



Rotel RSX-972

£1000

For Superlative performance with music and movies; solid build; flexible remote

Against 5.1 only, with no upgrade potential to 6.1

Verdict ★★★★★

It loses out to some on hi-tech tricks, but keeping it simple pays dividends in the performance on offer. It's a stunner!

Things started well for the Rotel as soon as we unboxed it, thanks to its clear, logical rear-panel layout, making it a breeze to hook up. Even better is the provision of good combination binding posts – yes, they'll even take banana plugs – for all five channels, while tweekers will appreciate the fact that there's a detachable mains lead, using an IEC socket, in place of the captive cable employed by most of the others here.

If you're swept away by all the talk of the latest technology then the Rotel will disappoint. It has Dolby Digital and DTS, of course, but these are of the plain vanilla 5.1 channel kind, without extra rear speaker enhancements and its output is a 'mere' 75W to each channel. But giving this classy receiver a miss on either of those grounds could be a serious mistake.

Performance apart, it's built beautifully, and the fascia has a clarity of layout that eludes most rivals. Also, the display is big and easy to read, which is particularly helpful as the remote handset, for all its extensive learning ability and almost kinky rubberised feel, makes source selection a little tricky, requiring a panel to be slid down to access the right buttons. But that really is the only ergonomic slip-up.

And it soon gets forgotten when the RSX-972 is in action. Quite apart from the flexibility

that allows any video input – whether it be composite, component or S-video – to be combined with any audio input, be it electrical/optical digital or analogue, this receiver has a sound to grab the attention, whether from the FM RDS/AM tuner, a CD player or video sources. True, you're not immediately struck by thundering, overblown bass, but that's to the good – the Rotel keeps its aces up its sleeve, only unleashing the low stuff when the on-screen action demands, such as in the big battle sequences of *The Patriot*, with the howling V8s of *Gone In 60 Seconds* or the eerie drum in the interment sequence of *Snow Falling On Cedars*. What you get the rest of the time is a beautifully integrated sound combining fine dynamics, total assurance and finesse. What's more, the Rotel always places effects precisely and seamlessly.

With music the Rotel puts in a similarly stunning performance, with a fine snap and snarl to rock tracks, underpinned with a weighty but deft bass, and an excellent sense of space and depth to the stereo image. Even hard-hitting dance tracks like Fatboy Slim's *Star 69* really thump out of the speakers, the generous power supply provision in the Rotel, plus the company's usual combination of simple layout and quality components, ensuring a directness of communication that eludes most home cinema receivers.

Classical music also benefits from the same attributes, giving good instrumental textures and character, and even the radio does a very good job when fed from a modest outdoor aerial.

Get the picture? The Rotel may be down on facilities beside the glitzy Denon, Pioneer and so on, but it's a storming all-round performer. We love it.

Power 75W x 5 **Surround modes** Dolby Digital and Pro-Logic, DTS 5.1, various DSP effects **Digital inputs** 2 optical, 3 electrical **Line inputs** 6, plus 1 in/out loop **Video inputs** 5 composite, 5 S-video, 2 component **Video outputs** Monitor out on comp, S-video and component, plus 3 outputs on comp/S-video **5.1 channel input** Yes **Preouts** 5.1 **Tuner** FM RDS/AM, 30 presets **Tone controls** Yes



What the Rotel lacks on the facilities front it more than makes up for with its sound, which truly grabs for its dynamics and grip with movies and music alike