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## NAD L73 DVD Receiver

By Jeff Fritz



Most explanations concerning the integrated amplifier extol the component's simplistic design. There's less cabling than for a preamp-power amp combination, one chassis for the manufacturer to sink the budget into (instead of multiple boxes), and no potential amp-to-preamp matching issues.

There are some fine integrations -- both of the two-channel variety as well as five-channel models -- on the market today.

Entry-level separates, on the other hand, are touted because they have obvious advantages: greater chassis space, which usually means bigger, more-well-regulated power supplies; less constraint on component layout because things aren't so crowded; greater physical shielding from section to section (i.e., separation between analog, digital, and video circuitry).

So should you buy separates or an integrated component? Either has the potential to be good, maybe even great. But what's best? Perhaps the better question is, What's best for your situation and your budget? The NAD L73 DVD receiver is an all-in-one component combining a DVD player, a multichannel amplifier, a home-theater processor, and an AM/FM tuner. It costs \$999 USD. Think of it as a home-theater-in-a-box without the speakers.

### What you get for your thousand dollars

First off, you get 45 watts into five channels, and because the L73 is from NAD, you can be pretty confident that the watts are real watts. When all channels are play-

ing at the same time into real loudspeakers, there are at least 45 watts at your disposal. The stars don't have to be aligned in a particular order for the L73 to produce its rated power. Believe me when I tell you that NAD's specifications are something the company holds in high regard -- a stance that should be a given with electronics makers, but often isn't. Knowing the real-world power output at your disposal gives this product points in my book. Although rated modestly -- but based on my use with some admittedly large speakers -- there's a good likelihood that the L73 is actually more powerful than many of the full-sized home-theater receivers on the market today.

The L73 is the best-looking of all the NAD products I've encountered (OK, excepting those in NAD's brand-new Masters series, which are big bucks compared to the L73 and which I haven't used -- yet!). Its titanium color is a step up from the blue-gray of the company's other products. The oblong buttons, readout window, and disc tray give the L73 a distinctive look without



being flashy or busy. Although not comparable in heft to any of the super receivers populating the market today, the L73 is substantial at 26 pounds, though its modest dimensions (17 1/8"W x 5 1/4"H x 14 3/4"D) allow it to be placed on almost any small to moderately

sized shelf or TV stand.

Processing options are basic but acceptable, fitting most systems in which the L73 is likely to be used. You get decoding for DTS 5.1 and Dolby Digital 5.1, which in my book is all that most folks need for DVD-Video. If you want 6.1-channel sound you need to look at more complex solutions than the L73, because, well, you'll have a more complex system that requires more processing power, more amplification, and more money. But honestly, with a system budget under \$2000, buying five good speakers to pair with the L73 is a better option than splitting that same budget for six or seven speakers. Quality first, quantity last.

Other processing options, which are designed to address your older two-channel movies and CD collection, include Dolby Pro Logic II and NAD's proprietary EARS mode. These are both excellent options for turning stereo software into multichannel sound. EARS, in particular, can give you a rather subtle nudge into multichannel, as opposed to knocking you over the head with swirling effects. If you like the subdued effect of tasteful surround, you might enjoy listening to your CD collection with EARS, especially the recordings of live performances where natural ambience is present on the disc. EARS will draw that out and present it with finesse and class.

Next up is the progressive-scan DVD player with component-video outputs, S-video outputs, and composite outputs. All of the functions present on mid-priced DVD players are present on the L73. Again, the very cutting edge of video -- HDMI outputs, for instance -- are absent, but for most folks that won't matter.

One convenient aspect of the L73 is that the myriad functions are controlled with one handy remote control. That alone will seal the deal for some people. The L73 is about simplicity while not sacrificing the few complications that you absolutely must have. I've recommended the L73 to buyers like my in-laws precisely because I know they can operate it from the get-go. An AM/FM RDS tuner with plenty of presets is included, too.

### Using the L73

The performance of this little NAD

DVD receiver met my admittedly lofty expectations. I watched quite a few DVD-Video movies and a number of concerts over the L73, and I can honestly say that I wasn't disappointed once. The video, as shown over my Sharp Aquos flat-panel LCD monitor, was displayed with properly saturated colors and crisp, clear images. I watched the entire first season of *Lost* on the L73, and it was always impressive. Scenes displaying the ocean's varying depths were replete with detail, while the dark green of the jungle's trees and brush were rendered with effective contrast and good color accuracy. The freckles on the face of Kate (Evangeline Lilly) -- the cute-as-a-button-but-able-to-whup-the-men star of the show -- were lifelike in their presentation as well. Motion could cause the L73 some problems, creating artifacts that I didn't see over my Esoteric DV-50 universal audio/video player (\$5500), but that's also true of most DVD players I've used -- some costing multiples of the L73's price. Overall I was quite pleased with the video image.

I remember borrowing an inexpensive Sony receiver from a friend when I moved into my home a few years ago. I needed to have some tunes and had not unpacked my heavy-duty gear. Expecting it to sound at least passable, I was shocked at what I heard. The sound, I recall, reminded me of that from a boom-box with a wet blanket placed over it: heavy, slow, thick, and muffled. It was unbelievably bad. I listened to another entry-level receiver just recently, this time a Pioneer model that's also around \$300. It was better than the Sony, but still pretty poor overall. The sound of the Pioneer was bleached and thin. The bass that was present was muddy and indistinct. That model was rated by the manufacturer to deliver 100 watts to five channels.

Imagine my delight when I heard the L73 for the first



time. It made my Paradigm Reference Studio 100 v.3 speakers -- all five of them -- sound big and dynamic; in other words, it let the inherent quality of the speakers come through. Although I enjoyed a number of 5.1-channel discs through the L73 I also listened to my fair share of good old CDs using the L73's EARS processing. Probably my favorite example was Eva Cassidy's Live at Blues Alley [Blix Street GS-10046]. The ambient sounds in the recording are much more realistically portrayed by surround sound than with simple stereo. Sounds coming from the rear of the room made the soundstage expand three-dimensionally. The processing was not intrusive -- in fact, its strength was its subtlety with tracks such as "Tall Trees in Georgia" and "Fields of Gold." The result was that one of my favorite recordings became even more enjoyable because it was converted to tasteful surround sound.

Sarah McLachlan's Afterglow Live on DVD-Video is a fine illustration of why multichannel sound, when enhanced by clean video, is more common on the store shelves than SACD and DVD-Audio. This live concert is presented so that the viewer gets truly immersed in the experience -- the experience of seeing and hearing the show as it unfolded. Frankly, this is what the (hopefully) coming HD-DVD and Blu-ray formats can expand upon: excellent video coupled with crisp multichannel sound. The result? The NAD L73 was completely enthralling due to the heartfelt manner in which the artist presented her life's work. There was no hint of compromise in the sound that said "mini component" or "all-in-one system." The sound was big-rig dynamic. Instruments were delineated nicely, and the vocals were clear and present. Ambient sounds washed over my living room without washing out the nuances of the recording.

The midrange clarity that I heard over the McLachlan DVD was also prominent with CDs I listened to in stereo. Johnny Cash's American IV: The Man Comes Around [American 440 077 083-0] presents the Man in Black in his last days, and his voice is showing the signs of his many years of hard work. Nonetheless, his strength and conviction are obvious on my favorite track, "The Man Comes Around." This is a case where the singer's emotions are contained within the texture of his voice. The L73 did not mask this quality at all, making the track effective and emotional.

Discrete high-resolution surround, as fed through the

L73's 5.1-channel inputs via a Samsung DVD-HD841 universal audio/video player, crossed the threshold into audiophile-approved performance. Stowkowski's transcription of Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition on 5.0-channel SACD [Naxos 6.110101] was presented in all its grandeur. It sounded clear, spatially accurate, and had incredibly clean bass.

#### **Who might buy it? A lot of people, that's who.**

The NAD L73 is a highly-recommendable component. Maybe it's not an easy sell for the rabid SoundStage!-reading stereo enthusiast, but it is a sure-fire bet for average folks looking for a terrific product in one easy-to-manage, attractive package. My in-laws are a perfect example. They appreciate good video and good sound but are not into equipment upgrading and auditioning components. (They would say that's what I'm for, and it's a role I gladly accept.) The L73 makes my job simple. It will work beautifully with their Samsung LCD TV, it will fit on a small shelf without drawing attention to itself, and its illuminated learning remote can provide control over the whole system. If NAD's reputation is anything to go by, the L73 should last them for years and be trouble-free.

Am I making too much of the convenience factor? Not when you consider the fantastic performance that, in this case, comes with it. Consider this: Making an established product (the TV) flat created an entire market segment. Form matters. Although the NAD L73 isn't likely to start a revolution, it will appeal to a wide-ranging audience. I'm one of them, and I know there are a whole lot more people out there who will agree.

...Jeff Fritz

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**NAD L73 DVD Receiver**

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