Music marvel

AVM’s one-box solution plays it all with style

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One-box wonder

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If, like so many other things, hi-fi systems didn’t just suddenly appear fully formed, they evolved from the primordial slime – so to speak – of do-it-yourself electronics that hobbyists made 60 or more years ago. By the seventies, the breed had evolved into recognisable separates – the pre, power and integrated – all in the name of ‘real hi-fi’. We’re still dealing with this state of affairs today, to an extent. It’s why some people will be naturally suspicious of Audio Video Manufaktur’s (AVM) Inspiration CS 2.2; it’s expensive at £3,995, small and integrates a CD player, DAC, DAB FM radio, network player – even a photo frame – into one compact box. Surely it can’t be that good, properly grown up hi-fi can it? Should a serious hi-fi magazine such as this even cover it?

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The display has a lot of work to do; there are many functions and to offer all of these it uses the horizontal row of ‘soft buttons’ underneath it, whose functions change depending on the mode. The vertical row of buttons beside it controls the sources, and of course the rotary control inset into the fascia operates the volume. It’s got a lovely smooth action, and the level is displayed (0 to 100.0) in the bottom right of the display. Once you get the hang of it, the AVM is pretty easy to use. The only other issue of any real note is the left-hand on/off standby button; the main power switch is on the rear fascia. Switch-on takes about 10 seconds, as the unit boots itself up and checks if there’s a disc inside the CD drive.

Round the back, there’s a set of banana-plug loudspeaker sockets (not binding posts), digital inputs (S/PDIF coaxial and optical, USB), Ethernet in and three sets of RCA line-level inputs. There’s a bespoke phono input, complete with earth terminal. Fixed and variable line outputs are also offered. Coaxial and optical digital outputs are fitted too, plus a radio antenna socket and a firmware update port. The latter is a very useful addition, meaning that the unit’s streaming client firmware should be upgradable, bringing a degree of futureproofing.

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This gave rise to all sorts of badge snobbery; beautiful and sophisticated so-called audiophiles, who were content to run a seemingly random assortment of often ugly and/or frustratingly hard-to-use equipment – all in the name of ‘real hi-fi’. We’re still dealing with this state of affairs today, to an extent. It’s why some people will be naturally suspicious of Audio Video Manufaktur’s (AVM) Inspiration CS 2.2; it’s expensive at £3,995, small and integrates a CD player, DAC, DAB FM radio, network player – even a photo frame – into one compact box. Surely it can’t be that good, properly grown up hi-fi can it? Should a serious hi-fi magazine such as this even cover it?

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IN-DEPTH

The Wolfson DAC upsamples every digital signal it gets to 24-bit/192kHz and works seamlessly and quietly. – either for individual or all inputs – The TEAC-sourced slot-loading CD drive works the best.

The company philosophy is to make simple and elegant products engineered to deliver genuinely impressive sound for the striking natural smooth CD sound. It is a beautiful early seventies compact, which – although not superhuman – is obviously of fine quality, rather than offering costly playback facilities, but in design and right, and giving a good deal of depth perspective. With rock music, the AVM keeps on teeth compares.

The greatest problem with the Inspiration CS 2.2 is the quality of the transistors used. For this reason, we’ve begun to see its products appear. We always attach importance to a worthy and impressive soundstage, and this isn’t lost on the AVM. Indeed, this is another of its unexpected abilities; the unit handles the tracts of synthesised low frequencies on this. At high volumes, you can turn the unit is struggling, just a little out of its depth, with more demanding loudspeaker loads. Given its price and purpose in life, this isn’t so much a criticism as an observation, but it does mark it out as mortal. The AVM keeps on teeth compares.

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set-up menu. Display brightness can be set, bass and treble can be varied — either for individual or all inputs — unused inputs can be deactivated, input names can be set and the FM autoradio stations can be edited. There’s also an Autoradio function that can be turned on, so that the CD player starts when a disc is inserted. As one would expect, there’s a balance control and the input sensitivity of all inputs can be adjusted. The Inspiration CS 2.2 even lets you programme in your desired track order for CD playback, should you so wish. There’s also a parametric-type loudness control fitted, with a bypass function.

Inside, the Class D amplifier stage delivers a claimed 110W RMS per channel into 8ohm, and 165W into 4. It delivers a claimed 110W RMS per unused inputs can be deactivated, and fitted, with a bypass function.

Sound quality

Although compact, the Inspiration CS 2.2 delivers a surprisingly good sound across all sources. It’s actually quite a noise-free sounding unit, with far more sophistication and subtlety than you’d expect for an all-in-one box of such diminutive dimensions. It goes decently loud and never appears to lose interest in the job it has been built to do. This is an important point, because a great many Class D amplifiers I have heard have a smooth and agreeable tone, but lack any real sense of musical zeal. The AVM CS 2.2, by contrast, is unexpectedly capable and lively sounding — while retaining a smooth bass.

I kick off with Supertramp’s “Sensory Delight” which — although not superhuman — is unexpectedly capable amplifier, front. The centrepiece is that music faceplate is hand polished as well as the!”ECH airbrushed chrome finish. This faceplate may be combined with a silver or black chassis and this CS 2.2 Deluxe comes for an additional £495 as a special order. The chrome faceplate may be combined with a silver or black chassis and this CS 2.2 Deluxe comes for an additional £495 as a special order. The chrome

What type of amplifier was compared in this review?

The AVM CS 2.2 uses a switching amplifier generally known as Class D. The design was chosen to combine musicality, transparency and reliability into one powerful design to partner with a large array of speakers. This design allows for a compact size and at the same time avoiding visible heatsinks as the cabinet is designed for this. Even when used at full power (which it can), the AVM CS 2.2 does not have to be changed up.

Tell me about the CD player

We have specified the Pure CD slot-loading drive manufactured by TEAC exclusively for AVM. This pure red disc CD drive delivers optimal reading results and serves as a base for the striking natural smooth CD sound. It is not a computer or DVD drive, but it allows for the utmost sound quality. With the AVM CS 2.2, it is a dedicated CD mechanism with separate circuits, which are dedicated to only rotating discs. The high frequencies on this. At high volumes, the AVM CS 2.2 Deliver the CS 2.2 high-end with its high-grade classical instruments. The CS 2.2 has a “real” feel to it, too. The pure red disc CD drive allows for the utmost sound quality.

Conclusion

One of the best things about this little one-box system is its sheer consistency across all sources. All its digital inputs sound good at either CD-quality or higher resolution, streaming is impressive and even the phone stage and radio are well done. The CD drive is obviously of fine quality, rather than just being there to make up the numbers. Each aspect of the unit is close in ability to all of the others, and this presents a solid and professional front. The centrestage is that unexpectedly capable amplifier, which — although not superhuman — is unexpectedly better than most.

The AVM Inspiration CS 2.2 is a well designed, compact and practical design, but it too is a little on the expensive side. However, the included accessories are what makes this an almost irresistible purchase.

Q&A

Udo Besser
Owner and managing director, AVM

DP: What type of buyer is the Inspiration CS 2.2 aimed at?

UH: The CS 2.2 is a beautifully crafted product that will appeal to both design-conscious and audiophile buyers. This all-in-one solution offers uncompromised sound quality combined with a versatile connectivity, and is very easy to use.

What type of power amplifier was used in the Inspiration CS 2.2?

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