



The Denon units exhibit superb video performance and authoritative audio

Denon DVD3910/ AVR-3805 £1900

DVD-3910 DVD PLAYER ★★★★★ £900
AVR-3805 RECEIVER ★★★★★ £1000

↑ FOR

As adept in stereo as in multichannel; easy receiver set-up; fantastic video

↓ AGAINST

DVD pictures sent via the digital connection can reveal poor discs

... VERDICT

Outstanding performance, spec and features make this pairing one highly desirable home cinema outfit



DENON HAS SEVERAL star players in the home cinema field, and this dream team pairs the already applauded AVR-3805 with its latest high-end universal player, the DVD-3910.

The Denon AVR-3805 replaces the AVR-3803, and every element has been upgraded to produce one of the most sophisticated seven-channel (120W each) amps in its class. Nowadays, it's impossible to review a Denon product

without referring to its tank-like construction, and both the receiver and the player are reassuringly solid in matching brushed aluminium. Of course, there's decoding and processing for every audio mode under the sun, multi-room functionality and an all-inclusive array of connections.

However, it's the usability features that really impressed us. The AVR-3805 practically installs itself using Denon's first-ever automatic calibration system, which simply involves placing a supplied wired microphone in your listening position. You're then temporarily surrounded by a technologist's dream assortment of beeps and blips as the amp adjusts its settings and – voilà – accurately installed surround sound with ease.

Another practical feature is the Denon Link digital connection, which carries all the video and audio data between the two components with just a single electrical connection.

And we have to mention what's possibly the coolest remote ever: the RC-970 touchscreen control illuminates itself when it's picked up, has learning capabilities, and can be configured to control the DVD player, too, making system operation a doddle.

The feature count for the DVD-3910 is impressive: universal disc compatibility, comprehensive connections including HDMI, DVI-D and Fire-Wire, PAL progressive scan video, and Pure Direct switching for untainted stereo performance – to name a few.

However, the proof is in the picture, and on this evidence the DVD-3910 has a strong case for being crowned class-leader. Progressive scan mode produces a picture of peerless quality using analogue outputs. Opaque blacks and intricate detail contrive to create an almost tangible sense of depth-

“The AVR-3805 practically installs itself using Denon's first auto-calibration system”

defining contrast. Subsequently, images appear amazingly solid, with stable edges and wonderfully smooth movement that sees no smears, even in the face of the lightning-paced kung-fu action in *Kill Bill: Volume 2*'s fight scenes. And the revealing detail isn't lost in the shadows of low-light scenes.

Surprisingly, images using a digital video connection can appear less impressive depending on the transfer – the Denon's digital processing is so advanced that it recognises every ounce of information on the disc, which can reveal the flaws in poor transfers. Still, high-quality discs, such as the Superbit edition of *Gladiator*, are breathtaking.

A picture this good deserves great audio, and the AVR-3805 is the perfect partner. The sound is fast, articulate and precise, able to realise the smallest of audio asides with ease. But, though it's sensitive to sonic subtleties, the AVR-3805 will shake a room without the slightest stutter. Power mixes with refinement, weight with warmth, and scale with quality. The thunderous low-frequency explosions in *Behind Enemy Lines* remain controlled, but will still have you cowering for cover behind the sofa if you dare crank it up.

With music, Pure Direct mode, which bypasses digital and video stages for better analogue sound, produces a rhythmic and entertaining sound with a typically warm Denon twang.

Overall, the Denon pair is superb, with the AVR-3805 amp and DVD-3910 player combining to form a sum greater than impressive parts.

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facts&figures

Price range
£1900-£2300



DVD PLAYER SPECIFICATIONS	ARCAM DV79	DENON DVD-3910	PIONEER 868-AVi
Price	£1000	£900	£1000
Supported formats	DVD-A, MP3 DVD-R/-RW/ +RW/+R/ HDMI component RGB Scart S-Video composite digital optical digital coaxial phono six-channel	DVD-A, SACD MP3, DVD-R/ -RW/+RW/+R/ HDMI/DVI-D component RGB Scart S-Video composite digital optical digital coaxial D-Link, phono six-channel	DVD-A, SACD MP3, DVD-R/ -RW/ HDMI component RGB Scart S-Video composite digital optical digital coaxial FireWire, phono six-channel
Dolby Digital	Yes	Yes	Yes
DTS	Yes	Yes	Yes
Progressive scan	PAL/NTSC	PAL/NTSC	PAL/NTSC
RECEIVER SPECIFICATIONS	AVR300	AVR-3805	VSX-AX5Ai
Price	£1300	£1000	£1300
Power	7 x 100w	7 x 120w	7 x 100w
Decoding modes	Dolby Digital, Dolby Digital EX, DTS Matrix DTS Discrete DTS 96/24	Dolby Digital, Dolby Digital EX DTS Matrix DTS Discrete DTS 96/24	Dolby Digital, Dolby Digital EX DTS Matrix DTS Discrete DTS 96/24
Processing modes	Pro-Logic II, Pro-Logic IIx DTS NEO:6	Pro-Logic II Pro-Logic IIx DTS NEO:6	Pro-Logic II Pro-Logic IIx DTS NEO:6 THX, THX EX
Analogue input	7	11	9
Coaxial digital	1	2	2
Optical digital	4	5	3
Firewire input	No	No, D-Link	Yes
PC input	No	No	Yes
HOW THEY RATED			
Picture	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
★ VERDICT	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★

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WINNERS

HIGH-END HOME CINEMA | £1900 - £2300

Denon DVD-3910/AVR-3805

★★★★★ £2300



EACH OF THESE five-star systems features state-of-the-art technology and offers first-class performance, but the subtle differences between decided our winner.

Top of the class is the Denon combination: the new DVD-3910 player and the AVR-3805 receiver. Both are equipped to the eyeballs with every high-end audio and video feature you could imagine, including universal disc compatibility, HDMI and Denon Link, automatic installation, and quite possibly the world's coolest remote. Build quality surpasses its rivals, and the Denon system also holds a slender upper hand in sound and picture performance.

Digital video images especially are fantastic, displaying images with intricate detail, depth-defining contrast, rich colours and sleek movement. Soundwise: almost every audio note is accompanied by a weight that adds energy and authenticity to the soundtrack.

In purely musical terms, Arcam's system has the rare ability to perform equally as well in stereo as it does with multichannel music and movies. It's Arcam's first fully featured AV amplifier, and though it

doesn't include a FireWire link or an automatic install – as do the other two in this category – the spec is impressive. Revealing detail and seamless steering create an all encompassing soundfield, but the AVR300 lacks command and control at high levels. And, while picture performance is again exemplary, the

“Both Denons are equipped to the eyeballs with every high-end audio and video feature you need”

slightly overcooked colour palette means the Denon shades it.

For overall performance, the Pioneer system comes closest to matching the Denons. The universally specified DV-868AVi player is an old favourite of ours and the VSX-AX5Ai receiver gives well-separated sounds, spaciousness, and expression.

But ultimately, Denon's extra sonic weight, and integration between components, crowns its system the worthy winner.

We tested with projector Yamaha DPX-1000; screen Stewart Electrimask; speakers M&K S-150 THX system

PERFECT PARTNERS

MULTICHANNEL SPEAKERS

Mission Elegante e82 £3990

★★★★★ September 2004

This tall, dark and handsome seven speaker set-up impresses immensely. Offers clear, precise yet vibrant sound.



PROJECTOR

Screenplay 7205 £5000

★★★★★ November 2004

DLP projectors don't come much more impressive than this high-performance, high-spec newcomer. The ScreenPlay has both high resolution and plentiful contrast, and includes a digital input that can accept either HDMI or DVI-D video signals.