

# Back in black

Yamaha returns to its roots with an AV amp in black and orange livery.

**Richard Stevenson** finds nostalgia isn't what it used to be...



**B**link and you can miss an important technical innovation in home cinema. Take two months off and the whole industry can change colour. Black is the new 'must-have' finish, and if the growing stacks of AV hardware cluttering up my hallway is anything to go by, Henry Ford is alive and well. Black may well match most flatscreen TVs but does it match my all-silver DVD player,

CD player, Sky+ box or sound server? Does it heck.

Yamaha's DSP-AX763 does give me a touch of nostalgia, though; my first AV amp was the brand's equally black DSP-A1000. It too combined an obsidian fascia with a fluorescent orange display, a combination I recall labelling a 'cosmetic road accident'. Man, I was harsh in those days.

My boat's clearly not afloat with the looks of the DSP-AX763 but

#### Dark horse:

As one of Yamaha's ToP-ART products, there are high-grade audio components lurking within

the spec sheet is altogether more sea-worthy: its power, at a claimed 95W-per-channel, looks good on paper; it is equipped with full Dolby TrueHD and DTS Master Audio decoding; and is replete with v1.3a HDMI sockets with DeepColor, auto-lip sync and so forth.

Any analogue video input is de-interlaced and put out over the HDMI as a native progressively-scanned picture (usually PAL 576i-to



576p) but there is no onboard upscaling. Similarly rather remiss is the two HDMI inputs, which in a day of multiple HD sources just isn't cutting it for a £500 receiver. To put that in perspective, this model's arch-nemesis, Onkyo's £400 TX-SR606, has four HDMI inputs and analogue video upscaling to 1080i...

### Top-notch audio

Clearly the DSP-AX763 takes the qualitative high ground, if not the quantitative one. It is one of Yamaha's ToP-ART (Total Purity of Audio Reproduction Technology) concept products, and includes such prestigious gizzards as custom-made block capacitors, high-grade Burr-Brown 192kHz/24bit DACs and Adaptive Dynamic Range Control (A-DRC). For those looking for some high-fidelity music entertainment, it boasts a Pure Direct mode that shuts down any circuit not being used for the relevant audio input selected, and assignable amplifiers for front-channel bi-amplification.

Several tweaks have been made to the auto-setup, YPAO RoomEQ

system and the compressed music enhancer over Yamaha's previous incarnations at this price.

The AX763 adds four SCENE modes, too. This allows you to set the amp up for input-specific preferences, giving you a simple one-touch way of getting the best from each. I thought this was a bit gimmicky at first, but as I like my films in near flat-balance 7.1 set-up, and my games in 5.1 with a healthy mid-bass boost to really underpin the exploding aliens, it turned out to be rather handy.

**Build quality is well up to the £500 standard, although the plasticky volume knob lets the physical side down** and the block-text menus do the same for the operational. If there is any good reason why manufacturers continue to use text menus when they have perfectly good software GUIs on other models, please let me know. Still, thumbs up for a docking port for both Yamaha's iPod dock and the new Bluetooth receiver – and the standard Yamaha remote is its usual

### AV/CV

**Product:**  
Budget AV amplifier majoring on sound quality rather than features

**Positioning:**  
Middle of the brand's DSP-AX range

**Peers:**  
Onkyo TX-SR606; Denon AVR-1909

functional and style-challenged self. The only other thing on the missing list is a radio – because, unlike almost all of its competitors, the DSP-AX763 is an amplifier, not a receiver.

### RoomEQ

The DSP-AX763's less-than-bristling feature count, fairly serious price tag, and chocolate orange wardrobe put it a fair way down the grid before this review started. And opening with a selection of DVDs with standard Dolby 5.1 soundtracks didn't do a great deal to improve its position after the first few laps either.

The sound is bold and fulsome, really pounding out the suspense and action scenes of *I, Robot*, and it carries a fair bit more sheer muscle than some of its competitors. But this weight is rather thick and it muddled up the front of the soundstage, keeping the movie firmly trapped between the speakers. A little speaker shifting opens up the soundstage but front and centre create more of a wall of sound than a highly detailed vista.

Engaging Yamaha's YPAO, one of the few RoomEQ DSP systems I have >

Yamaha's new amplifier faces stiff competition from Onkyo and Denon models





**Neat and tidy:**

The somewhat limited connectivity (only two HDMI's) means the backpanel shouldn't confuse owners

found to work well in my listening room, was the audio equivalent of engaging the turbos and hitting the nitro button simultaneously. Suddenly the cloying bass in the centre disappears and Will Smith's voice leaps cleanly into focus.

The eerie voice of Sonny (heavily influenced by *2001: A Space Odyssey's* HAL), is calmly haunting, and each character is given a defining position in the mix. The trade off is a little less gusto and sheer bass weight at the bottom end – but nothing a couple of clicks on the sub volume doesn't sort out.

Switch to a serious HD movie with HD-audio soundtrack and the Yamaha continues to find ever more solid footing. *The Golden Compass* (BD) is a masterpiece of sonic detail encapsulated in a Dolby TrueHD 7.1 soundtrack and the Yamaha leaves few audio stones unturned. The mix is not overtly crash-boom-bang, but instead rich in the sort of detail that puts you in the heart of the scene; distant birdsong, the flutter of tiny wings, the echo of footsteps and an enveloping background ambience that maps out the chamber dimensions with ruler precision.

The sound is still rather dense in the mid-bass region, giving plenty of thunder to explosive effects (enough to remind me my projector bracket is getting a bit loose) but never really 'breathing'. The bear fight scene, complete with deep growling roars and thumping blows, is hugely potent, but seems cramped at the front of the room, robbing the stunning final blow of its jaw-dropping impact. A minute later and the DSP-AX763 is again doing what it

is best at; crafting the scene-defining ambience of the crumbling ice bridge, complete with ear-splitting cracks and lorek Byrnison's (Ian McKellen's) booming voice.

**Pure Direct**

Yamaha was one of the first companies to integrate a Pure Direct mode to AV amps in an effort to keep audio signals clean and buffed inside a case awash with video signals, processing, displays and power supplies – and it works a treat. **With analogue two-channel music the AX763 does a good impression of a hi-fi amplifier**, although the DACs are kept fired up in case you are inputting over HDMI or SPDIF without analogue inputs. With Radiohead's *The Best Of...* CD the sound is warm and weighty, and suitably charged with angst-filled emotion. By the time I got to *Fake Plastic Trees* I was idly wondering if an HDMI cable could be tied into an effective noose, indicating the Yamaha is getting to the soul of the music. Again, it is still a little heavier and sluggish in the mid-bass than ideal, but I guess you can't have everything for £500.

The DSP-AX763 passes muster as an effective, modern AV amplifier ready for the HD age but it's not necessarily at the top of its game. The shortage of HDMI inputs, basic menu structure and lack of video scaling put it a little off the pace feature-wise and the heavy-weight sound will definitely suit some room and speaker combinations more than others. My advice? Put an ear to it before your credit card ●

**→ Specifications**

- Dolby Digital TrueHD: **yes** and Dolby Digital Plus
- DTS-HD Master Audio: **yes** and DTS-HD HR
- THX: **no** not at this price
- Multi-channel audio: **yes** 7 x 95W amplifiers
- Multi-channel input: **yes** 7.1 channel analogue inputs
- Multi-room: **yes** two powered zones
- AV inputs: **yes** inputs for 5 assignable AV sources
- HDMI input/output: **yes** 2 inputs, 1 x outputs (v1.3) HDMI switching
- Video upscaling: **no** but will you miss it?
- Component input/output: **yes** 3 inputs, 1 x component out
- Dimensions: 435(w) x 393(d) x 171(h)mm
- Weight: 11.8kg
- Also featuring: YPAO RoomEQ; auto setup; iPod dock; Adaptive Dynamic Range Control; compressed music enhancer

**→ Tech Labs**

**Manufacturer's specifications: 95W x 7 channels**

- 135W (2 channels driven, 8Ω, 0.5% THD) **1 2 3 4 5**
- 190W (2 channels driven, 4Ω, 0.5% THD) **1 2 3 4 5**
- 93W (5 channels driven, 8Ω, 0.5% THD) **1 2 3 4 5**
- 108W (5 channels driven, 4Ω, 0.5% THD) **1 2 3 4 5**
- Fidelity firewall: **1 2 3 4 5**
- 130W (0.06% THD, 8Ω, 1kHz) **1 2 3 4 5**
- THD @ 50W: 0.0042% THD (1kHz, 8Ω) **1 2 3 4 5**
- Frequency response 20Hz-20kHz: +/- 0.16dB **1 2 3 4 5**

Performance of this mid-range AV amplifier is well over specification, with impressive power output, fidelity firewall and frequency response readings



**HCC VERDICT**

Yamaha DSP-AX763  
£500 Approx

Price check: [www.techradar.com/422396](http://www.techradar.com/422396)

**Highs:** Solid build; weighty sound with good scale and atmosphere; useful SCENE modes

**Lows:** HDMI input shortage; congested sound with bass-heavy material

Performance: **1 2 3 4 5**

Design: **1 2 3 4 5**

Features: **1 2 3 4 5**

Overall: **1 2 3 4 5**