



AMPS/RECEIVERS

NETWORKED AV RECEIVER

DENON AVR-X1300W



Denon's latest receiver models are the fourth generation of the 'X' series. While superficially they may seem pretty similar to last year's, some interesting stuff has been happening under the surface, even on what qualifies as the entry-level unit, the seven-channel AVR-X1300W.

EQUIPMENT

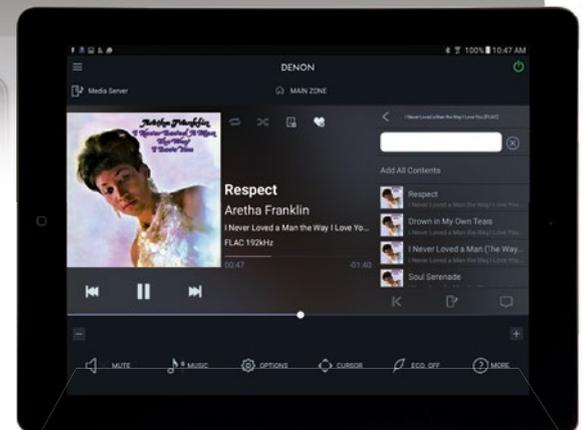
'Entry level' in this context does not mean 'basic'. Take that W at the end of the model number — it stands for 'Wireless', for wireless networking. Denon receivers have had that for a couple of years, but this year they score new Wi-Fi modules that offer dual-band connectivity — both 2.4GHz and 5GHz. The latter allows higher throughput and can take the load off the often overused 2.4GHz Wi-Fi space in a home.

Nor can the processing here be considered entry-level — there's the latest Dolby Atmos and DTS:X decoding, and the Dolby Surround processing, all enabling the use of ceiling speakers, or Atmos-enabled speakers that bounce the overhead channels off your ceiling. True it is

limited to just two overhead channels — the seven channels in total therefore give you the choice of conventional 7.1-channel surround, or 5.1 plus overhead, but not 7.1 and overhead at the same time.

Are seven amplifier channels of 80W each entry-level? Hardly, when they're measured at hi-fi specification levels. And you can redirect a couple of these to deliver an independent stereo source in a second zone, or to bi-amp the front speakers, or even to drive a Speaker B pair. All channels support four-ohm loudspeakers too.

The connections are relatively entry-level, perhaps — just six HDMI sockets, only two analogue audio inputs and two optical digital audio inputs, plus composite video. There are precisely seven pairs of speaker terminals, so you can't wire up alternative configurations and simply switch between them. So nothing fancy there. But you do get, in addition to the wired and wireless networking mentioned, Bluetooth, and a USB socket on the front panel for playing music from USB storage, or from an Apple device, including



iPods. You can play or pause or skip backwards and forwards using the receiver's remote control with these devices.

'Entry-level' here even includes full support for Ultra High Definition video standards, along with HDCP 2.2 so there's full compatibility with the latest and best sources.

So we reckon it's pretty amazing what an 'entry-level' receiver provides these days.

PERFORMANCE

Setting up was performed using Denon's usual wizard. This is highly detailed and can either hold your hand through every step of the process,



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Seven channels of power, the latest surround standards, network streaming, online music services, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth — and they call this entry-level?

including wiring, or you can skip steps. There's also a shortcut Wi-Fi connection set-up using an iOS device. A bit of the wizard helps you set up TV Audio, useful for ensuring the Audio Return Channel works. There's Audyssey MultEQ room and speaker calibration using a cardboard stand and microphone, conducting measurements from at least three different positions, and up to eight. We did some tweaking of the resulting crossover frequencies, but Audyssey gathers enough information so that it can still provide EQ adjustments with the new settings.

The sound quality was very good. There were no significant limits imposed on volume by the 80W specification. The whole system went extremely loud without any amplifier limitations becoming evident.

For movies, we enjoyed a variety of Ultra HD Blu-ray and Blu-ray titles, most encoded with Dolby Atmos. Plus several movies recorded from HD free-to-air TV. The latter were two channels only, so we applied Dolby Surround to those.

While four overhead speakers probably is slightly preferable for full Dolby Atmos and Dolby Surround, these systems do take account of your speaker allotment and optimise for it, so there was hardly any reduction in the impressiveness of the surround sound-field; the system just steered the sound more with the front and rear speakers rather than the overhead ones.

The surround field was consistently impressive. Even the big sound on a big production like 'Man of Steel' on UHD Blu-ray was well handled.

For stereo music (with EQ turned off) the receiver was also a pleasure. It handled the front stereo pair with authority and with plenty of reserves. Articulation was fine and stereo imaging was properly three-dimensional.

The receiver doesn't do any processing of video except overlay its on-screen display when you do such things as adjust the volume control. You can

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switch this off. The overlay didn't work with 4K content passing through the unit.

We checked the HDMI inputs and they all supported HDCP 2.2 and full 4K, 60p, 4:4:4 signals. In other words, it's good to go with Ultra HD Blu-ray.

The network functions are fully up to date; indeed you lose nothing here over premium receivers. We streamed music from a NAS server over the network up to 24-bit/192kHz PCM (in FLAC format), and double-rate Direct Stream Digital (DSD128 or 5.6MHz DSD). Plus Apple Lossless up to 24/96 and, more mundanely, AIFF, WAV, MP3, WMA and AAC (including iTunes purchases). You can use the Denon control app for this, or a DLNA app like BubbleUPnP on Android or the Sony Audio Remote app on iOS. FLAC files were delivered, whether using the Denon app or 'rendered', without gaps between tracks, just as they ought to be.

If you're using iOS, then of course you might prefer to just use AirPlay, which worked highly effectively and reliably as well. As it also did for Spotify Connect. There are also plenty of internet radio stations provided by the excellent vTuner portal. In addition to Denon's control app (much improved over previous generations), you can control it through a browser interface by typing in its IP address.

The Bluetooth connectivity worked well, too. It supports the AAC codec in addition to SBC; AirPlay will provide higher quality if you're using an iOS Wi-Fi device.

CONCLUSION

Of course you can spend more to get still more power, inputs and flexibility of set-up. But what the Denon AVR-X1300W provides as an entry-level AV receiver is extraordinary, with an excellent set of features and fine performance at the price. ■

Denon AVR-X1300W networked AV receiver

- Solid all-round performance
- Excellent feature set
- High value

- No line-level outputs for upgrading

Price: \$1099

Tested with firmware: 1100-1892-6022

Power: 7 x 80W (8 ohms, 20-20,000kHz, 0.08% THD, two channels driven)

Inputs: 6 x HDMI, 2 x composite video, 2 x analogue stereo, 2 x optical digital, 1 x USB, 1 x Ethernet, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth

Outputs: 1 x HDMI, 1 x composite video, 2 x subwoofer, 7 pairs speaker binding posts, 1 x 6.5mm headphone

Zone: Assignable power amplifiers

Other: 1 x set-up mic

Dimensions (whd): 434 x 151 x 339mm

Weight: 8.5kg

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