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VERDICT

Be it sonic or video images, this Rotel impresses with an approach that is both believable and involving. Quality construction and good value for money further, vital attractions.

PRICE.....R17 900

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DVD-A DECKS

ROTEL RDV-1080

The image king

IVAN MULLER

Encountering components such as Rotel's RDV-1080 DVD-A/video deck underlines just to what extent the once completely separate worlds of audio and video have converged. You see, one could sing the praises of this Rotel as a more than accomplished DVD player, and devote a significant amount of space extolling the virtues of its video image quality. But similarly, this is a DVD player that puts a lot of effort into reproducing music with believability and gusto.

As part of Rotel's '10' series of components, the RDV-1080 is currently the marque's top DVD player, and it certainly delivers to flagship standards.

The styling is best described as severe in a functional, no-nonsense kind of way. Reassuringly robust, the player has an all-metal chassis with a thick, anodised aluminium faceplate. A clear display crowns the centrally mounted transport tray, with circular buttons offering direct access to the most important functions.

The rear provides a better idea of the RDV-1080's pedigree and technical capability. Besides the usual stereo analogue and choice of coaxial and Toslink digital outputs, this Rotel also has a six-channel analogue output set, indicating the player's on-board decoding capability.

But this is not just a fully equipped DVD player happy to translate Dolby Digital, MPEG and DTS soundtracks. Those six outputs also serve the RDV-1080's DVD-Audio capabilities, which means that DVD-A software, typically high-resolution, 5.1 channel audio, can be played back on this deck.

Of course, the Rotel is fully compliant with normal 2-channel CDs, and its DVD-A talents mean that its on-board decoders can cope with

192 kHz/24-bit audio data. However, its DVD-A capability comes at a price: it will not read CD-R or CD-RW discs, and is also not equipped to cope with MP3-encoded discs.

The video connectivity options are equally comprehensive, and extend not only to the expected composite and S-Video outputs, but also to 3-channel component video and progressive scan capability, thus vastly upping the stakes in video performance terms.

Video quality is further boosted by a latest-generation RISC-based MIPS video integrated circuit, which is linked to a 10-bit/54 kHz video D/A converter.

Rotel's considerable experience in producing premier audio components is clearly reflected in the tidy circuit topology, which makes use of separate power supplies for the digital and analogue circuits. The reclocking circuitry is fully isolated, signal paths are kept as short and uncluttered as possible, and premier circuit components are used throughout.

Finally, the Rotel's remote control handset is a tidy, well laid-out unit that is a cinch to use, with the lack of illumination the only blot on an otherwise excellent ergonomic copybook.

More important than all of this, however, is just how well the DVP-1080 fares in practice – a test it passes with flying colours. Initially, I used it in its conventional DVD player role, and it didn't take long for this player to convince me of its excellent video imaging capability.

Even using the normal S-Video output, picture quality was quite superb on my Sony Wega reference monitor, showing off ample detail, sharp

focus and solid colour renditions. Swapping to component video provided further benefits, with resolution appearing finer and even less granular than before without losing any crispness.

Of particular interest to those with progressive scan-capable monitors, plasma screens or video projectors is that the Rotel can deliver a progressive scan signal from PAL discs, which is said add a further dimension of quality to what is, in my opinion, already a great picture.

Talking of great pictures, the Rotel's video excellence is more than matched by its audio imaging capabilities – and that includes its talents in plain old stereo, as well as in multi-channel modes. In CD player terms, this Rotel does good recordings full justice, confidently extracting the essence of a recording and serving it up with verve.

A rich tonal harvest, excellent attention to even the finest detail, and an overall sense of cohesion ensured that the RDV-1080 can rival many a fancied dedicated CD player in the musicality stakes. And when it came to DVD-A, the Rotel could sound quite astonishing, even though I still prefer old-fashioned left and right to surround sound.

Of course, the RDV-1080 is more than adept at translating normal Dolby Digital or DTS soundtracks, again showing off a penchant for precision and detail, yet retaining an essential vibrancy that ensures an utterly convincing and involving music and movie experience.

The Rotel RDV-1080 is not a cheap DVD-A deck. But then, excellence rarely comes cheaply. And this Rotel's one of the best...

Deon Schoeman