

# HARMAN KARDON AVR 365



## Harman Kardon AVR 365 networked AV receiver

Price: \$1499

The AVR 365 is currently at the top of the AV receiver range from Harman Kardon. It has all the cool new stuff provided by HDMI 1.4, alongside Harman Kardon's customary excellence in audio performance... at least, after you've intervened in one mode of operation.

### EQUIPMENT

Compared with the AVR 265 (reviewed in *Sound+Image Best Buys 2102#1*), this model has more power, as you'd expect, but also improved system integration features, plus welcome support for USB audio.

The power quoted with this model is 110W per channel, measured with two channels running, although of course there are up to seven channels available. Most of the usual amplifier configurations are provided, so you can reset the surround back amplifiers to drive a second zone, or for front 'height' speakers for Dolby Pro Logic IIz mode. A little unusually,

there is no provision available to use them for bi-amplifying the front stereo pair of speakers.

As we noted with the lower model, Harman Kardon has been shedding connections it considers to have increasing irrelevance. So there is no support here for S-Video, nor are multichannel analogue connections provided, either for input or output. You do get two sets of component video inputs, but no matching outputs—anything piped to them is converted to HDMI output. Still, there are composite video outputs, including a video recording loop which is, perhaps, the only superfluous connectivity remaining.

Harman Kardon sensibly expects you to go largely HDMI, so there are six HDMI inputs provided and a single HDMI output. One of the HDMI inputs is on the front panel, ready for *ad hoc* use with a range of digital video devices. The receiver is fully up to date, supporting frame-packed 3D content and the Audio Return Channel in which audio from the TV's own internal tuner can be fed back to the receiver for amplification down the HDMI cable normally used to deliver video to the TV.

For new media you get an Ethernet socket plus the use of the front-panel USB port. The latter is for audio only, while the former provides internet radio and access to DLNA-delivered audio from your home network.

A word is in order on the styling of this unit. It features smooth, clean lines, with a

darkish brushed-aluminium panel covering the bottom half, and a dark glass panel at the top. Between the two is an almost invisible row of control buttons. The front panel display is fairly informative, while the volume control has a unique light in a ring in its interior. If you must have a big lump of an AV receiver—as dimensionally this one is—we reckon the Harman Kardon AVR 365 is about as pretty as they get.

It's probably futile on our part to complain about this unit's manual. You get a multi-language Quick Start Guide in the box printed on paper. The English section is 10 pages long. If you want a proper manual it isn't on a CD, you have to download it from the internet. Even with the green imperative and near-universal internet access, we're still inclined to think that you should get everything that you need for proper operation of your equipment in the box, and that includes the documentation.

### PERFORMANCE

Harman Kardon has its own automatic set-up facility here, which is called EZSET. This works quite similarly to those of other brands and also measures for EQ, which it automatically applies with a view to smoothing the audio response.

This receiver is incredibly flexible in the sense of being able to configure different settings for different inputs. Indeed, you can even set it up so that you can have multiple settings applied to the same input! Just assign, say, HDMI 1 to two or three different input names—say, 'BD', 'Source A' and 'Source B'—with different processing settings for audio and video. Which is something you will probably need to do. For example, by default, 'Video Mode' is off. Unfortunately 'HDMI Bypass' is also off, so if you feed the unit with interlaced video then you'll get the most basic of progressive-scan conversions. The unit can offer much, much more than that, but you'll have to drill down into the menus to get there.

The USB playback function worked properly, although it was somewhat limited in audio handling, providing support only for MP3 and lossy WMA. Not even WAV was supported for lossless playback.

Internet radio worked well via the vTuner system. The nice thing about this is that it allows you to set favourites via a web interface. That makes using it easy, and coverage of both internet radio stations and podcasts is about as complete as it can get. The DLNA access worked smoothly too. The receiver gets through long lists at a reasonable clip thanks to a 'Page' up/down key on the remote.

Now before getting to a specific issue on the sound, let us first say that if you go through, input by input, and defeat the process we are about to complain about, the audio quality of this receiver is first class. It handled our various speakers with great aplomb, indeed, just about as well as any home theatre receiver we've used. But that was after we fixed something.

As we were fiddling around with sound processing modes while playing back music from our DLNA network, we discovered that a process called Dolby Volume was, by default, in operation. (We were happy to note that another process, MP3 Enhancer, wasn't.) Although this is a reasonably common inclusion on receivers, we confess that we haven't actually knowingly used it before; we certainly won't again.

Its purpose, at first glance, seems benign. It purports to even up the volume between your different inputs to avoid nasty jumps in level as you switch between, say, 'Network' input, CD player, Blu-ray player and so on. Even this description leaves us with a vague feeling of uneasiness. To perform this function it would have to measure a sample of input and then adjust the virtual volume knob.

But something interesting happened when we turned it off. Suddenly the music we were listening to—the album 'Brother, Sister' by mewwithoutyou—jumped up in volume enormously, but also jumped to life. We hastily turned down the volume by seven decibels to get back to the level at which we'd previously been listening, and the additional life remained. Not having listened to this album for a while, we had blamed our vague dissatisfaction with the sound on the MP3 compression. But without Dolby Volume the music was more detailed, less harsh, and wider in its dynamic range.

So we read a bit more. The (downloaded) manual told us the story. This process does two things: the aforementioned volume levelling, and something which we assume is called "Modelling", since Dolby Volume applies a "Modeller Module". This, the manual tells us, "endeavours to re-create the reference presentation that was heard in the recording studio without losing portions of the program at the typically lower volume levels often used in the home." In other words it screws around with dynamic levels and the frequency balance to create what it thinks the sound should be like, instead of leaving it be.

There is no warning, no request as to whether you want this applied or not.

We pulled out a bunch of discs and found that the "Modeller Module" was activated not only with the DLNA content where we first discovered it. We popped a 96kHz 24-bit audio-only DVD into our player and found out, damn it, that the Modeller still decided it should screw with that. Which, incidentally, was also being processed into a form of surround sound by Harman Kardon's 'Logic 7

Movie' process, once again by default. Then we fed the 96kHz 24-bit multichannel PCM sound from a DVD Audio disc to the receiver via HDMI, and were relieved that Dolby Volume was operating in the 'Low' mode, rather than the 'Medium' mode which had thus far been deployed. But examining the manual told us that 'Low' meant that the possibly useful part—volume levelling—had been switched off and only the music-damaging modelling was in operation.

Look, Dolby Volume isn't entirely horrible. It doesn't totally mutilate the sound. But it did take an edge off it, flattening and homogenising it to our ears, reducing its excitement. Just a smidgen, but an unnecessary smidgen. The main problem is that this is applied without you knowing about it, without asking. We feel this is quite a deficiency.

### CONCLUSION

The Harman Kardon AVR 365 is lovely in looks, lovely in sound and lovely in video handling. It is truly excellent. But only if you go through and carefully adjust default after default after default setting. You need to kill Dolby Volume, get rid (mostly) of Logic 7 and carefully adjust video processing settings to deliver the best results. *Stephen Dawson* +

### VERDICT

## Harman Kardon AVR 365 networked AV receiver

Price: \$1499

- Excellent audio performance
- Very good video performance
- Gorgeous styling
- ➡ Dolby Volume and other poorly chosen default settings
- ➡ Only downloadable manual

**RATED POWER:** 7 x 110 watts, 8 ohms, 20-20,000Hz, 0.09% THD (two channels driven)  
**INPUTS:** 6 x HDMI, 2 x component video, 0 x S-Video, 2 x composite video, 3 x analogue stereo, 0 x 7.1 analogue, 2 x optical digital, 2 x coaxial digital, 1 x USB, 1 x Ethernet, 1 x proprietary iPod dock port  
**OUTPUTS:** 1 x HDMI, 0 x component video, 0 x S-Video, 2 x composite video, 1 x analogue stereo, 1 x subwoofer, 1 x optical digital, 1 x 6.5mm headphone, 7 pairs speaker binding posts  
**ZONE:** 1 x stereo audio, assignable amplifiers  
**OTHER:** 1 x RS-232C, 1 x trigger out, 1 x IR in, 1 x IR out, 1 x Zone in, 1 x setup mic (shared as headphone output)  
**DIMENSIONS (whd):** 440 x 165 x 435mm  
**WEIGHT:** 12.4kg  
**WARRANTY:** Two years

**CONTACT:** Convoy International  
**TEL:** 02 9700 0111  
**WEB:** www.e-hifi.com.au

