



Cambridge CXC/CXA60 €1428

This new combo suggests that budget buyers can have both sound quality and style. Does it deliver?

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Cambridge CXC
€529/CXA60€899

ORIGIN
UK/China

TYPE
CD player &
integrated amplifier

WEIGHT
CXC: 4.7kg
CXA60: 8.3kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD) CXC:
430 x 85 x 315mm,
CXA60:
430 x 115 x 341mm

FEATURES
• Quoted power
output: 2x 60W
(8ohm)
• 4x RCA line input;
1x 3.5 minijack input
• 2x Toslink; 1x
coaxial digital input

DISTRIBUTOR
Audio Partnership

WEBSITE
cambridgeaudio.
com

Few manufacturers have come to encapsulate the budget end of the hi-fi market quite like Cambridge Audio (as it used to be known). In the eighties it made exotic high-end kit, but reinvented itself in the early nineties with some superb affordable CD players and DACs, and since then it hasn't looked back. The products have traditionally been a little mundane looking, but they have consistently outperformed many price rivals. This new combo – sporting the new shortened 'Cambridge' monicker – attempts to keep that excellent sonic pedigree, but go the extra mile in terms of styling. It's certainly a big step up from what we're used to from the brand, aesthetically. The CXC is a dedicated CD transport, and it pairs with the CXA60 amplifier.

The CXC is said to be optimised for audio CDs – an important point in a world of optical drives designed to read DVD-ROMs, adapted for hi-fi use,

and uses the company's own special S3 servo, which is said to give very low jitter. The design is neat and it has an aluminium fascia and pressed steel case, damped to cut resonance. The matching CXA60 surfs the zeitgeist of modern amps, sporting three digital inputs, plus a BT100 Bluetooth dongle (€99) – which feed the integral Wolfson WM8740 DAC chip running at up to 24-bit/192kHz resolution. It's a Class AB design pushing out a claimed 60W RMS per side via an Alps volume control, and has a low-flux toroidal transformer to help it along the way. Analogue inputs are standard too, of course, including a 3.5mm socket on the front.

Sound quality

Despite being only slightly more expensive than the Yamaha combo (reviewed on page 37), there's a step up in performance, and it's a considerable one at that. Fascinatingly, even hooking the Cambridge CD transport up to the Yamaha amplifier improves things noticeably, but when the Cambridge amp is added, the system really begins to soar.

Essentially, the sound is bigger, punchier and very much more vibrant. The Yamaha is enjoyably smooth, but seems to be lacking a whole layer of dynamics; the percussion on *King* is dramatically more accented via the Cambridge, and you can hear rim shots jumping out of the mix that the other cheaper

PERFECT MATCH

Cambridge offers a good range of formats in a different way to the others here, thanks to its use of a CD transport. The CXC has no built-in digital converter – this isn't needed because it feeds the digital audio stream to the CXA60 directly, to play through its built-in Wolfson WM8740 DAC. It's an elegant solution because DACs aren't duplicated, meaning that money can be saved and spent elsewhere. The matching amplifier seems to have got the lion's share, with three digital inputs, plus a socket for the optional Bluetooth dongle giving near CD-quality aptX streaming from smartphones, tablets and computers. Like the other two budget combos, no USB input is fitted. Neither is UPnP streaming available via either the CXC or the CXA60; network music fans will have to buy the CXN Network Music Player. Unlike its other budget rivals, there also isn't a phono stage fitted.

designs miss. This all makes the music flow so much better, and come alive. Even vocals are discernibly better and more tuneful.

Moving to the brash but melodic sound of *Lorelei*, and the Cambridge combo manages to give more detail than the more affordable duos here, but in a smoother way. Despite this, the texture of the instruments is far more realistic; you can hear the chiming sound of those early digital synthesisers better. The same goes for the Coldplay tune; this pairing seems able to unpick the mix and throw loads of detail out, yet it is smoother and more immersive too. The sound of Herbie Mann's flute finally begins to ring true on *Summertime*, too. This is set against a far deeper and more spacious soundstage, with instruments located much more accurately in the recorded acoustic. ▶

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

FEATURES

★★★★★

LIKE: Propulsive, musical sound; fine styling; decent build; facilities

DISLIKE: Nothing at the price

WE SAY: This great value combination punches way above its price

OVERALL

★★★★★

