

V2 rocket

Cambridge Audio has revised its Azur 640A amp... and we are blown away by the update

PRODUCT Cambridge Audio Azur 640A v2

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £300

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Cambridge Audio has been upgrading its Azur range to 'v2' status of late... first came the CD players, now it's the amps' turn. The 640A v2 is an update which, in addition to offering a few sound enhancements (a little more power, improvements in crosstalk performance, generally improved circuitry), adds compatibility with the company's new 'Incognito' multiroom system. That means a few extra connectors on the back and a small amount of additional circuitry.

The basic specification is similar to most other integrated amps on the market today: six line level inputs (no phono option), twin speaker outputs, headphone output, 75-watt power output (nearer 90 watts by our meters) and defeatable tone controls. The mains transformer is a healthy-looking toroidal, the internal heatsink is substantial and the circuitry uses a mix of op-amps for line-level stages and discrete transistors for the power stages. Op-amps are more numerous as the inputs are all individually buffered, while the headphone socket has its very own miniature power amp – an unusually deluxe feature at this sort of price.

There is some evidence of cost savings, for instance in the very thin side panels and some cheap-feeling details, like the knobs used for tone, balance and volume controls. The small knobs are hard to grasp and the volume knob is really 'soggy'. It doesn't track too well between channels and images can just slightly wander from side to side as the knob is turned. But we love the overload protection feature, which simply winds the volume control down when overload is detected. Pure genius!

SOUND QUALITY

Most amps at the upper end of the budget range are now very good. Where once we would expect a few trade-offs, there are now just a small handful of minor niggles, none of them likely to stand between the lucky owner and an enjoyable night's music-making.

Does the 640A v2 rock? Can it do voices? Can it do classical? Will it make your foot tap? Does it image? Should I sell the Krell? Decidedly 'yes' to all except the last, and the answer there is only 'no' because, apart from the limits imposed by 90 watts, there are still a few veils to strip from the sound and some authority to add before performance can truly be described as 'high-end'.

In terms of sonic essentials, though, the 640A v2 offers them all in impressive abundance. At any rate, there is no sense of curtailment either in the bass or the treble. The bass is pretty tight, too – not controlled with

the sort of rigour that one might expect from a hundredweight of exotica, but sufficiently under manners to maintain good independence of, say, orchestral double basses, bass drum and the multitude of higher-pitched instruments. Treble is beautifully open and notably sweet, and the midrange seemed to us virtually coloration-free.

As a result of all that, Cambridge Audio's new baby offers a lively, involving and compelling view of pretty much any kind of music, driving speakers small and large with vigour and also subtlety. It's a great little amp is recommended with enthusiasm. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 85% 	PRO Excellent extension into both bass and treble, with good control of the former and delightful sweetness in the latter. Powerful, lively and musical, too.
FEATURES >> 85% 	CON Not the ultimate in detail and resolution, and the rotary controls feel rather 'cheap'... but both these criticisms seem churlish at the price.
BUILD >> 75% 	
VALUE >> 94% 	
CONCLUSION A cracking little integrated stereo amp, offering performance that covers all the basics and a good deal more. There are shortcomings, but hardly enough to rob it of its bargain status. For those on a tight budget, the 640A v2 could be a godsend.	
HI-FI CHOICE >> 90% OVERALL SCORE	

