

Denon AVR-3803

Video up-converting in Denon's latest By Tony Davey

Denon AVR-3803 AV receiver. \$3799

A wry smile crossed my face as the 3803 was delivered to my door by a rather red-faced editor who had to carry this behemoth monster from his car boot.

While not an exact correlation, weighty electronics often translate into quality sound. At 16.5kg, while this it isn't the heaviest offering in Denon's stable, its certainly up there.

What you get out of the box is a big box of 434mm wide, 171mm high and 416mm deep. The 3803 has 11 analog audio inputs, seven digital audio inputs (two coaxial, five optical), two optical outputs and seven video inputs, an onboard AM/FM tuner and 110 watts of amplification for each of seven channels.

What makes this receiver different from the rest is the up-conversion of a video signal. The 3803 upconverts either composite or s-video signal to a component signal. Testing quickly showed that this does not improve the source signal, but if you have multiple video inputs into the amplifier you only need one output. This is handy as you can use the receiver as a true switching unit, rather than having to switch TV or projector inputs as well.

Set up on the 3803 is straight forward and with the help of the on-screen display and the hand-book I had this monster up and running in no time at all. Once set up is complete, including allocation of digital inputs, simply light the fuse and stand back a safe distance.

Being a home theatre amplifier, the 3803 has all the required surround sound

modes demanded in today's age, Dolby Digital, DTS, Pro Logic 2 and DTS-Neo6 in either 5, 6 or 7 channel variants.



If you are so inclined, there are also the obligatory surround processing modes for "enhancing" the 2 channel music experience.

Remotes don't usually bother me much, you turn things on, you turn them off and you adjust the volume. This remote does all that, but I found the volume action far too quick. A quick press on the volume button shifted the volume by 0.5 db, hold the button down for any length of time, and the volume went from mild to wild in a few heart-beats.

Performance

The start up sequence of *Terminator 2 – Judgement Day Ultimate Edition* had me quickly forgetting any minor quibbles I had with the remote and sitting in wonderment as to how good this amplifier is. The entire sound field was active with good body to the sound.

Throughout the entire movie the 3803 recreated the movie theatre atmosphere well. The 110 watts of power for each channel is ample, with the amplifier showing no strain at coping with the hefty demands of the *T2* soundtrack. Explosions had sufficient oomph, music from the score sounded rich and full bodied – many receivers can sound thin and screechy – and the amplifier was able to have depth to the surround speakers, even at low volumes.

Musically the 3803 surpassed expectations. I threw everything I had in my collection at the 3803, and it just kept purring along, faithfully reproducing the musical notes it was expected to.

Whether it was smooth easy listening jazz from the likes of Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong's *Ella and Louis* or

something more upbeat such as U2's *Rattle and Hum*, I found the 3803 a pleasure to listen to. Voices had a magnificent neutral tone, high notes sounded bright, but not overdone and there were times during music playback I had to check if my sub was off, bass reproduction was that good.

Summary

Home Theatre is ever evolving with more performance and features available for less money. It wasn't that long ago that I was virtually laughed out of a store for wanting a home theatre amplifier with Dolby Digital and DTS for under five grand. Not only do you now get these formats as standard, but you are also getting 6.1 and 7.1 digital surround with an ever increasing level of quality.

The 3803 is a solid performer with some innovative features putting its head slightly ahead of its competition. Sound reproduction for music is remarkable, faithfully reproducing tone and character in all that was thrown at it and in a home theatre environment, performance is enveloping and powerful.

If you are looking for a great home theatre amp, but don't want your music to suffer, take one of these for a test drive, you won't be disappointed.

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