

MUSIC STREAMERS

Cambridge CXN €1099

FOR Impressive and enjoyable sound quality; sleek design

AGAINST Nothing at this price



The years haven't taken their toll on the Award-winning Cambridge CXN - it still looks as fresh and modern as the day we first saw it (spring 2015). And it remains a stonkingly good high-resolution music streamer for €1099

It sounds fantastic. There's an enthusiastic drive to the performance, combining subtlety, snappy timing and rich detail to deliver a sound that's just wonderfully entertaining. It's a punchy sound that has a really good grasp of rhythm and low-end impact.

Music handling

We've seldom heard a sub-thousand-pound streamer sound so muscular. Basslines are meaty, textured and bound along to the lively sense of rhythm.

The stop and start of notes are precisely and snappily delivered, and there's seemingly no end to the streamer's energetic drive. The CXN is skilful at conveying the space between instruments, too, with Ghostpoet's atmospheric *X Marks The Spot* filling the room with easy dynamics.

The sound isn't overly smooth, but the Cambridge delivers a full-bodied performance. The CXN certainly doesn't hold back from delivering the full impact of a song, the intensity of The Dead Weathers' brooding, screeching *60 Feet Tall*, for example, being fully conveyed.

Still unrivalled

The admirably balanced tone in evidence never puts a foot out of place, either. Drums hit accurately, the bass digs deep, and the top end sparkles - but stops shy of sounding coarse. The midrange in particular sounds lovely, with voices fully fleshed out and packed with character. The streamer is not fussy with file type, either; it sounds fluid and dynamic with high-resolution and Spotify-streamed tracks alike.

You'd think rivals would have bettered the CXN in the ensuing years, but no other product has managed it yet. Oppo's Sonica DAC had a go, though. Pricier at £800, it boasts similar features. It sounds rich, solid and weighty, but doesn't offer the kind of musical, agile and dynamic presentation the CXN is capable of.

The CXN is decked out with all the latest streaming features, so it's crucial

The 4.3in screen is packed with information but never looks cluttered

you have a stable network connection. You can connect via ethernet, but Cambridge includes a wi-fi antenna if you prefer a wireless connection. Setting up the network is swift, and we experience no dropouts.

Apple users can stream songs stored on their devices using AirPlay, but we're not too keen on the rather weedy sound quality that results.

The front or back USB ports can charge your iDevice (or Android handset for that matter), but for playback, both inputs are compatible only with USB hard drives and memory sticks.

Hi-res files

The CXN also features Spotify Connect and internet radio. File support is extensive: all the popular formats such as WAV, FLAC, AIFF, ALAC and MP3 are supported, plus DSD 64 files (which you can play only using the back USB input).

All digital inputs on the CXN are capable of playing high-resolution files of up to 24-bit/192kHz, and they can be upsampled to 384kHz, too. That includes the USB type B input for your laptop, and optical and coaxial inputs.

Rival Oppo Sonica DAC offers a much higher file support - up to 32-bit/768kHz - but, realistically, 24-bit/192kHz is actually the upper limit for any mainstream music files.

There's also a pair each of RCA and balanced XLR outputs, along with two digital outputs.

We have to hand it to Cambridge Audio - the CXN is one classy-looking streamer. It's a neat, modern construction that's moved away from the more traditional looks of the previous Azur 351 and 651 components.

We have to give special mention to that control dial, too. It has a smooth, perfectly weighted resistance, and

the way the menu responds is really rather delightful.

KEY FEATURES



Ethernet and wi-fi



USB type B input

Product of the Year

We tend to use the remote interchangeably with the new-look Cambridge Connect app, as the app is more suited to scrolling and selecting lists of songs. There are some hiccups in operation, but it's not enough to stop us from using the app.

With two Product of the Year Awards to its name, we shouldn't be surprised that the Cambridge CXN continues to deliver. It's a joy to listen to. The functionality, design and ease of use are the best we've seen at this price, and the engaging, punchy sound is sure to win people over.

WHAT HI-FI? says

Rating ★★★★★

SOUND	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★

VERDICT A stylish, feature-packed streamer that sounds great and is an absolute joy to use