening and if the disc-strewn chaos of my listening room at 4am is any clue, this is an amp that hits the spot with both movies and music. It combines a supremely natural, emotion-filled balance with music, a tightly detailed movie sound with impressive multi-room abilities if you can live with the bus sign display and without video trickery, then the Azur 640R leads the field in the budget AV receiver market.**

