

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 840A

1399,00 €

Cambridge has created new class of amp for the top of its Azur range

If Cambridge is trying to make a statement on just how much amplifier it is possible to supply at a retail price of € 1399, we get the message. This has one of the biggest mains transformers we've seen in anything under a couple of grand. Then there are the big heatsinks, well-filled circuit boards fitted into every crevice of the case and even a separate, tiddly transformer for standby functions. Cambridge's 'Incognito' multiroom interface, fitted as standard, completes the package.

But probably the most exciting feature is the new amplification class that Cambridge's leading designer, Doug Self, has cooked up for the amp: Class XD. An obvious idea but a hard nut to crack practically, this gives Class A performance from near-class AB standing current levels, combining very high linearity with sensible efficiency, all the time remaining free from crossover distortion. There's still a bit of heat coming off this amp and we would strongly recommend heading ventilation recommendations, but it's no inferno.

As a microprocessor-controlled amp, the 840A offers input gain trim and other nice features including automatic volume ramp-up when switching on. That, however, shows up the one feature we don't like, which is the use of noisy relays to alter volume. On the whole, though, it's entirely thumbs-up on the features front: for instance, we love the output protection that winds down the gain to prevent overload. The eight inputs (one via balanced or unbalanced socketry) can be renamed from the default 'Input 1' etc. It's a well-assembled unit and (noise apart) nice to use.

SOUND QUALITY

The 840A's combination of lively enthusiasm and fine detail retrieval meant the panel found much to praise. Comments like "the piano hangs in the air nicely" and "good warmth on female vocals" attest to its essential realism and musicality, while the timing was thought

good and resolution was praised frequently.

It's evident that something about certain types of music stimulates artefacts on this amp that affect some listeners more than others. How can the midrange be both clear and muffled, or the bass both heavy and fast?

The muffled midrange allegation was made in the Damien Rice track, exactly where another listener thought bass a bit slow and heavy. This track (The Blower's Daughter) was chosen for the tests not least because it features some very heavy bass in conjunction with complex midrange and treble, and it seems that something the 840A does with it comes across to some ears as affecting the bass, to others as a midrange problem.

Similarly, the clear midrange and fast bass were both found in the baroque track, which doesn't have any pronounced bass to speak of and thus shows off the midrange to perfection, unencumbered by any LF artefacts.

We've dwelled on that a little, partly because those tonality issues were the only criticisms our panel came up with. In fact, two of our panellists overall enjoyed this amp immensely, the third being less convinced as he was the one most bothered by the bass. Listen out for that, for sure, but don't overlook this amp: it's a fine performer with a lot to offer. **HFC**

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 87%	An amp that's both detailed and lively, with excellent midrange and treble detail; very mild bass anomalies seem to disturb only some listeners. Those who don't notice these tendencies simply love the sound!
FEATURES >> 90%	
BUILD >> 87%	
VALUE >> 92%	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 89%	



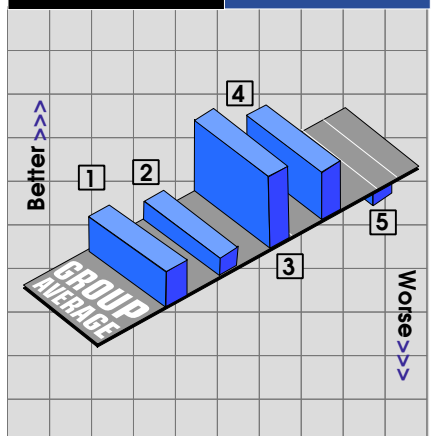
LAB REPORT

Output power from this amplifier is considerable, all the more so when one tests its performance into a 4-ohm load - the same 33W output is available, equivalent to 272W. Beyond this, the electronic protection simply turns down the gain, but momentary signals can exceed this by a little, giving a modest dynamic headroom.

It is clear that Class XD works as claimed, for while midband distortion is not exceptionally high by the standards of this group (very high standards, for sure) the performance in the treble is remarkable, barely worsening compared with lower frequencies.

At any frequency, distortion pretty much vanishes into noise below about 5W output. Noise is excellent and the treble bandwidth very wide indeed, bass being -1 dB at 6Hz. The high power consumption at idle shows that Class XD doesn't quite match Class AB for efficiency, and standby power is also a little high - so switch it off at night!

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1) Dynamic power >> +20%
- 2) Frequency response >> +10%
- 3) Dynamic range >> +40%
- 4) Distortion >> +25%
- 5) Output impedance >> -10%

SPECIFICATIONS		
Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	120W	136W
Distortion (1kHz / 8 ohm)	0.015%	0.002%
Freq. response (20Hz-20kHz)	>100dB	109dB