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Sharp AN-PR1500H home cinema rack

Sharp makes a stand for simple home cinema

by Danny Phillips published on 23 October 2008

If you're one of those people who thinks home cinema kit should be heard but not seen, then Sharp's latest AV rack could be right up your street. Stealthily concealed within its stout frame are a DVD player and 2.1-channel speakers, providing a convenient, clutter-free way of bringing home cinema into your living room.

The DVD player is built into the top shelf and the disc slot on the front panel is the only reminder that it's there. All of the connections are accessed around the back and there's a generous line-up, including HDMI, Scart, Component, Composite, S-Video outputs and no less than three digital audio inputs.

The left and right subwoofers act as the stand's legs, while the front stereo speakers are situated just above them on either side. In the box is a reinforced glass top cover (which supports a maximum load of 80kg) and a shelf that supports the rest of your kit.

Despite its alluring piano black finish, which is sympathetic to the vast majority of plasma and LCD sets on the market, the rack is no work of art - the blocky shape and lack of curves make it more imposing than elegant.

Among the system's surprisingly plentiful features are a couple of sound modes designed to make up for the lack of rear speakers - Dolby Virtual Speaker and Audistry Sound Space - both of which try to fool you into thinking the speakers are further apart than they actually are.

The DVD player has plenty more tricks up its sleeve including support for Dolby Digital and DTS, the usual array of play modes and the ability to upscale pictures to 720p and 1080i, but sadly 1080p is off the menu.



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It does, however, allow you to play back MP3, WMA and JPEG files from a USB flash drive connected to the port on the front, as well as DivX from CD-R and CD-RW. The front panel also offers two microphone inputs for any budding Sinatras who want to indulge their passion for karaoke.

The off-the-shelf onscreen menus are rudimentary and uninspired but let you explore them without any hassle. But the remote is dreadful, packed full of tiny, poorly placed buttons, some of which have a second function which you need a Shift key to access.

But once you've hit the play button, such concerns are blasted right out of the water by the AN-PR1500H's awesome sound quality. It handles rambunctious movie soundtracks with the articulacy and assuredness of the best two-channel home cinema systems.

Bass output is so well-rounded and visceral it feels like a physical presence in the room, pumping sudden bangs and crashes into every corner. But the sound is far from lop-sided - superb midrange and treble handling make dialogue and high-pitched effects sound clear and strident alongside the low-end rumble.

Our only complaint is that Dolby Virtual Speaker and Sound Space don't spread the effects wide enough to convince as a 5.1 substitute - what we're left with is a very good stereo performance and nothing more, which doesn't make the most of movie material. Picture quality is solid rather than spectacular, with a little too much noise to compete with a decent dedicated DVD deck. There's lots to admire though, such as the rich colours and well-rendered detail.

VERDICT

Although the AN-PR1500H is far from perfect, its performance is much better than you'd expect from a product whose primary function is to hold up a TV. Most impressive is its sound quality,

At a glance

What is it?

Home cinema rack system

Good

Sound quality, sturdy build quality, easy assembly, convenient solution

Bad

Confined soundstage, blocky design, remote, no 1080p upscaling

Verdict

A clever home cinema solution with great sound quality and a decent range of features, though it's no match for full 5.1

Price £600

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10

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which makes the most of its two-channel limitations, but with provision for proper rear channels the AN-PR1500H system could have been even better. If Sharp can sort this out for the follow up, as well as revamping the terrible operating system, then we could have something very special on our hands. As it stands, the AN-PR1500H is a clever curio that will be a real problem solver for many people.