

AVReceiver

ROTEL RSX-1067 ♦ £1,795 (APPROX) ♦ 01903 221 500 ♦ www.rotel.co.uk

When power meets panache



Alvin Gold takes a shine to Rotel's bravura RSX-1067 receiver, which is as beefy as it is beautiful

Laideez and gentlemen, I give you the latest flagship home cinema receiver from an electronics house better known for two channel high fidelity – Rotel – a name that has (at least until now) found it difficult to break into the magic circle occupied by the likes of Marantz, Denon, Pioneer and Yamaha.

Although well equipped, the RSX-1067 doesn't have the user friendly front panel design of its major competitors – using part of the silver front for aggressive looking heat sinks wasn't a great way of endearing it to the typical buyer. But the genesis of the design, and without wishing to give too much away, the way it performs in the real world, shows that any trepidation should be put to one side.

Power house

Without straying into tricky i.Link or HDMI territory, the basic specification list of the RSX-1067 is impressive. This is a powerful amplifier (the brand quotes a 100W per channel power specification for all channels driven simultaneously), with a comprehensive collection of surround sound codecs (including the latest from Dolby, Pro-Logic IIx), courtesy of Crystal Semiconductor; there's also a strong suite of multiroom and custom install related features too, certainly as good as any other amplifier in its class.

The tuner is a 30 preset FM-RDS/MW design which on FM easily outperforms most of the anonymous tuners fitted to

other models of this type (and it also sounds better than DAB under almost all conditions). Ease of use could have scored higher (see Practical Tip).

Button overload

Despite its meaningful demeanour, this model takes some getting used to. The problem isn't with its intrinsic capabilities, which on the whole are impressive, but with the way they have been implemented.

The menu structure is clear, but why do speakers that can be programmed out of the setup still appear on submenus? And why is the delay menu for synchronising sound and vision known as Group Delay, which has a subtly different meaning in the world of audio, and is therefore clearly misleading? The sheer number of front panel buttons (32 to save you counting),

RATINGS

Highs: Build quality, movie and music playback
Lows: Ruthlessly analytical sounding, questionable ergonomics, no front panel input or headphone socket

Sound	★★★★★
Build	★★★★½
Features	★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★½

plus mains bass treble and volume will put many off, and there are other similar examples of user interface decision making where the combined effect is to produce a receiver with a relatively steep learning curve.

The remote control, by contrast is not subject to these caveats. It is a conventional design featuring a small LCD display, and the less used features located behind a slide down cover on the lower part of the unit. The main controls are large, well differentiated by shape, grouping or background colour, and have clear backlighting. It is also well equipped, and can be made to operate up to nine different components via

LAB REPORT

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Manufacturer's Rated Output				
7 x 100W (8Ω, 1kHz, 0.05% THD)				
Measured power @ 1kHz				
2ch driven: 140W into 8Ω	✓			
5ch driven: 120W into 8Ω	✓			
2ch driven: 220W into 4Ω	✓			
5ch driven: 195W into 4Ω		✓		
Fidelity firewall @ 1kHz/2ch				
138W: into 8Ω (0.05%THD)	✓			
Distortion @ 50W				
0.01%THD @ 1kHz (8Ω)			✓	
Frequency response				
20Hz-20kHz +/-0.3dB	✓			

HCC PRACTICAL TIP

While we had problems with the grammar of system setup using the Rotel RSX-1067, this is largely a matter of expectations and experience. Play around with the unit for a while and you'll soon get the hang of it. In fact, you will come to appreciate its flexibility and power, the ability to programme different speaker groups for stereo – two speakers or two plus a sub at the same time as three other groups of settings appropriate for Dolby Digital and DTS, for example.

Another useful extra is the ability to programme different crossover frequencies for different speakers or speaker pairs, a facility that in one-box receiver territory has been limited to Harman Kardon until now. We also applaud the 7.1 channel digital input which can be driven in two different ways, either as standard with all digital circuitry bypassed, or with a redirect which takes the form of a summed 100Hz low pass filtered mode from all channels combined which can be used to drive a subwoofer.

FEATURES

Specifications: 7.1 channel receiver; 100W per channel all channels driven RMS 8 ; FM-RDS/MW tuner with 30FM and 10MW presets; LFE/subwoofer crossover switchable 40Hz-200Hz in six steps; multiroom multisource with composite video and stereo audio zone 2 output; independent crossover points for each speaker; adjustable subwoofer levels for different DSP modes; composite and S-video upsampling to component video; onscreen display from video monitor outputs; multicomponent macro programmable backlit learning remote control with LCD status display window
Surround sound formats supported: Dolby Pro-Logic II; Dolby Digital 5.1/EX/P-LiX; DTS 5.1/ES; DTS Neo:6; DTS 96/24; HDCD decoder included; 2, 5 & 7 channel stereo; four DSP/acoustic modes
Connections: Audio only – one line, one tape, 7.1 channel in; AV – five line with S-video and composite, three HD compatible component video in; one tape with composite and S-video; all channels audio out at preamp level; two component video in, one out; four coaxial digital in; two optical digital in, seven pairs speaker terminals; zone 2 stereo audio and composite video out; three 12V trigger out, two 12V assignable trigger out; two IR in; computer I/O; FM & AM aerials
Dimensions: 433(w) x 189(h) x 400(d)mm Weight: 20.4kg

Tried & Tested



Love or loathe the industrial styling, the sound quality speaks for itself



micro programming and a learning facility. Speaking personally, I'd rather have a well designed remote like this than some of the fancy touch screen remotes available from other suppliers which can often be surprisingly hard work to use.

Compare and contrast

While the RSX-1067 can be challenging to use, its performance is effortless. Rotel claims to have bought its high fidelity expertise in on the power amplifier section, and claims the preamp is derived from the RSP-1098. Given that the latter typically costs more than the

receiver of which it is a part, it makes the RSX-1067 appear amazing value.

However, inwards looking comparisons of this type are not very meaningful, and in any case the two products are not strictly comparable.

In reality, the 1098 and 1067 simply share the same core processing engine and D/A conversion stage. If I were to hazard a guess at its family tree, I'd say that the power amplifier section is closely related to Rotel's well liked and highly successful RA-01/02 integrated amplifiers. There's no guarantee that the two would work together, but they do. This receiver has a very solid, physical

presentation, and the kind of lighting reflexes that are unusual in this class of equipment. There's nothing in its character that attempts to sanitise the sound, for example by adding false warmth, or diluting detail. This is an uncompromising muscle box with a sense of class. To make the most of its attributes, I'd advocate mixing it with a high-end DVD player which can make the most of both DVD and CD media.

While more than happy delivering blockbuster material, this unit also enjoys stereophonic music. It has an unusual resolving power and transparency, which blossomed when partnered with top-end loudspeakers (from Spondor). A selection of music from Rautavaara, Stravinsky and Satriani (Joe Satriani that is) played with a standard of clarity and control that is almost off the scale for a home cinema amplifier.

In multichannel mode, the Rotel is immensely enjoyable. Dolby imagery is sharply focussed and well anchored. But DTS was significantly more three-dimensional and subtle. It was clear that the Rotel is more than capable of matching other quality amplifiers and receivers at or near the price.

Conclusion

The Rotel RSX-1067 is a delightfully confrontational receiver. If you can live with the unusual user interface and other minor idiosyncrasies, you'll enjoy a muscle machine which clearly outperforms its main competitors, and ease of setup apart, rivals some significantly more expensive machinery. Most of all it can drive loudspeakers with a conviction and sense of control that is quite extraordinary ■

'There's nothing in the RSX-1067's character that attempts to sanitise the sound by adding false warmth'



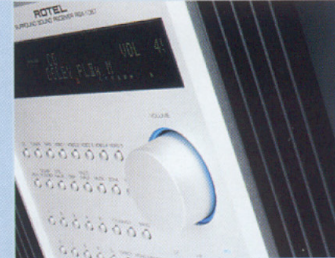
There's plenty of room for connections on the rear panel



Rotel is not one to hide its buttons behind flaps



This learning remote can operate another nine components



The black metal fins act as a heat sink