



Marantz SR5500

Along with the Onkyo, this 7.1 channel replacement for the 6.1 SR5400 is the least expensive in this roundup.

Unlike the other three models it does not boast an auto system set up feature. Deduct one point for ease of setup, but bear in mind that this omission does not impact on performance. Auto setup has yet to reach the stage where it can compete with a carefully conducted manual setup for accuracy, and in this case the on-screen menu system is easy to drive, if rather utilitarian. There is an abbreviated simple setup procedure available for those that can't wait to get their new purchase on the road.

The remote control verges on dour as a design statement, but the receiver itself is well turned out, with a quality extruded aluminium fascia.

One key feature is a new high power processor which performs the image steering associated with Dolby Digital, DTS and other surround codecs. Another is a current feedback amplifier, a

configuration that offers certain performance benefits, as well as more power than its predecessor. More power in fact that any of the other models tested here with the exception of the Denon AVR-2805, which costs substantially more.

Surround yourself

All the usual surround codecs are available including DTS 96:24, which is sometimes excluded on cost grounds from receivers at this price level, and the 6.1/7.1 channel compatible Dolby Pro Logic IIx. Surprisingly, the designers have even managed to squeeze in Dolby Headphone, which is designed to provide a more natural, out of head listening experience from surround sound source material. Until very recently support for multiroom, multisource operation was not available at this price level, but the Marantz can do this too, with the surround back speaker outputs redirectable to the second zone.

There is also an RS232 comms port for use with external touch screen controller, though the cost of such a bolt on is disproportionate for a model such as this.

As you can see the SR5500 is a more than routinely well equipped model at the price, but what really makes it a compelling proposition is that the price has been achieved without compromising sound. The audio is cleaner and more controlled than most comparable receivers, and there is little of the usual frazzled, messy presentation often heard at this price level.

Relax, don't do it

Levels of detail, are impressively high, which helps ensure a vital and appropriately complex result with suitably animated source material. Dolby and DTS soundtracks are decoded with a sense of precision and with very stable and precise imagery. Most of all the Marantz has a smooth, almost relaxed demeanour. It rarely sounds as if it's being stretched too far. Sometimes it can sound a bit too relaxed, sapping some of the energy from the sound, when listening in stereo in particular.

This is an impressive low cost addition to the field, and great for music (especially using Pure Direct) and home cinema ■

TEST SCENE

The Return of the King



The Marantz is very comfortable in dealing with a wide range of sound levels including quieter moments of dialogue

PRICE £450

www.marantz.co.uk
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RATINGS

Style	★★★★☆
Ease of use	★★★★☆
Features	★★★★☆
Sound	★★★★☆
Value	★★★★☆
Overall	★★★★☆

WHC VERDICT

Superb value, well equipped without being gimmicky, solid audio engineering, relaxed, engaging and disciplined sound quality



AT A GLANCE

<p>FEATURES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dolby Headphone Lip sync adjust 0 – 200mS Simple setup function Auto input signal detection/switching Up-conversion to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> S-video & component video Down conversion of S-Video to composite video (useful for Zone 2) Video off mode/Pure Direct mode Circle Surround II
<p>CONNECTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Component video in x2 Component video out Coaxial in x2 Coaxial out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> S-video in x5 S-video out x3 Analogue in x9 Analogue out x4



Audio inputs

Component video

Speaker terminals