

SCREENING ROOM by Robert Archer

Who Needs High-Def DVD?



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The last thing custom installers need to deal with is a format war. Unfortunately, that's what they're getting as Blu-ray and HD DVD are doing nothing but confusing millions of consumers.

While the heavyweights slug it out for HD disc supremacy, however, cooler heads are prevailing. Companies like **Cary Audio** have entered the marketplace by developing alternative products that exceed performance expectations while maintaining the momentum of the current-generation DVD format.

Cary Audio's goal with its DVD-7 DVD player was simple: Provide dealers with a step-up performance product that offers superior video and audio quality. Based on my experience, I think the company has accomplished its goal and produced arguably the best DVD player on the market.

Features

The DVD-7 is a state-of-the-art performance DVD player and its list of features supports that statement. Without getting too caught up in the horsepower under the hood, the DVD-7 incorporates Dual Faroudja Video Format Converter/HDMI D/A converters, dual 12-bit/216-MHz RGB/CV chips and three 12-bit/108-MHz component video chips. On the audio side the player incorporates Burr Brown PCM 1792u D/A converters. The DVD-7's audio circuit design, meanwhile, is derived from the company's 303/300 CD player, and it offers the ability to shut off the video circuit for use in dedicated audio listening sessions. Its video attributes are equally impressive and they include the ability to output everything from 480i to 1080p via HDMI or component, and it has three separate always-active video out-

puts, which enable it to feed as many as five video displays. The video outputs include composite, S-Video, component, RGB-HV and HDMI. Its audio outputs include optical and coax digital, analog RCA and XLR.

Setup

Integrating the DVD-7 into my system was pain free. Choosing to go the analog route for most of my evaluation, I took advantage of the option the player offers by connecting its video output using component cables, analog left/right RCA interconnects for CDs and one digital coax for multichannel audio content.

Moving into the setup menu, I found the player's configuration choices to be self-explanatory, and set the component upscaling output to 1080i, which I found to be a pleasant addition in the event that a display doesn't have a DVI or HDMI input or if you're like me and think the analog option yields a better picture. I followed that up by completing the rest of the audio and video set-up options.

Performance

Here's where I start to sound like an infomercial, but I'm being perfectly honest when I say that I could not find anything about the player that I disliked. Video looks spectacular; audio sounds great. I did try a few different output settings such as 720p, 1080p and did so from both the component and HDMI outputs. I also listened to a variety of CDs and multichannel music DVDs, and throughout it all I kept coming up with the same word, "wow!"

What really struck me about the player

when I was listening to CDs was how smooth and detailed it sounded. The amount of resolution the DVD-7 provided was awesome. I have to admit that I even wondered why would someone buy one of the company's CD players because this DVD player does it all just fine.

On the video side the unit delivered deep colors and noise-free images that would fool many people into thinking they were watching native HD content. There were some differences between the HBO HD broadcast of "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire" and the upscaled version from the Cary unit, but you had to look for them. On other content, however, the differences were much harder to recognize. For example, on CG movies like "Cars," Lightning McQueen's gleaming red paint job glistened onscreen, and the scenery of Radiator Springs looked convincingly real with all its subtle shades of color and fine sandy detail.

Final Thoughts

Over the past few years I've been lucky enough to use a number of Cary products. Of the many products I've tried the DVD-7 may be the company's crowning achievement. Naysayers may point to the player's price tag and say that nobody would buy a DVD player for that amount of money. That's true for a much of the public, but for people who want the best the DVD-7 is a must-have component that in the grand scheme of performance A/V actually breaks a lot of price points when compared to the competition. —Robert Archer

MSRP is \$4,000.

www.caryaudio.com



CARY AUDIO DESIGN
1020 Goodworth Drive
Apex, NC 27539
919-355-0010
919-355-0013 fax
www.caryaudio.com