

Screen sensation

The advent of Blu-ray, and its increasing acceptance into the home theatre mainstream as disc and player prices drop, has brought with it the need for some changes in the accepted specifications for AV receivers.

To make the most of the high-resolution multi-channel soundtracks that are theoretically available on Blu-ray discs, the latest generation of AV receivers and processors have to be compatible with Dolby TrueHD and DTS HD, as well as the discrete Dolby Digital Plus.

And as full-HD plasma and LCD panels increasingly become the norm, a receiver's ability to pass on or even upscale HD video, and to transfer both video and audio data via HDMI, plays a further, key role in the overall home theatre experience.

Enter the NAD T747, a smart and full-featured AV receiver that recognises the new challenges brought about by the Blu-ray format, and responds accordingly.

Interestingly, NAD offers the T747 in two finishes – graphite (grey) and titanium (silver). The former is the more traditional colour for

traditionalists, while the latter looks brighter and, arguably, more upmarket.

The choice between these two is not merely cosmetic, though: the titanium version retails for R14 400, while the graphite finish adds R2 200 to the bill. Functions and features are identical. While the review unit was a graphite unit, I'd opt for the titanium simply for the R2 200 saving.

Either way, the NAD looks the smart, functional part. Its designers have kept the fascia simple and uncluttered, with pride of place given to a large, clearly legible alphanumeric display.

The front panel switchgear is clearly presented and easy to understand, and there's a front input panel for quick and convenient connection of game consoles, camcorders, digital cameras and the like.

The rear of an AV receiver always seems like an ergonomic nightmare, and the NAD doesn't fare much better, although the input and output grouping, as well as the labelling, does at least make identifying inputs easier.

The good news is that there is ample

provision for HDMI and video component inputs – vital considering how quickly HD-ready and full HD displays are becoming the home theatre norm. A 7.1 pre-output and 7.1 main input set allows the connection of external processors, or additional power amplifiers. Also included is a dedicated iPod port to allow connection of the NAD IPD-2 iPod dock.

Equally welcome is the NAD's video upscaling capability to full HD, 1920x1080 standards. It achieves this via the now ubiquitous Faroudja DCDi video processing and scaling chip.

Worth noting at this point is that the T747 offers a second zone of operation, with fixed or variable-level audio, as well as video, being outputted to a second zone. A second zone-specific remote control is also provided.

Talking of remotes, the NAD's main remote control handset also allows the operation of other NAD components such as DVD and Blu-ray players, and CD players.

Hooking up various components is a fairly simple task. The binding posts are sturdy



Vital Stats

enough, and will accept a wide variety of termination, or even bare-stranded wire. The various inputs and outputs are clearly demarcated, and it's all fairly logical.

The NAD's ease of use extends beyond plugging in the various ancillaries, and hooking up the speakers. It also provides an auto-calibration system that sets up levels, delays and equalisation for each of the channels in the 7.1 configuration.

These auto-cal systems have become better over the years, and in AVSA's virtually soundproof listening studio, there were no extraneous sounds to throw the results off kilter. The result was a pretty good initial, automatically generated speaker set-up.

However, I did end up tweaking the subwoofer and surround channel levels, and also found that swapping between Dolby and DTS formats often required further adjustments. That just goes to show how divergent soundtrack mixing levels are...

The NAD's graphical user interface is one of the better designs around, with a crisp look and intuitive menu and command structures. A description of the various adjustment and set-up parameters would occupy too much space, but trust me: even the most committed fiddler will find enough to adjust and specify.

However, it is a powerful utility that provides comprehensive set-up of the sound modes associated with each input, as well as allowing source input allocations to be changed or confirmed, while source inputs can also be renamed to reflect specific components.

It is worth spending a bit of time going through the set-up menu in detail and to tweak the various aspects to suit a specific application, or personal preference. It can certainly make the difference between a riveting or an indifferent movie (and music) experience.

As mentioned, the NAD T747 was set up in the AVSA listening studio, coupled to a Sony Bravia LCD panel, while the source signal was provided by a Harman Kardon BDPI0 Blu-ray player. Connectivity was HDMI throughout, although I also tried component video and coaxial digital audio as an alternative.

The T747 required a bit of running in, but was sounding more than handy after 50 hours or so, and had reached its optimum after another 20-30 hours thereafter. I was expecting it to be a pretty good in sonic terms, and so it proved to be.

Claimed power output continues to be a bone of contention for NAD's engineers. They

Channels7.1
Power output.....7 x 120 watts
 continuous

Surround sound formats
Dolby TrueHD and below,
 DTS HD Master and below

Audio DAC.....24-bit/192 kHz

Frequency response.....5 Hz – 20 kHz

Signal-to-noise ratio.....>100 dB
 (rated power at 8 ohm)

HDMI inputs/outputs.....4/1

AV inputs/outputs4/1

Audio inputs/outputs.....2/1

Digital inputs/outputs4/2

Dimensions (WxHxD)
435 x 167 x 394 mm

Weight.....13,3 kg

PRICER14 400 (titanium finish)
R16 600 (graphite finish)

VERDICT

Robust, well executed AV receiver compatible with all the latest surround formats. Vivid video, but it's this receiver's sonic skills that really impress. Rich enough in features, too, especially given the price.

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maintain that their traditionally conservative figures provide a more accurate, real-world indication of power capability than the more usual, laboratory-based statistics.

Thus, the 7 x 60 watts of simultaneous full disclosure power quoted by NAD, delivered by seven identical, high-current discrete output devices, should not be considered the same at the RMS or IHF ratings employed by other marques.

NAD claims that power quality is more important than power quantity, and that its figures pertain to the challenging 4 ohm load of a real-world speaker, with all channels driven at the same time, over a full 20 Hz to 20 kHz frequency band, and at the rated distortion. Minimum continuous power is quoted as 7 x 120 watts.

I can tell you, however, that the NAD always sounds more powerful and more authoritative than its power output figures may suggest. It has no shortage of oomph, and also doesn't run out of breath, even when asked to deal with power-sapping movie effects.

This is a receiver that always seems to have

something in reserve, and delivers punishing sonic effects with verve and control. Vivality, it also has pace and real dynamic punch on its side, so that soundtracks are delivered with the clarity and slam their creators intended.

Of course, there's more to good surround sound than just sonic muscle. The NAD's digital-to-analogue conversion, and its Dolby and DTS decoding abilities (both matrixed and discrete) were more than admirable, with an overriding sense of authenticity created by tonal range and sonic integration.

The individual channels meshed convincingly, allowing an all-important 360-degree soundstage to be credibly created, while ensuring that centre channel-based dialogue remained clear and articulate.

The potential of high-resolution lossless surround sound was amply demonstrated by the NAD. Although Blu-ray releases employing these latest-generation formats are few and far between, a Dolby sampler showed just what can be achieved – and it's thrilling stuff!

However, in line with NAD's focus on real-life performance, the T747 remains an excellent performer with more mundane material such as plain old 7.1 and even 5.1 DVDs, and its considerable sonic heritage is always apparent.

That even goes for stereo: the T747 had that snappy, boisterous, full sound that has become NAD trademark, together with lucid, finely focussed imaging, and staging so expansive it was easy to believe that it somehow slipped into surround mode.

Unlike many receivers, it also retained the deftness and the delicacy so often needed to transform a performance from mundane to memorable levels. The T747 has both momentum and finesse on its side – a combination that will please movie fans and music enthusiasts alike.

And the video? Well, with Faroudja's DCDi video processing and upscaling, picture quality was very good, with smooth rendering, nicely deep blacks, and satisfying attention to detail. The NAD had no problem working with full 1080p Blu-ray material, but also impressed with normal DVDs.

There's not much else to say about the NAD T747 receiver. It's set to become a favourite choice among those who place particular emphasis on musicality, but also delivers great surround sound and a believable picture.

The clincher is a very keen asking price, which makes the NAD a very good deal indeed.

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