

DIVA for

ARCAM

DVD
VIDEO

dts DOBLY DIGITAL MPEG-2 DVD VIDEO

Motion Adaptive Progressive Scan

Bravely disregarding both SACD and DVD-Audio, Arcam has produced an affordable audiophile DVD spinner. Dominic Todd listens to the new DV78...

There's never been any doubt as to the effectiveness of Arcam's DVD players. The DV89 is a front line choice for anyone looking for serious sound quality as well as a decent picture. Yet at a minimum of £1,100 they've never been cheap. Realising the need for something a little more affordable, Arcam has produced the DV78. Fortunately the company claims that, thanks to simplified construction, the £700 DV78 should sound just as

than £150, it seems Arcam has taken a big risk on the DV78's standard CD sonics being above and beyond the call of duty. No complaints with the picture spec' as a PAL/NTSC Progressive Scan circuit with component outputs is standard. You'll also find that the DV78 should play most copies, including MP3s, with no problem.

The finish is to Arcam's usual high standards, with the only sign of cost cutting being the new and, I have to say, rather tacky remote control.

Yamaha DSPAX640 amplifier, the Arcam showed fine DVD player credentials. The front mounted navigation button, in particular, should be singled out for ease of use and thoughtful design. Lose the DV78's remote control and you're no longer stuffed, which is more than you can say for many of the rivals...!

In terms of picture quality, I found the DV78 every bit as good as the best at this price point. With Progressive Scan switched in, the picture was totally flicker-free and rock solid in terms of resolution. Detail was precise and accurate, but there wasn't the rather overblown colour aspect that afflicts certain rivals. Instead colours were natural and made for an involving picture.

Thankfully there were none of the jagged edges that can also blight certain DVDs, and the picture moved with great alacrity when needed, without leaving ghosting. In terms of soundtracks I found the DV78 to be a revelation. Its picture may be no more than a match for its better rivals, but the sound quality is in another league. To further scrutinize this I swapped the Arcam across to my usual system and feed it some CDs.

Unsurprisingly, when fed with Annie Lennox's 'A Thousand Beautiful Things', the sound reminded me very much of Arcam's own rather good

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good as its big brother. Certainly the specification is particularly good at this price point. Simplified it may be, but the Arcam's construction shows real care. The 32-bit Zoran audio DSP works in conjunction with a high quality Wolfson 24/192 DAC. In addition, the toroidal mains transformer and low jitter clock show attention to audio detail often lacking at this price point. Being able to play HDCDs is a plus, but the biggest minus of all has to be the lack of either SACD or DVD-A. When there are now players offering one or the other for less

Still, I'd rather Arcam spend the money on the gubbins inside, especially considering the none-too-lazy competition. Most rivals, such as the Denon DVD2900 and Pioneer DV868Avi offer both SACD and DVD-A, but then neither has Arcam's reputation for CD sound quality. If it can reproduce CDs with real conviction, then it may just be enough to make up for the lack of universality.

Certainly, in terms of ease of use, I encountered no problems with the DV78. Hooked up to a Hitachi PMA400e plasma and through a

a song



DV78 DVD PLAYER



POWER

CD73. Bass didn't reach down quite as low as it might, although the exquisite control and tautness more than made up for this. Looked at in perspective, the Arcam's bassline was still deeper than that of the Denon DVD2900 and musically in another dimension. Vocals were extremely well resolved with just a hint of sibilance blighting an otherwise flawless performance. Likewise the guitar had the type of timbre that you'd expect from a decent CD player rather than a DVD. Super timing, texture and decent sound staging all added up to a sound that was truly enjoyable to listen to and certainly a match for the cream of the £400-£500 CD player brigade.

As you'd expect from an Arcam, the DV78 was especially impressive with Classical music. Schoenberg: Gurrelieder, (Berliner Philharmoniker, conducted by Simon Rattle) had all the drama necessary. Although generally refined and smooth there was ample fire in the DV78's belly when dynamic clout was called for. If anything, the strings were perhaps a tad too smooth but then, given the likely AV amp system match, this isn't necessarily a bad thing. Certainly the string timbre was well above average and the staging first rate.

I didn't think The White Stripes' 'The Hardest Button To Button', would lend itself quite so well to the

Arcam's refined persona, but it still generally impressed. The rawness was slightly gentrified with a softening of dynamics. Yet percussion was still crisp and there was oodles of detail including lengthy cymbal decay. The guitar also motored along with convincing growl and, whilst not the most thrilling of presentations, I couldn't fault the Arcam's timing and sense of fun.

Fun was also a surprising element of Nelly Furtado's 'I'm Like a Bird'. Here the taut bassline suited the pop-bop down to the ground. It strode through the song with immense confidence and vivid detail. Part of the appeal lay in the depth of sound stage, which went a long way to make up for the DV78's ultimate lack of real grunt. Vocals were slightly nasal, just as they should be in fact, and were well projected from the rest of the mix. As with the other tracks I also found a truly musical nature to the Arcam's performance that majored on letting you hear the individual textures and resonances that go to make up each particular instrument. As before the DV78 was never less than engaging to listen to.

At the beginning of the review I wondered if Arcam had done enough to make up for the DV78's lack of universality. As you can probably tell by now the answer is an emphatic yes. Those seeking SACD and/or

Unlike rival companies, Arcam still produces all its hi-fi in house. This means that rather than outsourcing, usually to the Far East, production of the DV78 is kept within the UK. The company claims that the price-to-performance ratio has been achieved by re-engineering the DV88+ design for more efficient production. Simplification of the circuit board and power supply has led to reduced manufacturing costs without, apparently, impairing the sound quality in any way. The only question it raises is - why anyone would now buy the DV88+?

FOR

- Natural picture
- Engaging sound
- Fine finish

AGAINST

- No SACD/DVD-A
- Tacky remote
- A tad pricey

DVD-A will be immediately put off by this machine, but those with a more open mind have a treat in store. As a DVD player, the Arcam can confidently hold its own against the already impressive Denon and Pioneer - it's every bit as well made as its Far Eastern rivals, and rather less daunting to use, too. The only real let down here is the less than pretty remote, but then at least it's functional. The picture may not be the most vivid but its natural and solid image is likely to offer longer-term satisfaction. And as a stand alone CD player the Arcam is almost unique in that it's pretty much the only sub-£1,000 player that can genuinely cut it as a star music performer. My only slight gripes, sonically, were a lack of really deep bass and slight over refinement of some instruments. Neither, though, can get in the way of the DV78's utterly convincing timing and beguilingly musical nature.

For anyone looking to combine DVD and CD, and who isn't too bothered about universality, then the DV78 more or less chooses itself.

VERDICT

Arcam has succeeded in showing that a quality DVD doesn't need SACD or DVD-A to shine. Class leading sonics, and an impressive picture, back it a winner.

ARCAM DV78 £700
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