



# CONCLUSIONS

Do these six thoroughly modern amps live up to the stereo masters of old?

**W**e promised at the outset of this group test that we would see how these amps compare sonically with those of yesteryear. But, with all due respect to the prophets of doom, for whom things have never been on a steady downward decline since 1960, we humbly submit that the upwards trend of quality – which we have mentioned before – shows no sign of levelling off. Or if it does, it's a function of the dreaded law of diminishing returns: there's simply not much room left for improvement.

None of these amps would pass muster if put to the test in a true top-notch system. But none would be in any kind of disgrace, either. They all offer balance, power, refinement and inner detail, in sufficient quantity to qualify for the uniformly high marks we have deliberately awarded them. Still, as ever, they differ sufficiently to make some careful auditioning worth the bother.

Scoring lowest overall, the Audiolab two-box combo does come perhaps at something of a disadvantage, though we'd argue

comparing it with like-priced integrated amps is not unfair. Clearly it scores highest for its upgrade potential, and we'd love to hear the power amp partnered by a slightly more open and detailed preamp. It is just pipped sonically by the Denon, a monster larger in every dimension than the two Audiolab boxes together. Overall, we felt the Denon is a decent amp, but it does need to do a little more to justify its size and weight.

Onkyo's A-9755 offers a lot of power for the money and we liked it a lot. It shares with the cheaper

and less powerful A-933 a basically musical approach, but for the extra £200, we'd tend to be more impressed by extra detail and insight rather than the extra power. Call us hard-hearted, but we find it a little underwhelming.

The Arcam, Cambridge and Creek models are hard to choose between. True, the Creek is by some margin the dearest, but its extra refinement is a justifiable expenditure in our book. Arcam's fully featured A90 is just a touch less detailed, but in terms of value for money the Cambridge wins by a nose. **HFC**

## TRY THEM WITH THESE

### CD PLAYERS

**CAMBRIDGE AZUR 840C** £750

A high-tech wonder, with the most detailed, yet relaxed sound at the price.

**REGA SATURN CD** £1,298

This new top-loader is one of the most precise and musical players around.

### SPEAKERS

**KEF iQ9** £999

This strong all-rounder is good with all kinds of music and delivers great bass.

**ATC SCM19** £1,999

A highly revealing standmount that makes a great work-out for amps!

## HINTS AND TIPS

➤ Amplifiers generate heat and need to be able to get rid of it. Allow a little breathing space round the amp.

➤ Use decent cables. Phono plugs can also lose their grip in sockets and speaker wires have a habit of working loose in screw-down terminals.

➤ Switching to standby, rather than properly off, usually avoids losing settings and can help speed warm-up.

➤ Amps are seldom electrically microphonic, but the casework can resonate audibly. A few damping devices can work wonders.

## STEREO AMPLIFIERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	Arcam Diva A90	Audiolab 8000Q/ 8000P	Cambridge Audio Azur 840A	Creek Destiny	Denon PMA-2000AE	Onkyo A-9755
<b>PRICE</b>	£895	£1,000	£750	£1,200	£1,200	£700
<b>SOUND</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>FEATURES</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>BUILD</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>VALUE</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>OVERALL</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	Well-featured amp with very little character of its own. Highly informative, rather than analytical.	Offers the advantages of pre-/power separates at an integrated's price, but the preamp seems less detailed and neutral than the power.	Detailed and lively, with excellent midrange and treble detail; some very mild bass anomalies.	A highly assured performer that doesn't ever try to superimpose its own personality on the music.	Imposing amp that can seem a little dry, though there's plenty of detail on offer and fine bass, too.	Not incredibly detailed, but its involving, musical nature makes it a very pleasing listen.
<b>KEY FEATURES</b>						
<b>LINE INPUTS</b>	7	6	7	6	6	6
<b>TAPE OUTPUTS</b>	2	2	1	1	2	2
<b>PHONO INPUT</b>	Optional	No	No	Optional	Yes (MM/MC)	Yes (MM)
<b>SIZE (WxHxD)</b>	43.5x10x32cm	44.5x7.5x34cm (each)	43x11.5x38.5cm	43x7x31cm	43.5x18x48cm	43.5x14.5x43cm
<b>WEIGHT</b>	11kg	6 + 8.7kg	15kg	10kg	24kg	17.6kg
<b>REMOTE CONTROL</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>BALANCED INPUT</b>	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
<b>LAB CONCLUSIONS</b> E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
<b>CLIP POINT (8 OHM)</b>	28.5V <b>G</b>	33V <b>G</b>	33V <b>G</b>	27.5V <b>G</b>	32V <b>G</b>	40V <b>E</b>
<b>FREQUENCY RESPONSE</b>	±0.2dB <b>G</b>	±0.3dB <b>G</b>	±0.2dB <b>G</b>	±0.25dB <b>G</b>	±0.15dB <b>E</b>	±1dB <b>A</b>
<b>DYNAMIC RANGE</b>	99dB <b>A</b>	104dB <b>E</b>	107dB <b>E</b>	104dB <b>E</b>	102dB <b>G</b>	101dB <b>G</b>
<b>OUTPUT IMPEDANCE</b>	0.08 ohm <b>G</b>	0.07 ohm <b>G</b>	0.06 ohm <b>G</b>	0.02 ohm <b>E</b>	0.02 ohm <b>E</b>	0.14 ohm <b>A</b>
<b>POWER CONSUMPTION</b>	20W/2.4W	30W/-	64W/10W	37W/0.7W	58W/3W	62W/1W