

Cambridge Audio DVD89

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Cambridge Audio DVD89 CD/SACD/DVD-Audio Player \$599

Cambridge Audio has carved out an enviable reputation as a producer of well designed and well built, high performance audio products with entry-level pricing. Their new flagship DVD player, the DVD89, introduces SACD playback and HDMI (High Definition Multimedia Interface) digital video output to the Cambridge Audio lineup.

A universal player, the DVD89 can play all manner of 12cm disc: DVD-Video/Audio, CD, including all their R/RW varieties, SACD, MP3, MP4/DivX and jpeg files.

Video processing is accomplished by the popular Mediatek chipset (also used in the successful Pioneer universal players), with audio by unspecified 24-bit, 192kHz D/A Converters. There's onboard Dolby Digital decoding but DTS is only available as a digital bitstream.

Build quality is excellent with an Azur style metal faceplate, a simple control layout and smart blue display. Unfortunately the display is small and hard to read from across the room so users will need to rely on the onscreen display.

Almost every type of connector under the AV sun is presented on the rear panel. DVI-D and HDMI for digital video. Component, S-video, composite, RCA audio and Scart (composite, RGB video, two-channel audio) for analogue duties. Digital audio through coaxial or optical connection.



The Cambridge Audio DVD89 (click for larger image)

Decoded Dolby Digital and high resolution audio through a set of 5.1 RCAs. With such comprehensive connection options, this player should be usable with any audio system and almost any TV, bar the most basic, non-AV input equipped TV's.

The remote is your standard lightweight, plastic affair controlling track access, menu navigation, digital video output selection, PAL/NTSC setting and analogue volume level. Nice to use but the transport buttons could be larger to add some differentiation from the other similarly sized buttons.

Setup requires a monitor and is a straight forward using the DVD89's clunky but functional, VGA-style onscreen menu. Load a disc and like all universal players it takes a while to organize itself before any output appears. While loading and during playback, the transport is blissfully silent and very responsive to track changes and the like.

Video

Cambridge's implementation of HDMI allows for output resolutions of 480/576p or upsampled to 720p/1080i. There is no 480/576i via HDMI for those with third party video de-interlacer/scalers. Interlaced output is only available through component or S-video. Using the upsampled mode also locks you into the 16x9 aspect ratio, less than ideal if you watch a lot of non-anamorphic material.

Performance with 720p output was impressive, bringing noticeable improvement over the good 480/576p, component and S-video outputs (composite wasn't tested) and with less artifacts than the 1080i mode. Pictures were sharp and clear, with good detail, and accurate colour palette. Like others that use the Mediatek chipset, chroma bug is present but not exaggerated. Some dot crawl and horizontal jaggies was also observed.

Over the course of viewing an entire movie there was the underlying suspicion that the images are a little artificial in their pristineness, jazzed up with added sharpness. On occasion the component output looked more realistic.

Despite these reservations, the HDMI option gives the DVD89 enough of an advantage to stand a notch above the past budget universal player favourites like the Pioneer 676/686 or Yamaha 657.

Sonic success

Balance is the key to the DVD89's sonic success. Music flows with an ease rare in low priced equipment. Tonally it is a little darker than life but endowed with a great sense of liveliness without ever getting unruly. A smooth midrange plus sweet high end results in a very listenable CD player, even more so than the Cambridge 640C v1 CDP, borrowed to compare CD playback, (thanks to Willie from Image Audio). The 640C was better resolved and extended in the highs but a



The DVD89's remote control (click for larger image)

bit limp in the bass and didn't have the same drive and tunefulness.

Switch to the high-resolution formats and the DVD89 ups the sonic ante whilst retaining the balanced qualities shown with CD playback. SACD producing a more open soundfield with some added ambience and ease of reproduction, while DVD-Audio brings a more powerful, purposeful sound.

Debits are few; some roll-off at the frequency extremes – not always a bad thing with budget equipment – and a less than holographic presentation.

Performance and versatility

Cambridge Audio has hit the target squarely with the DVD89. While it doesn't present a huge advance over the stalwart budget universal player benchmarks like the Pioneers, it does offer enough improvement to be considered an evolution of the breed. Excellent all-round performance and extreme versatility, in a stylish package at a great price makes the DVD89 a winner.

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