

AWARDS 2015 STEREO AMPLIFIERS

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Stereo amplifiers



Choose the right stereo amplifier and you could be giving your hi-fi system the instant performance boost you've been looking for

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Best stereo amplifier £300-£700

Cambridge CXA60 £500

Through the early part of 2015 there was a gap in the market for a good £500 integrated stereo amplifier. Then along came the highly accomplished Cambridge CXA60. Part of Cambridge Audio's CX series, it boasts digital inputs, high-resolution audio support and a well-finished design that is certainly pleasing to the eye. Oh, and it sounds great too.

A snappy, enjoyable sound - but subtle too

This integrated amp is immediately likeable. It's snappy, enthusiastic and puts musical enjoyment high on its list of priorities. That doesn't mean it leaves things like detail, dynamics or rhythmic precision trailing - the amplifier is capable of delivering subtle, accurate detail.

Play The White Stripes' *Seven Nation Army* and that iconic bassline has just the right amount of tautness to keep you hooked. It's a gripping, entertaining listen. Thankfully, the energetic performance doesn't stray into unruly, overzealous territory, with the Cambridge exercising control over dynamics and rhythms. Hans Zimmer's compositions for *Inception* are appropriately brooding, and the tension is maintained throughout.

This Cambridge amplifier is seamless in operation. The on-panel buttons click satisfyingly and respond instantly, as does the smooth volume dial, and the remote quickly becomes second nature in use.

There's a decent spread of connections, with four line-level inputs and two sets of speaker terminals on the back panel. Inside the box, there's a 24-bit/192kHz DAC that supports playback of high-res audio files across its two optical and single coaxial inputs. Those hoping for a USB input will have to look at the CXA80 (£750) instead, but the CXA60 can stream music from smartphones via Bluetooth, although you'll need a BT100 dongle, which will set you back an additional £70.

Here, then, is an Award-winner that delivers in every aspect. It looks smart and it has a decent spread of connections but, by far the most important, its enthusiastic, detailed and rhythmically cohesive performance is an absolute joy to listen to.

Last year's winner, the Arcam A19, has a more refined sound but is £150 more expensive (and doesn't have any digital inputs). At £500, the CXA60 offers a more exciting and more competitive package.

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