

# More than a wide boy



**Rotel RSP-1098**  
Multichannel processor  
£2295

★★★★★

**FOR**

Belting performance, comprehensive specification – and a screen, too!

**AGAINST**

Very little, assuming you can afford it

**VERDICT**

Terrific – worthy of comparison with much pricier designs

A SURROUND PROCESSOR with an LCD screen isn't new: Parasound did it in the Halo C1. However, Rotel's RSP-1098 does have the advantage of being considerably more affordable than the £5000 C1.

The idea of the 6 in screen is that you can access DVD-Audio menus without having to turn on your main display, though you could also watch a movie on the processor if you really felt like it. More usefully, the screen lets you make fine-tuning adjustments without having to spoil your viewing with overlaid on-screen graphics. You could even display information from another video source – such as a security video camera – on the screen if you wanted.

It sounds like a frippery, and to a degree it is, but in true Rotel fashion, the rest of the RSP-1098 is resolutely business-like.

This is as much a hi-fi company as a multi-channel specialist, and this processor has been developed with both hi-fi enthusiasts and home cinema buffs in mind. To that end, it displays earnest audiophile

intent: lift the bonnet, and you'll find the layout shows considerable attention to clean-signal-path design.

Behind the display are two of Rotel's own toroidal power transformers, one dedicated to the analogue circuitry, the other to the digital stages. A third cylindrical inductor – which looks like a transformer – serves as a mains conditioner/filter. Further back, there's an array of nine separate circuit boards, arranged vertically much as in a PC: digital, analogue and video circuits are neatly separated from each other. This reduces noise and

cross-talk from one element to another, which should help bolster performance.

Otherwise, and as with most higher-end processors, the Rotel offers both a comprehensive specification (see panel for more) and also an easy upgrade path to protect your investment against future surround sound developments. A computer-style input provides direct access to the internal software, allowing for processing/decoding downloads as required – and Dolby Pro-Logic IIx is already scheduled for supply in the near future.

Once set up – the screen does make this a whole load easier than on some rivals – the RSP-1098 quickly settles into its very impressive stride. The balance is clean, fast and effortless, with ample focus and wonderful three-dimensionality. It's a high-end

sound, as befits the Rotel's lofty price, and we've heard several pricier processors that don't offer significantly better detail, resolution or realism.

To see if we could eliminate our costly Lexicon LX-7 power

amp from the equation, we switched over to a much more affordable (£845) Rotel RMB-1075 power amplifier, but while that changed the balance in many ways, it didn't harm the overall quality – which is some testament to the transparency, processing ability and sheer tonal precision of the RSP-1098. It just sounds terrific, whether with the subtle cave acoustics of the final scenes of *Pirates of the Caribbean* or the frenetic combat of *Pearl Harbor*.

As with many processor/power amp combinations, the Rotel pairing delivers the goods in stereo, too. You could get better

sound from a £3000 stereo-only pre/power, but the RSP-1098/RMB-1075 can certainly compete with good £750 integrated amps, and for many that'll be great news.

So hats off to Rotel. The RSP-1098 is a terrific bit of equipment – it's a bit flash, but it's also eminently sensible.

LEADING RIVALS

**Arcam Diva FMJ AV8**

£3000 ★★★★★ May 2003

Blistering specification and exceptional performance

**Naim AV2**

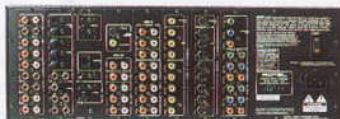
£2255 ★★★★★ December 2002

Very much AV of the minimalist kind, the Naim can sound truly thrilling

SETTING IT UP

**Rotel expands its range**

ROTEL HAS BASED the RSP-1098 around the latest Cirrus Logic 32-bit DSP engine, the CS49400, to provide decoding for every current surround format. As you'd expect, it's compatible with seven-speaker audio, and Dolby Digital EX, DTS-ES Matrix and Discrete 6.1 and DTS 96/24 are all available. Comprehensive processing is also provided, with Dolby Pro-Logic II and DTS Neo:6 on offer, backed up by Rotel's proprietary 'Extra Surround' mode, which allows seven-speaker replay from any source. The same chip also offers HDCD and MP3 decoding. A software upgrade to give Dolby Pro-Logic IIx is due very soon.



“It's a real high-end sound, and several pricier processors don't offer better much resolution”

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Processor Cirrus Logic CS49400 32-bit

DACs 24-bit/192kHz

Analogue outputs 8

Digital inputs

8 (5 electrical and 3 optical)

Analogue audio/video inputs

5, with S-video and component video support

Component video inputs

4, with component video transcoding

Dimensions (WxHxD)

43.2x16.2x34.1cm

Weight 7.6kg