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Harman Kardon HK 3490 Stereo Receiver

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1 di 3

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Although home theater (or audio/video) receivers enjoy the bulk of receiver sales these days, there's still room in the market for stereo receivers. Some listeners want a high-quality stereo music-only system. Others want good, full-range home theater sound, but don't have the room for, or don't want to install, a surround sound speaker set-up. Harman Kardon is one company that hasn't abandoned the stereo receiver market, as evidenced by their HK 3490 stereo receiver.



The HK 3490 (suggested retail price: \$499) isn't your father's receiver. It's filled with features that make it right at home in 2009. It delivers a robust 120 watts per channel into

eight ohms (150 wpc into four ohms). Its rear and front panel provide seven analog audio inputs, including a phono input for those listeners who want to enjoy their vinyl (the phono input accommodates moving-magnet phono cartridges). It includes coaxial and optical digital audio inputs - ideal for users with older CD and DVD players that might get better sound from utilizing the up-to-date D/A circuitry in the HK 3490. The receiver has four composite video inputs and a dedicated input for the Harman Kardon The Bridge II iPod docking station. This latter feature enables you to connect an iPod via The Bridge II (sold separately); the iPod can then be controlled from the HK 3490's remote control and menus that are

displayed on a connected TV or on the receiver's front panel.

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Other connectivity features include A/B speaker switching, a headphone jack, two subwoofer outputs, a tape monitor loop, preamp outputs and power amp inputs, a composite video output, IR in/out jacks and two switched AC convenience outlets. However, keep in mind that the HK 3490 is largely an audio receiver: it doesn't have the plethora of HDMI and other video connections that a full-blown A/V receiver would offer.

The HK 3490 is XM Satellite Radio-ready and accommodates an optional XM tuner module. It also has an FM/AM tuner. The receiver offers Dolby Virtual Speaker and Dolby Headphone processing that provides a surround sound listening experience from stereo loudspeakers or from headphones.

The Harman Kardon HK 3490 is unusually good-looking for a stereo receiver (or any audio component, for that matter), with curved side panels and a gloss-black and dark gray front panel that give it a sleek, stylish look.

The HK 3490's sound quality is excellent. Harman Kardon has long been a proponent of high-current, ultrawide-bandwidth amplifier designs, and it pays sonic dividends. The sound is open and detailed, with clean upper midrange and highs, not harsh or grainy in the slightest. The high-current amplifier and high-power output provide plenty of volume and dynamic capability. Tonally, the receiver could be considered on the warm and side, as opposed to some receivers that sound more lean and "forward."

The Bridge II compatibility is a major plus, as it enables an iPod to interface with a user's home entertainment system and provides ready access to an iPod via remote control and menu displays. The dual subwoofer outputs are another useful feature that enables a user to put together a two-channel-plus-subwoofer speaker system in two different rooms, or a two-speakers-plus-two subwoofers set-up in the main home entertainment room.

High Points

- The HK 3490 features a wide selection of audio inputs, including a phono input and digital
- The receiver enables ready integration, control and playback of an iPod, using the optional The Bridge II docking station from Harman Kardon.
- \bullet The sound quality is excellent and the receiver has plenty of power at 120 watts per channel into eight ohms (150 wpc into four ohms).
- \bullet The HK 3490 is one of the best-looking audio components out there at its price.
- \bullet Dual speaker outputs and dual subwoofer outputs enable multi-room music playback and the ability to add multiple subwoofers to a system.

Low Points

- $\bullet \mbox{ There are no HDMI, component or S-video connections if you need full-fledged A/V receiver connectivity, you'll need a different receiver.$
- \bullet To enjoy the full iPod capabilities the HK 3490 offers, you'll have to purchase the Bridge II iPod docking station separately.

Conclusion

The Harman Kardon HK 3490 stereo receiver combines excellent sound quality with plenty of power (120 watts per channel into eight ohms), an extensive selection of audio inputs, including a phono input and dedicated iPod interface (via the optional Harman Kardon The Bridge II docking station), and other useful features like XM Radio compatibility, Dolby Virtual Speaker and Dolby Headphone, dual subwoofer outputs and other useful features. It's a good choice for listeners who want to put together a high-quality stereo music system, or add high-quality sound to their TV and home entertainment system.

Keywords

Harman Kardon, Harman Kardon review, Harman Kardon HK 3490, Harman Kardon HK 3490 stereo receiver, receiver, stereo receiver review, phono input

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