

Shipping sounds to Newcastle Sherwood's Newcastle receiver comes up trumps by Max Christoffersen

**Sherwood Newcastle R-956
AV receiver. \$2899**

Somewhere in New Zealand there is a Sherwood amp with my name on it. Literally.

It's bolted under the passenger seat of my 'former' sports car and is now in unknown territory here in Godzone. Nicked, swiped, ripped-off or stolen... whichever way you describe it, the end result was the same. My car and Sherwood amp vanished one night never to return.

So I was pleased to see another Sherwood product turn up at my place if only temporarily and even if it is somewhat more complex than my bargain car stereo amp, there is a family resemblance to the former four-channel amp now amusing someone else, somewhere else...

But mention the name Sherwood to many enthusiasts and they'll ask "who the hell is Sherwood?" Well they were an American company, now owned by Koreans, who has been making a considerable impact on audio for the past 48 years! Of most significance historically, is the very first 100 per cent solid state audio receiver ever produced carried the Sherwood name. Sherwood also produced the first on board decoding receiver carrying DD, DTS and Dolby Pro-Logic. This ain't no 'Johnny come Lately' audio company folks!

More recently Sherwood has been making some in-roads on the home theatre market and the domain previously occupied by more familiar Asian audio names. Part of this recent encroachment on the Big Boy's domain can be attributed to high quality machining, good fundamental audio performance and good overall build quality. (A bit like my car amp actually.)

While designed in the USA, this component is made in Korea and has the same standard of fit'n'finish as brands such as Denon, Pioneer and Onkyo. So that should give you some indication of the sweet cosmetic finish on this model.

So what do you get for your money?

First up it's a '6.1' receiver featuring DTS ES, Dolby Digital EX, 'Dolby Pro Logic -Time-Link', four DSP hall-type modes and Tru-Surround (a simulated multi-channel soundfield from two speakers). For 'purist' audio listeners there is an



analogue bypass meaning all analogue inputs are not fed through any internal digital conversion which is often the fastest way to degrade a signal.

Secondly the processing is based around the powerful Motorola DSP-56362 chip, while the six-channel amplifier output is a hefty 120 watts through a totally discrete amplifier output stage. Component switching is offered, as are dedicated Zone 2 outputs and pre-outs on all channels including centre rear. And for those looking to the future, a six channel pass through.

So a somewhat stock '6.1' receiver with similar functions to many others at the same price point – which in 2001 means a formidable array of features designed to make audio life a little more interesting than Sherwood's first component in 1953!

Cold out of the box I went two channel audio with Kimber 8TC cable and a digital direct feed from my Philips CD player and my trusty if aging Infinity Kappa 8's. Having just bought a new acoustic guitar I went for something that sounded just like the real thing; I chose all solo acoustic music from a CD called *Guitarismo* featuring a variety of acoustic and electric acoustic musicians from Craig Chaquico, Neil Schon, Brian Hughes and Buckethead.

And what a revelation the Sherwood was. Here was a sound that was as good as any I had heard from any integrated amplifier, much less a home theatre receiver. All of my music criterion was there in abundance: it was full-bodied, articulate with glorious attention to detail and with body and substance to match. No sizzle or snap just life-like attack and decay that drew my attention to ride cymbals and open note guitar strings. And the dynamics! The dynamic impact coupled with a sense of 'clean air' around solo acoustic guitar was

exhilarating.

A few hours later I had a pile of empty CD cases on the floor and I hadn't even connected up home theatre. Frankly who needed it! I was genuinely enthralled with the fluid, full bodied, but sweetly assertive sound from the Sherwood. This was two-channel audio bliss!

I rarely have any time for DSP modes and frankly Dolby Pro-Logic is more important than almost any other surround mode. And here too, the sonics were very clean without sibilance or hash. Dolby Digital/DTS threw up a very familiar all round performance which was both dynamic and assertive with Toy Story sounding surprisingly gutsy and focused.

All in all great balance and a performance than many might think should come from some 'better known brands.' Ergonomically there are some quibbles, but the sonics just can't be forgotten.

Reviewing equipment is fun when a product not only delivers but frankly knocks your sox off! This Sherwood receiver did it in spades.

But whichever way you cut it. This Sherwood is a class act – it is up there with the most satisfying of audio products I have heard. It is musical delight and a formidable performer in home theatre. You by-pass this one at your own peril!

BTW, if you have my car with my Sherwood amp in it, keep the car – I just want the amp...

