



AVR-X1400H offers HEOS for all

This low-price AVR doesn't look any different from its predecessor, but offers new functionality – and a balanced sound – that may make it a perfect fit. **Danny Phillips** heads to Scarif

WHILE SOME AVR and processor marques can seem loathe to continually refresh their product range year after year, it's a challenge that Denon rises to with relish, adding value to new models without hiking up prices, thus giving buyers a reason to part with their cash. The brand's entry-level and midrange receivers include more features every year while avoiding a drop in performance and a big price rise.

The latest example of this is the 7.2-channel AVR-X1400H, which spices up the specifications sheet of last year's AVR-X1300W with in-built HEOS multiroom streaming – appearing for the first time across Denon's entire AVR range – and HDMI passthrough of new HDR variants. It does Dolby Atmos 5.1.2 and DTS:X out of the box too.

The addition of HEOS is a major win. Should you have any HEOS speakers, you can add this receiver (and your cinema speaker system) to your house-wide multiroom setup. Even if you don't own or plan to get other HEOS gear, integrating it within this AVR means a wider range of streaming services, and slicker app-based user control, come into play.

Of internal tweaks, the most notable is the implementation of a new 32-bit DAC (Asahi Kasei's AK4458), used previously in the 2016-era AVR-X4300.

This pricier option, says Denon, was chosen after extensive listening tests. The promise is of greater resolution and greater dynamics over the TI PCM1690 DAC employed in the AVR-X1300W.

One area that hasn't been updated is the external design. The chassis again sports a gentle curve and large input/volume dials. It looks neat but is only available in black, and the plasticky central portion of the fascia lets you know you're shopping at the affordable end of the market. As ever, this feels a far cry from the fridge-like receivers of old.

The display itself is big and shouty, giving full format names and sources in bright digits. Below it sit a row of buttons, including Quick Select keys (handy) and keys for tuner presets (probably not so handy). Below these are front-panel inputs – HDMI, USB, 6.5mm headphone socket and an input for Denon's setup mic.

Around the back are five more HDMI inputs, tethered to a single ARC-enabled output. There's no dual-screen/Zone 2 video functionality here. Still, all HDMI inputs are primed for 4K/60p, HDCP 2.2, HDR10 and Dolby Vision, with HLG support due to be added via firmware update this Autumn.

As a modern receiver for the HDMI and networking generation, the absence of coaxial digital ports, and

just two stereo analogue inputs, is acceptable. Integrated Wi-Fi brings all the usual goodies – AirPlay, Spotify Connect and DLNA music streaming from PCs and NAS drives – but the beauty is that you can oversee playback from Denon's HEOS smartphone app. Hi-res FLAC, WAV, AIFF, DSD and ALAC files are supported, while TIDAL, TuneIn and others join Spotify on the streaming roster.

This app itself is terrific, effortlessly flinging music to multiple multiroom speakers. Presentation is top drawer; it's logically laid out and loads up NAS drive content without batting an eyelid. Another app, Denon's AVR Remote 2016, is a surrogate remote control, offering a more traditional range of AVR functions. You can flit between the two controllers with a tap of the screen.

Older-school users can stick with the physical remote. The button arrangement is simple but it feels a bit plasticky in general.

The Denon's HDMI-piped onscreen menus are basic but get the point across. A Setup Assistant guides you through initial setup using foolproof menus while Audyssey's MultEQ room correction system (not the MultEQ XT32 iteration found on the company's higher-end receivers) aims to sort out any acoustic problems and create an even soundfield, before giving you a choice of running the calibrated audio in Reference, L/R Bypass, Flat or Off modes.

Note that MultEQ requires a minimum of three readings (you can do more if you like) to work, so factor in a little setup time. More in-depth tweaking can be done via Audyssey's MultEQ Editor app, a £20 download for iOS/Android devices.

I'm one with the Force...

As with Sony's STR-DN1080 [p48], this is another affordable receiver claiming the sort of power rating you might usually associate with a high-end dedicated amp – in this case, 145W per channel. Dig a little deeper into Denon's specs and an 80W-per-channel measurement (20Hz-20kHz, 8 Ohm, 0.08% THD, two channels driven) perhaps gives a fairer indication of its prowess.

And while not a beast, the AVR-X1400H still sounds muscular. As Jedha City is destroyed in *Rogue One* (Blu-ray, DTS-HD), the scale of the scene is suitably immense. A wall of sound thunders across the room towards you, underpinned by solid LFE. The Denon's sound is cohesive and well-balanced, not allowing any particular frequency to dominate.

Amid the carnage, first-class detail reproduction shines through. Clear, precise top-end info adorns every explosion. Surround information is deftly orchestrated too. X-Wings and Tie Fighters scream between speakers with speed and



SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY ATMOS: Yes **DTS:X:** Yes **THX:** No **MULTICHANNEL INPUT:** No **MULTICHANNEL PRE-OUT:** Yes, 7.1 **POWER OUTPUT (CLAIMED):** 7 x 145W (into 6 Ohms) **MULTIROOM:** Yes, Zone 2, plus HEOS integration **AV INPUTS:** 3 x composite; 2 x digital audio (1 x optical and 1 x coaxial) **HDMI:** 6 x inputs; 1 x output (all v2.0) **VIDEO UPSCALING:** No, 4K passthrough **COMPONENT VIDEO:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 434(w) x 151(h) x 339(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 8.5kg

FEATURES: HEOS multiroom streaming and smartphone app; Ethernet; Bluetooth; Wi-Fi; AirPlay; Spotify Connect; DLNA streaming; FLAC, WAV, AIFF, DSD and ALAC playback; TIDAL, SoundCloud, Napster, TuneIn Radio; Audyssey MultEQ auto calibration; compatible with Audyssey MultEQ Editor app (£20); dual subwoofer outputs; Dolby Surround Upmixer; DTS Neural:X

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ROGUE ONE: A STAR WARS STORY: This spin-off from the main franchise doesn't let the side down with its streamlined story, sumptuous visuals and thrillingly cinematic DTS-HD MA 7.1 soundmix. A great home cinema demo disc.

purpose. The soundstage is broad and immersive, with accurate effects placement during the beach battle on Scarif. This expressive presentation, coupled with clarity and organisation, makes the action easy to follow.

Switch over to *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (Blu-ray, DTS-HD) and the brilliant freeway shoot-out is a blast. The action is weighty yet nimble; car engines roar and snappy gunshots have a tight bass thud. You can crank the volume without ruffling the Denon's feathers, testament to the AVR's careful tuning.

Yet although it conveys gunshots and explosions crisply, you might think it could do with attacking them a bit harder. Denon's characteristic smoothness ensures listenability at loud volumes but lacks the bite you get with other receivers.

This approach works well with music. The AVR-X1400H's natural warmth and finesse gave me chills when streaming Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*. The soul masterpiece is drenched in detail, with a smooth balance and tight, groovy basslines.

Everything you need?

The low/midrange receiver market is a sweet spot for Denon, and the AVR-X1400H is a good showcase for exactly what £430 gets you these days. The option of running 5.1.2 or 7.1, app-assisted control, automated EQ, Bluetooth/network streaming with a strong selection of services – it's all here. Certainly, legacy inputs are meagre and the onscreen UI appears dated, but I can't see potential buyers complaining.

In use, it has the refinement and detail for which Denon is renowned. Listeners who like their soundtracks a bit more feisty might be underwhelmed, but there's no denying the AVR-X1400H's appeal. ■

HCC VERDICT



Denon AVR-X1400H
→ £430 → www.denon.co.uk

WE SAY: Another midrange marvel from Denon, offering a superb feature list – enhanced by HEOS and Dolby Vision support – and detailed performance at a great price.

1. The AVR-X1400H looks identical to its X1300W predecessor

2. Well-spaced, colour-coded speaker terminals make wiring an easy job

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Seven-channel AVR with Atmos, DTS:X and HEOS

POSITION: Denon's entry-level 7.1 model

PEERS: Yamaha RX-V483; Pioneer VSX-932