

WATTS GOING ON

Things are moving in amplifier world – don't miss out

An expanding middle is a reality we all must address as time dribbles away, but at least in hi-fi it's something we can roundly celebrate.

Rather than padlocks on the biscuit tin and pyjamas with elasticated waistbands, having more recommendations in the budget-to-midrange sweet spot makes our lives a lot simpler and more entertaining – even if it means your choice is becoming ever more difficult.

Stereo amps – specifically those sporting both digital and analogue connections – is one such burgeoning sector of the market, as highlighted by the round-up you're about to read.

Of the five reviews printed across the following pages, four of the products were tested within the past couple of months; the fifth is a two-time Product of the Year whose talents refuse to dwindle, even in light of this renewed competition.

Enduring master

That last mentioned amp is Cambridge Audio's CXA60 which, at € 799, sits in the middle of this quintet ranging from €400 up to a grand.

Three are updates or new editions of amplifiers we've previously recommended, including those bookending the group: Marantz's PM6006 UK Edition at one end and the Cyrus One HD at the top.

The other such product is the second incarnation of NAD's D 3020. The original challenged our view on what a midrange Class D amp could do and tore up the rule book completely in terms of its design. That shock factor may not be present this time around, but safe to say the V2 doesn't disappoint.

That leaves Arcam's SA10, set the colossal task of replacing and updating the company's twice Award-winning A19 integrated amp. That job description alone perhaps makes it the most highly anticipated offering of the lot.

All are recommendations, so join us as we celebrate a talented and diverse set of integrated amplifiers.



**ARCAM
SA10**
€849
(page 39)

**CAMBRIDGE
AUDIO CXA60**
€799
(page 38)

**CYRUS
ONE HD**
€999
(page 41)

**MARANTZ
PM6006 UK
VERSION** €549
(page 36)

**NAD
D 3020 V2**
€499
(page 37)

€799

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

WHAT HI-FI? says

Rating ★★★★★

Cambridge Audio CXA60

FOR Enthusiastic sound; deep bass; timing; build; connectivity

Your eyes may or may not enjoy the modern look but your ears will love the sound



AGAINST No Bluetooth as standard



Despite not adding to its two Product of the Year trophies at last year's *What Hi-Fi?* Awards, the CXA60 has a quality of sound that keeps it an excellent choice. That's impressive, given that it is three years old and costs €100 more than it did.

It's certainly one of the classiest-looking midrange models we've come across. It's clear Cambridge Audio has given plenty of thought to every aspect of the design; rather than settle for a bland box, the company has made it look and feel every bit a high-quality product.

Visual impact

Looking at its sleek 'floating chassis' design and clean, uncluttered fascia next to the more traditional, dial-heavy Marantz PM6006 will no doubt split opinion. Whichever you prefer, the Cambridge makes a great first impression - not least with its simple, elegant display, satisfyingly smooth volume, balance and tonal dials and blue buttons, which emit a rather gratifying click and are indicative of the Cambridge's seamless operation. Even the sturdy remote, compatible across the CX range, has a well-thought out design.

But the CXA60 isn't just a pretty face. In fact, where it excels is in its complete sound, high-resolution audio support and impressive set of connections.

aptX Bluetooth is an optional upgrade by way of the company's €99 BT100 dongle, but going wireless (and spending extra to do so) isn't necessary.

A 24-bit/192kHz DAC supports native hi-res playback across its two optical and

single coaxial inputs, which join four line-level inputs, a 3.5mm aux input for plugging in portable players or smart devices, and a 3.5mm headphone jack. Like the Marantz PM6006, there's no USB input. You'll have to look to the CXA80 (€1099) for that.

There's scope to use the CXA60 as a preamplifier, and to plug in a subwoofer for extra low-end heft, and two sets of speaker terminals mean you can bi-wire or run a second pair of speakers.

Just one is enough to hear how entertaining this amplifier is, though. Fluid, snappy and packed with enthusiasm, it puts musical enjoyment high on its list of priorities.

That doesn't mean it leaves aspects such as detail, dynamics and rhythmic precision trailing behind - the amplifier skilfully handles complex arrangements and is capable of delivering subtle detail.

Stream The White Stripes' *Seven Nation Army* and that iconic bass line is bouncy, rumbling and has just the right amount of tautness to keep your foot tapping firmly to the floor.

The whine and crunch of the guitar riff sounds textured and has plenty of bite, while the edgy, ragged nature of Jack White's voice is deftly conveyed.

Power with variation

You don't have to strain particularly hard to hear where the Cambridge justifies its extra outlay over the Marantz; there's not only more meat and power behind the screeching guitar solo when it comes in, but greater dynamic variation to it too.

KEY FEATURES



3 x digital inputs



Twin speaker terminals



24-bit DAC

It's able to tie together the drubbing bass line with the thumping drum and vocal more convincingly, and the Cambridge sounds more enamoured with the track's attacking nature.

Hans Zimmer's compositions for *Inception* are appropriately brooding: the tension is maintained throughout, courtesy of expressive slow-building dynamics, and plenty of low-end weight. The dying piano notes at the end of the track have plenty of space to breathe in the open soundstage too.

The search for purity

The Direct mode feature is worth pursuing, as it minimises sonic degradation from the tone controls and aims to supply the purest sound possible.

Delivering in almost every aspect, save for Bluetooth or a USB input, the CXA60 is still one of the most exciting sounding and well featured packages out there.

Got €799 to spend on a new amp? You won't go far wrong by investing it here.

WHAT HI-FI? says

Rating ★★★★★

SOUND ★★★★★

FEATURES ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VERDICT The Cambridge Audio CXA60 is one of the best connected and exciting-sounding amps out there