

CEDIA 2019: DENVER TECH SHOW PREVIEW

# WHAT HI-FI?

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# Denon AVR-X2600H

Denon has kept up its annual tradition of producing another multi-talented, future-proofed AV receiver



There are few annual events we look forward to as much as Christmas - birthdays and National Doughnut Day, perhaps - but the yearly launch of a new Denon midrange AV amplifier can be added to that list too.

The Denon AVR-X2600H (£599) is the 2019 successor to last year's AVR-X2500H, which received a five-star review from *What Hi-Fi?*, as did the AVR-X2400H before it and the AVR-X2300W before that. Like its predecessors, the AVR-X2600H pulls you in with an exhaustive feature list, and keeps you there with an equally compelling performance.

The Sony STR-N1080 (£429) remains a rival to the AVR-X2600H, as it was to the AVR-X2500H. We play Elton John's *Rocket Man*, performed live at Madison Square, and the X2600H doesn't reveal quite the same level of nuance and textures of sounds, nor the cohesiveness.

But while not as painstakingly subtle or naturally musical, the Denon does give the Sony a masterclass in G-factor. There's greater weight and overall lift to its claimed 150W per-channel presentation, in addition to superior scale and spaciousness, all of which amount to a thrilling presentation that's nothing if not enveloping. After all, weight and scale are crucial talents for an AV receiver to possess - especially for owners who are partial to a summer blockbuster.

In *Bad Times At The El Royale*, for example, there's huge expanse to the

## KEY FEATURES



AirPlay 2

eARC

eARC

7.2

channels

Vietnam War scenes, while the sounds of fist punches and overthrown casino tables during the climactic fight scene are impactful, with measured, three-dimensional thwack and thump.

### A powerful character

Ultimately, the AVR-X2500H's powerful, dynamic and detailed character reveals itself in its successor. During the recording session scene, there's punch to the flamboyant *He's A Rebel* piece, and the Broadway-esque group vocal is awash with detail, the delivery capturing the softer lilts of the harmonies as much as the bigger bellows.

Tonally sound, fast and well integrated, the X2600H proves an all-round powerhouse talented enough to transform your living room into an exhilarating home theatre when paired with a gifted speaker package, such as the Elac 2.0 5.1 Home Theater System or

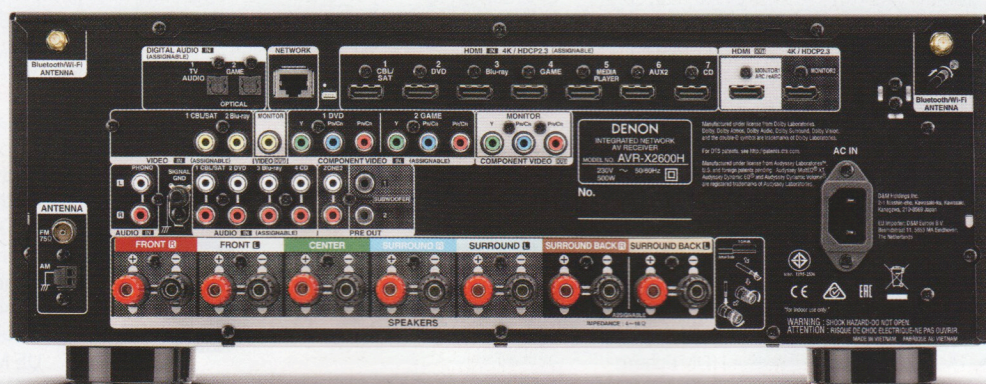
Q Acoustics' 3010 5.1 Cinema Pack.

Denon's consistency is unsurprising, although it does mean owners of last year's model needn't rush to upgrade.

Last year's AVR-X3500H - the next AV receiver up in Denon's 2018 line-up - naturally brings more proficient handling of dynamics and power to the proceedings, so it's hard not to recommend at its current reduced price of £499 (down from £900). But stocks will be limited.

Now the 2019 AVR-X3600H (£999) has been announced, we look forward to hearing whether the X2600H has closed the gap between the two models, or if the X3600H is that much better still.

Denon has managed to squeeze even more features into the typical AV receiver dimensions, too, which those wanting to take advantage of the ever-increasing accessibility of next-gen audio formats should be aware of.







The 7.2 channels can be appropriated in a 5.2.2 configuration for Dolby Atmos and DTS:X formats, but for those without the extra height speakers, there is DTS Virtual:X on board for the up-mixing of DTS soundtracks - to give the sense of height. Dolby Atmos Height Virtualization Technology, which essentially attempts to do the same with Dolby soundtracks, is promised via a future firmware update.

### Atmos support

Equally as important for Atmos fans is the AVR-X2600H's out-of-the-box support of Enhanced Audio Return Channel (eARC), which is part of the HDMI 2.1 specification.

This allows the efficient pass-through of uncompressed audio codecs (such as DTS:X, Dolby Atmos or TrueHD) from HDMI-connected source devices or streaming services over HDMI due to its bigger bandwidth capability. The standard was finalised only last year, so 2019 receivers will be the first to be shipped with support as select older models get firmware updates.

All eight of the X2600H's HDMI inputs (including on the front panel) and its twin outputs are also accredited with the latest Digital Content Protection standard (HDCP 2.3-certified).

Auto Low Latency Mode (ALLM) gives gamers with compatible consoles, such as the Xbox One S and Xbox One X, a smoother, more responsive experience by forcing everything in the HDMI chain to enter its low-latency setting.

The X2600H is the latest in a line of decent Denon AV amplifiers



**"Like its predecessors, the AVR-X2600H pulls you in with an exhaustive feature list, and keeps you there with an equally compelling performance"**

HDMI aside, there are both digital and analogue connections, including a USB input, two optical inputs and a phono and four pairs of RCA inputs.

While Bluetooth and Apple AirPlay 2 take care of streaming local files from a smartphone, tablet or computer, Denon's HEOS hi-res, multi-room platform is also built in, offering subscribers of Spotify, Tidal, Amazon, Deezer or TuneIn direct playback of each service's music catalogue via the HEOS mobile app.

The app also facilitates the streaming of networked WAV, ALAC and FLAC files up to 24-bit/192kHz and DSD 2.8MHz and 5.6MHz. Denon also has a controller mobile app for more primitive functions, or there is Amazon Alexa voice control (via an Amazon smart device) or the good old fashioned remote, which is suitably good and, indeed, old fashioned.

You'll need to set-up a Denon HEOS account to take advantage of the platform, and once out of the box, we'd advise taking half an hour of your time to configure the amplifier properly. Denon's Setup Assistant takes you through everything from cable connection to network set-up to speaker calibration, the latter using Audyssey's thorough and intuitive software.

Take some time over the setting-up process and you'll be rewarded with a well-performing, feature-packed and future-proofed AV receiver for all your movie and music demands. Denon has consistently proved its competitiveness at this price point over the years, and the AVR-X2600H follows in that long family line. If you have the budget and desire for a serious home cinema, this Denon receiver demands your attention.

## WHAT HI-FI?

**SOUND**  
★★★★★  
**FEATURES**  
★★★★★  
**BUILD**  
★★★★★

**FOR**

- Weighty and expressive sound
- Vast network streaming
- Atmos 5.2.1 compatible

**AGAINST**

- Not the last word in subtlety

**VERDICT**  
Denon does it again. This multi-talented, future-proofed receiver can be bought in confidence

**RATING** ★★★★★