

Cambridge Audio CXA60 review

If you want to take your budget hi-fi system to another level, the CXA60 is a great option...

WHAT HI-FI?

Our Verdict



A great £500 amplifier that looks and sounds the part – this Cambridge is a big success



For

- Entertaining, enthusiastic delivery
- Snappy and attacking timing
- Deep bass and gripping highs
- Excellent build and finish
- Easy to use
- Good connectivity



Against

- Bluetooth dongle not supplied
- Needs careful partnering

There's a gap in the market for a good €900 integrated stereo amplifier. Or rather, there used to be. The highly accomplished Cambridge CXA60 now fills this space.

Part of the Cambridge Audio's new CX series, the CXA60 integrated stereo amplifier boasts digital inputs, high-resolution audio support and a smart design that is certainly pleasing to the eye. Oh, and it sounds great.

Sound



The CXA60 comes in black or silver finishes and has a clean, minimalist look

The Cambridge CXA60 is immediately likable. It's fluid, snappy and packed with enthusiasm. This is an amplifier that puts musical enjoyment high on its list of priorities.

That doesn't mean it leaves things like detail, dynamics and rhythmic precision trailing behind – the amplifier skilfully handles complex arrangements and is capable of delivering subtle, accurate detail.

Stream The White Stripes' Seven Nation Army and that iconic bassline is bouncy, rumbling and has just the right amount of tautness to keep you hooked.

The CXA60's presentation is slightly forward, but it's not to the amp's detriment. The whine and crunch of the guitar riff sounds textured and has plenty of bite, while the strained, ragged nature of Jack White's voice is deftly conveyed. It's a gripping, entertaining listen.



Thankfully, the energetic performance doesn't cross the line into unruly, overzealous territory, with the Cambridge exercising plenty of control over a song's dynamics and rhythms. Hans Zimmer's compositions for Inception are appropriately brooding, and the tension is maintained throughout.

The strings in Time rise in slow-building intensity, while the drums lend a good helping of sombre weight. The dying piano notes at the end of the track have plenty of space to breathe in the open soundstage, sounding poignant and arresting.

Some of its rival amplifiers, such as the £650 Arcam FMJ A19, are able to dig a bit deeper, reveal a touch more subtlety and reach more open highs – but the Cambridge remains a hugely entertaining and capable listen, especially for its price.

It has a solid sound, and one that manages to be exciting and easy to listen to in equal measure.

Build and design



The CXA60 is capable of streaming music from smartphones over Bluetooth, but you'll need a BT100 dongle

The CXA60 looks very smart indeed. It has a sleek and modern 'floating chassis' design, a sturdy aluminium build with finishes available in either black or silver, and a clean, uncluttered fascia.

It's clear Cambridge Audio has given plenty of thought to every aspect of the design; it looks and feels like a high quality product.

The display is simple and elegant. Buttons coloured clearly in blue are neatly laid out next to their corresponding input label, and turn dark blue when selected.

You'll notice that there's an input button with the Bluetooth icon: the CXA60 is capable of streaming music

from smartphones over Bluetooth (using the higher quality aptX codec), but you'll need to buy a separate BT100 dongle (£70) to make it work.



The air vent on top of the amplifier isn't just for looks, either. It helps cool down the class AB amplifier powering the CXA60's 60W per channel.

Peek inside and you can clearly see the toroidal transformer – it's situated right in the middle of the chassis, a calculated positioning that Cambridge Audio claims ensures low magnetic flux levels, so there's less interference on the signal path.

Other internal design highlights include separate and symmetrical circuit paths to minimise crosstalk issues between the left and right channels.

The Cambridge amplifier is seamless in operation. The on-panel buttons click satisfyingly and respond instantly, as does the smooth volume dial.



The remote is sturdy and well laid out, and it quickly becomes second nature in use

The balance and tonal controls (indicated by the bass and treble clef icons) are nicely made and turn smoothly.

The Direct mode feature is worth a go, as it blocks any interference from the tonal controls and aims to deliver the purest sound possible.

The included remote is a sturdy, well laid out design and quickly becomes second nature in use. You can use the same remote across all of the CX series products, too.

Connectivity and features



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There's a decent spread of analogue and digital

connections, with four line level inputs and two speaker terminals (so you can biwire or run a second pair of speakers) available on the back panel.

Inside, there's a 24-bit/192kHz DAC that supports playback of high-resolution audio files across its two optical and single coaxial inputs. Incidentally, it's the same Wolfson DAC chip used in the DacMagic Plus.

Those hoping for a USB input will have to look at the CXA80 (£750) instead, which sits right above the CXA60 in the CX range.



A 3.5mm auxiliary input is placed on the front panel for plugging in MP3 players or smart devices, alongside a 3.5mm headphone jack.

There's also scope to use the CXA60 as a preamplifier, and to plug in a subwoofer if you want to extend the low-end heft of its performance.

Cambridge continues its helpful policy of labelling all inputs both ways, making it easier to read the labels when leaning over the product.

Verdict

We're impressed with the Cambridge CXA60. It's an amplifier that delivers in every aspect. It looks smart, it has a wide spread of connections, and its enthusiastic, detailed and rhythmically cohesive performance is a joy to listen to. We like using it, too.

Its closest rival, the Award-winning Arcam A19, has a more refined and mature sound. However, it's pricier and doesn't have any digital inputs.

At €899, the CXA60 offers a far more exciting and competitive package. We think you'll like it – maybe even love it.