

Emotiva's 11.2-channel AVR punches right in line with its substantial weight, says **Martin Dew**

The Iron Man of AV receivers

Even though Tennessee-based Emotiva embraced a 'separates only' philosophy for 20 years of its existence, that all changed last year. Two AVRs rolled off the production line, the nine-channel MR1L and the beefier 11-channel MR1. Key to both is the availability of 13.2-channel decoding for a 7.2.6 or 9.2.4 layout.

In a marketplace with lots of choice, and Emotiva being a smaller enterprise than many of the obvious AVR contenders, it makes sense for the brand to try and stand out. Consequently, the BasX MR1 at £2,300 feels a bit different. Chief among its features is the proverbial tank-like build quality and expanded channel count for the money spent. Possibly on the downside, though, is a forfeit of common streaming options and a prettier user interface. The MR1 might suit the more discerning home cinema fan, or the one who doesn't always follow the crowd.

Like the slimline MC1 AV processor reviewed last year [see *HCC* #343], the MR1 sits within the company's BasX line, distinguishing itself from Emotiva's pricier and more feature-driven Reference models. And the similarities with the MC1 don't end there. This AVR's rear input panel is almost identical to the processor, meaning it is effectively the MC1's electronic brains and inputs bolted onto an 11-channel amp section. 'Separates in one box', as the company likes to stress.

The MR1 is a beast of an AVR, at nearly 23kg. The casing is fashioned from chunky steel and aluminium, not least because it must support a Christmas cake-sized toroidal transformer for the onboard Class AB amplifiers. Also note the 430x330x580mm (whd) dimensions, which could inhibit various shelf placements, although rack insertion is an obvious and available option.

The single finish choice features a striking-looking matt-black chassis surrounding a defeatable blue VFD (vacuum fluorescent display) behind an acrylic front panel. There is also a neon-blue horizontal strip running along the length of the display plate. Basic click buttons for changing inputs and playback modes sit to the left and right of a plastic central volume knob.

On the rear panel, you'll find six HDMI 2.0b (not 2.1) inputs and two outputs, one with eARC for passing audio down from a TV. With four analogue RCA pairs, plus two coaxial and two optical digital inputs, there's plenty of scope for connecting other, non-HDMI source devices

– although note that there's no dedicated phono input for a turntable, and the USB DAC connection – while nice to see – is limited to 48kHz media. Onboard Bluetooth, supported by a swivelling antenna, is another music playback option, in lieu of any Wi-Fi/Ethernet streaming.

There's an IR remote input, a trigger output and an RS-232 control connection. You also get a full gamut of 13.2 analogue outputs if you choose to use any of them for external amps. Two subwoofers can connect either over balanced XLR or unbalanced RCA connectors. The MR1 comes with an excellent backlit remote with soft-touch buttons, and an Emo-Q calibration microphone.





AV INFO

PRODUCT:
11-channel AV receiver with 13-channel decoding

POSITION:
Above the nine-channel BasX MR1L

PEERS:
Denon AVC-X4800H; NAD T778; Onkyo TX-RZ70



1. A large toroidal transformer feeds into the receiver's 11-channel amp stage, mounted on internal heatsinks

2. The MR1's front display can be dimmed if desired

3. Backlit remote includes channel trim keys for on-the-fly adjustment

While many AV receiver manufacturers stop short of claiming a power output for anything more than two channels driven, Emotiva claims 100 watts into 8 ohms or 130 watts into 4 ohms with all channels driven. There's certainly plenty of audio welly on tap in listening tests to support those claims.

Speakers' corner

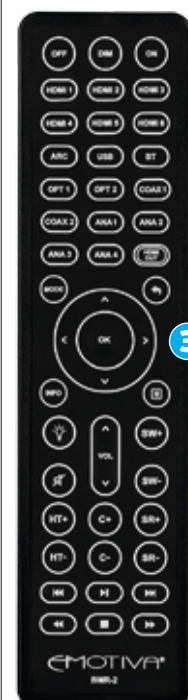
Emotiva employs its own Emo-Q room correction system. After running a calibration with the microphone pointed

first at the ceiling and then at individual speakers for the loud tone sweeps, Emo-Q displays a visual interface. A three-colour multi-line graph illustrates where the room response from each speaker has been corrected. There are eleven bands of parametric EQ for the LCR, seven for the surrounds and heights and five for the subwoofers, if you plan to do your own manual tweaking, say, with Room EQ Wizard (REW) or another tool. While the look and presentation of the tab-indexed user interface is a little unpolished and dated, it's perfectly usable.

The speaker setup I used for testing was a 7.2.2 arrangement. The MR1 reassigned one pair of front height channels logically to become a pair of middle height channels.

Performance art

All 11 loudspeaker screw terminals are well-built and set into the MR1's rear plate at 45-degree angles, which mitigates the chance of wiring cables out of phase or allowing wayward copper strands to make contact with the wrong surface.



Wired up and calibrated, the MRI produced a vivid and colourful soundstage from Blu-rays and streamed media. The Dolby Atmos mix of *The King's Man* (4K Blu-ray) amply filled my speaker array with a nice balance of power and careful high-frequency articulation. Ralph Fiennes' biplane jump sequence before the final showdown hurled directional propellor rotations into the height speakers and swooping aircraft wings into the ear-level channels.

Even in the quieter moments at the Savile Row tailor shop, in dialogue exchanges with Charles Dance's Kitchener, there was a lovely cinematic spaciousness and

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tonally smooth quality to the sound. Voices were always clean and natural. Despite these sonic assets, the bass response tended to over-reach during action sequences. Whether this was a shortfall in the Emo-Q calibration results or the AVR just required more post-calibration tweaking is debatable.

The MRI did, however, handle the transition to the devastating Soyuz capsule re-entry scene in *Gravity* (Blu-ray) with impressive dynamic fervour. The blasts of air and fire, interspersed with haunting metal crashes from all directions, were fully realised and visceral. Cohesion and forcefulness combined to majestic effect in a soundstage writ large, which is not always the norm for an AV receiver in this price category.

Emotiva's unit also proved to be a convincing dispatcher of tunes. The 'Re-remix' of 'Don't Go' by Yazoo, streamed via Spotify, exhibited a rich midrange, along with some expressive high-frequency electronic accents. A little more transient response and punch wouldn't go amiss, but this AVR is hardly in high-end territory. And the MRI was quite proficient at extracting both the subtlety and depth of Leos Janáček's 'Sinfonietta', played by the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Sir Andrew Davis (CD). In the final dramatic 'Andante con moto' movement, there was a fine rendition of radiant strings and an assured attainment of orchestral scale.

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY ATMOS: Yes **DTS:X:** Yes **IMAX ENHANCED:** No **MULTICHANNEL INPUT:** No **MULTICHANNEL PRE-OUT:** Yes, 13.2-channel **MULTICHANNEL OUTPUT (CLAIMED):** 11 x 100W (8ohm, 20Hz-20kHz, all channels driven) **MULTIROOM:** No **AV INPUTS:** 2 x optical digital audio; 2 x coaxial digital audio; 4 x analogue stereo **HDMI:** Yes, 6 x inputs; 2 x outputs **DIMENSIONS:** 430(w) x 330(h) x 580(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 22.6kg

FEATURES: Emo-Q Second Generation automatic room correction; three-preset manual correction with parametric EQ for all channels; aptX Bluetooth (with supplied antenna); USB-B DAC input; Cirrus Logic CS42528 DACs; DTS Neural:X and Dolby Surround upmixers; RS-232 connection; trigger output; IR remote input; dual subwoofer outputs on XLR and RCA; dimmable front-panel display; Dolby Vision and HDR10+ passthrough; HDMI eARC

TESTED WITH



THE KING'S MAN: Not the funniest or most action-packed entry in Matthew Vaughn's spy trilogy so far, but even if it feels a bit like a GCSE history lesson at times it's a worthy addition to the canon. The 4K disc has impressive visuals and will unleash a tide of room-filling music and effects into ceiling and surround speakers.

Metal worker

The BasX MRI is a multi-talented AVR with some excellent sonic results to recommend it. The 13.2 channels of decoding and pre-outs could be the deal clincher alone if you have a dedicated media room and/or upgradeability in your sights, and there's potential here for system tweekers to get their hands dirty with Emotiva's parametric EQ. Movie playback is immersive, cohesive and alluring over lengthy periods, thanks to smooth, open highs, and build quality is also impressive. The lack of streaming options and HDMI 2.1 connectivity might rule out the MRI for some, but others will admire its fine, powerful performance and excellent value ■

4. The MRI's 13.2-channel pre-out bank includes XLR and RCA subwoofer options

HCC VERDICT



Emotiva BasX MRI

→ £2,300 → www.emotiva.com

WE SAY: The MRI trades some streaming and usability features for a rugged build and superior home cinema performance. That makes it quite unusual in the marketplace – and we like it.

