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HARMAN/KARDON HK990 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER AND HD990 CD PLAYER

Product Name: harman/kardon HK990 integrated amplifier and HD990 CD player

Product Type: integrated amplifier and CD player

Price: \$3499 and 999

Reviewed By:

Magazine: Best Buys and Home Theatre: Winter 2009

Distributor: Convoy International Pty Ltd

Who Sells What/Website: harman/kardon

Harman's new HK990 integrated amplifier is not only the most powerful integrated amplifier it has ever built, it is also the first to include an in-built digital-to-analogue converter, and also the first to include the 'EzSet' computerised equalisation circuit that, with the aid of a microphone (supplied) will create a filter to enable your loudspeakers to deliver the flattest, most linear frequency response in your listening room. (Previously, EzSet had been available only on harman/ kardon A/V receivers.) The new HD990 CD player is not only packed with features and facilities, it also has a circuit specifically designed to improve performance when it's used with the HK990.

Equipment

You will know the minute you unpack the HK990 that Harman means business in the power output department, because it tips the scales at just over 24kg! The centrally mounted heat-sink is borrowed from the high-end audio sphere. Behind it are two large, low-speed fans to dissipate the heat created when the amplifier is operating at its rated output of 150-watts into 8Ω. The HK990 is heavy on features too, driving up to two pairs of speakers, headphones, and with analog inputs for CD (balanced and unbalanced), Tuner, CD Recorder, Tape Machine, Auxiliary, TV and Phono (MM or MC). There's a stack of digital inputs as well, including two optical and two coaxial inputs, and an HRS-Link (High Resolution Synchronisation) input for use with the HD990 CD player. HRS-Link allows the digital circuitry inside the HK990 to 'lock' to the digital circuitry inside the HD990 so there's no jitter. A pair of subwoofer RCA outputs (and inputs) let you drive a powered subwoofer (or two) in conjunction with your main left and right speakers. This feature works particularly well thanks to the EzSet, which allows you to digitally filter the output signal to stream ultra-low frequencies to the subwoofer outputs.

The HD990 is incredibly full-featured for a CD player, though you wouldn't know it from the tastefully minimalist front panel. It has both balanced and unbalanced analogue outputs, as well as optical and coaxial digital outputs, plus, of course, the all-essential HRS-Link output that provides the jitter-free interface with the HK990. However, in an extremely unusual inclusion for a CD player there are also optical and coaxial digital inputs, so you can 'upgrade' older digital components, or plug in the digital output from a multiroom computer-based system, such as a Sonos ZonePlayer (particularly useful!).

Performance

The very first disc we span in the HD990 revealed that it's capable of displaying CDText where this is available on a CD. We also found it plays home-recorded CD-R/RWs filled with MP3 tracks. However, once you've heard how phenomenal

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the HD990 sounds when playing standard commercial CDs, we don't think you'll ever settle for second-best MP3 files when listening to it. In short, the sound quality of the HD990 is simply amazing. Sounds leapt forth from the speakers without distortion or compression, as fresh and immediate as the day they were recorded. There was absolutely no background noise audible, even on albums recorded at very low levels. We used both the standard CD/Amp connection method, as well as the HRS-link connection and can confirm that the latter is definitely the superior connection, though the performance of the HD990 is audibly superior even without the HRS-Link advantage... which will come as good news to those who are happy with their existing amplifier.

We were equally impressed by the performance of the HK990. We auditioned it in both 'standard' and 'EzSet-calibrated' modes with mixed results. If you have a good room with large, accurate loudspeakers and don't use a subwoofer, EzSet bestows small audible advantages. However, if you have anything less than this, or use a subwoofer, you will hear clear improvements when using h/k's EzSet circuit. But whichever way you go, you won't find anything lacking in the power or facilities departments: the HK990 and HD990 are brimming with both.

Conclusion

From time to time, all hi-fi manufacturers produce particular models that stand out from the pack: components that punch so far above their weight they become instantly famous. Now, for the first time we can remember, a manufacturer has pulled off the double by delivering two such components at the same time. It really doesn't get any better than this!

harman/kardon HK990 integrated amplifier & HD990 CD player

Price: \$3499 & \$999 **Warranty:** Two Years

Positive

Powerful and flexible HLS Link and EzSet Stunning CD sound

Negative

Arcane amp menu Ugly remote (amp)

MYM: Convoy International Pty Ltd



Who Sells What: [harman/kardon](#)