



Emotiva welcomes system builders

In the shape of the MC1, the UK finally gets a fine-sounding – and well-priced – 13.2-channel audio processor that can set you off on an upgrade path, says **Martin Dew**

EMOTIVA'S BASX MC1 AV processor decodes surround sound audio, passes through/switches video signals, and pretty much nothing else. That it can do this so ably from a thin chassis and for under £1,300 makes for a refreshing cocktail. You'll need to buy power amps, and forego some of the features of the integrated competition, but this could be just what you're looking for if a separates setup is in your sights, and you've been left frustrated by the lacks of processors on the market.

The MC1 is part of Emotiva's BasX range, for which we are to read 'basics'. This, as you might guess, is the Tennessee-based company's entry-level. Across its ranges Emotiva sells power amps, processors and AVRs, plus loudspeakers (the AirMotiv series), subwoofers, headphones, hi-fi preamps, DACs and even a CD player. Basically, it wants to offer consumers a one-stop shop, and through its direct sales model (in the US at least) aims to undercut the competition.

For those building an AV setup around the MC1 (the C stands for 'controller', by the way) Emotiva has done some of the grunt work for you, with a line of power amps to complement it. The BasX A3, A4, A5, A6 and A7 (priced from £650 to £900), with their respective channel counts, make obvious bedfellows. Of course, there's nothing to stop you using whatever power amps you can lay your hands on.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
13.2-channel
AV processor

POSITION:
Only multichannel
processor in
Emotiva's BasX
lineup, below RMC
and XMC models

PEERS:
IOTA AVX17

An acrylic strip runs almost the whole width, behind which sits a perfunctory VFD (vacuum fluorescent display). On the left are click buttons for input changes and playback modes, and on the right, a plastic rotary volume control. The unit is well-built and befitting of a mid-priced home cinema component.

At 4.5kg it'll slide easily onto a shelf, while the 430mm width and sub-2U height make it perfect for a standard-sized home cinema rack. Even the 33cm depth allows a lot of space for cables. (Remember that running 13.2 channels requires 15 interconnect cables and will be a ball of spaghetti if not managed properly.)

Around the back are four analogue, two coaxial digital and two optical inputs. Six HDMI inputs max out with the 2.0b spec for 4K/60 video, HDCP 2.2 and passthrough of HDR10, HDR10+ and Dolby Vision. One HDMI output supports eARC. There's Bluetooth onboard, but no Wi-Fi or wired Ethernet connection, which is a disappointment as it precludes the use of a smart control app (it comes with a black, backlit remote with responsive soft-touch buttons).

If that seems a bit barebones, note that you do get an IR remote input, a 12V trigger out, RS-232 remote control input, and balanced XLR connections (in addition to unbalanced RCA) for the MC1's two subwoofer outputs. There's even a USB-B input, to feed the processor's DAC from a computer or smartphone, but this isn't an avenue for hi-res music as the supported PCM sample rate tops out at 48kHz.

Work the room

To make full use of the MC1's thirteen-channel processing you can go for a 7.2.6 speaker layout. Or you could trade two height channels for left and right front-wides in a 9.2.4 system. With two height speakers or Dolby upfiring, the



MC1 assigns all the topside sound as left middle height (LMH) and right middle height (RMH). This also applies if your only pair of heights is forward of the listening area with sound averaged from the front and rear soundstages.

Emotiva uses its own Emo-Q room correction system, rather than license a third-party solution like Dirac or Audyssey. The measuring procedure via the MC1's onscreen display is super-fast, only taking a few minutes.

The processor sounded good straight out of the box but after running Emo-Q the soundstage became more obviously balanced and cohesive. The GUI displays graphs of the corrected frequencies, which is quite revealing. You can also correct each channel individually. With eleven bands of parametric EQ for the LCR, seven for the surrounds and heights, and five for the subwoofers, there's plenty of scope for manual tweaking.

Yet while the setup menus are usable, the fonts and presentation are a little clunky compared to some competitors' devices. It all looks a little dated. There is, however, a healthy set of customised selections for audio and video sources.

For this audition tests I used M&K 150 Series satellites and M&K X10 subwoofers in a 7.2.2 layout with Parasound HCA amps powering the former. The MC1's listening modes are pure, direct, stereo, multi-channel, Dolby Upmix and DTS Neural:X. I used direct mode for most listening as it runs the signal through the room corrected EQ.

Sound bites

The journey through the Kingdom of Atlantis in *Aquaman* (4K Blu-ray) takes command of every speaker in the Dolby Atmos bubble. The MC1 accurately channelled the directionality of darting submarine craft while conveying the trouser-flapping sustained bass underscoring the scene. Mera's pod rumbled as it slalomed through the colourful vista of swirling seaweed and underwater critters. The amphibious human dialogue was crisp, and the music score amply filled the room.

The 7.1 sound design of the lightcycle race in *Tron: Legacy* (2010 Blu-ray) is even more aggressive, rendering CGI bikes flying past the audience and smashing barriers with gut-wrenching realism. Emotiva's processor conveyed the massive dynamics of the scene, but did at times sound a little edgy and harsh. This area is where costlier immersive AV processors will justify their price tags.

Still, the MC1 is always a thrilling listen, its soundfields precise, largescale and packed with speedy transitions. As space vehicles dodge each other in the battles of *Star Wars: Episode VI – The Return of the Jedi* (4K Blu-ray), the bass seems to follow them around the room. Billy Dee Williams' voice in the Millennium Falcon is clear and



SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY ATMOS: Yes **DTS:X:** Yes **IMAX ENHANCED:** No **MULTICHANNEL INPUT:** No **MULTIROOM:** No **HDMI:** 6 x 2.0b inputs and 2 x outputs (1 x eARC) **AV INPUTS:** 4 x digital audio (2 x optical and 2 x coax); 4 x analogue stereo; USB-B (DAC) **VIDEO UPSCALING:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 432(w) x 79(h) x 330(d) mm **WEIGHT:** 4.5kg

FEATURES: HDR10, HDR10+ and Dolby Vision passthrough; dual balanced (XLR) subwoofer outputs; Bluetooth with rear panel antenna; Emo-Q room correction with supplied mic; multi-band manual parametric EQ; firmware updates via USB; VFD front-panel display

TESTED WITH



AQUAMAN: This 2018 romp with Jason Momoa as Arthur Curry, heir to the Kingdom of Atlantis, didn't win any Academy Awards but offers an HDR grade and colour palette that are eye-popping, particularly during the IMAX sequences. These visuals pair with a home-demolishing Dolby Atmos track. A must-have demo disc.



centred. This is welcome because, against the competing bold orchestra and pinpoint sound effects of the ship's internal control panels, there is a lot for the MC1 to negotiate.

This slimline processor doesn't come up short with music either. The late Chris Squire's 'lead' bass guitar sound on the 2015 remaster of *Fragile* by Yes on (CD) communicates with authority. Its upper harmonics enunciate in the mid-range while lower registers dip seamlessly into subwoofers. Clare Rutter's soprano voice in Herbert Howells' 'Sanctus' from *Hymnus Paradisi* (Naxos/Spotify) is both vivid and natural. Meanwhile, the full orchestra is detailed, spacious and soaring.

Pure and simple

There are not many choices for consumers when it comes to back-to-basics processors, either with the MC1's price or slender profile. In fact, this Emotiva model is almost in a class of its own. Some will see the pared down feature set as a bonus: after all, if your AV room is all about movies and immersive audio, why pay for features you might never use? Plus, the MC1 delivers an impressive, detailed performance in return, while offering deep-dive manual calibration potential. Interested in separates? This might be just what the AV doctor ordered ■

HCC VERDICT



Emotiva BasX MC1
→ £1,299 → www.emotiva.com

WE SAY: Short on features, yes, but that's missing the point. The MC1 provides value, simplicity and great 3D audio performance from a compact enclosure, plus upgrade flexibility.

1. Emotiva's backlit remote includes keys for individual channel level tweaks

2. The MC1's slender chassis measures just 79mm high

3. Subwoofer outs are on both balanced XLR and unbalanced RCA