

DVDPlayer

DENON DVD-A11 ♦ £1,700 (APPROX) ♦ 01234 741200 ♦ www.denon.co.uk

Ultimate DVD techno-bling



**GLORIOUSLY
OVER-ENGINEERED,
DENON'S A11 PURPORTS
TO BE THE BEST DVD
PLAYER ON THE PLANET.
ALVIN GOLD IS SEDUCED BY
ITS TECHNO CREDENTIALS**

When DVD was unleashed a few short years ago, it was generally accepted as a definitive video source that would be good enough for any application for a long time to come. It took VHS by the scruff of the neck, and the rest, of course, is history. DVD-Audio has also been introduced in an attempt to produce a definitive sound quality source alongside the Sony/Philips alternative, SACD. The player tested here, Denon's new high end DVD-A11, is one of the select group of 'universal' players that can cope with each of the above.

But new times bring fresh perspectives. Picture and sound quality expectations develop as digital technology improves, and one of the key bottlenecks is the conversion of digital signals off disc to analogue before they leave the player. Until now, this has meant the amplifier and video display device (plasma or projector) has had to work with signals that have already been converted to analogue. Once a signal is in this form, it is susceptible to noise, distortion and other corruptions which impact on performance.

In a well managed digital signal chain, there is no corruption or loss of data after the initial digital coding when the disc was made, and if the final conversion can be made late or not made at all, there is little opportunity for further data loss. There are no technical difficulties in staying digital, but without secure encryption to help prevent pirating, there was no way that the copyright holders would allow digital signals outside the player.

FIRST PAST THE POST

This is what the Denon DVD-A11 is all about. To date, Pioneer has been the

main producer of DVD players with encrypted digital audio outputs, but as I write, their players all have analogue video outputs. The Denon DVD-A11 is the first player with digital audio and video outputs, beating two new Pioneer models by a matter of weeks. The three interfaces provided are Denon Link Second Edition, IEEE1394 (aka Firewire and i.Link) and finally DVi-HDCP.

Taking these in turn, Denon Link is Denon's proprietary audio interface. It is a technically elegant and powerful wideband interface, but it shows no signs of being adopted by other producers, and the original version was limited to CD standard 16-bit digital audio.

The Second Edition adds DVD-Audio to its repertoire, but as it stands SACD is not supported, because Denon has not yet

RATINGS

Highs: Incredibly desirable state of the art DVD player; superb connectivity

Lows: No HDMI; needs esoteric hardware partners

Picture	★★★★★
Features	★★★★½
Sound	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★½

secured agreement from the SACD licence holders. i.Link (aka IEEE1394) has some theoretical disadvantages when measured by Denon Link standards, but it remedies the SACD shortfall, and enjoys much wider support from other manufacturers,

Lab Report

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Video jitter (3ns)	✓			
Signal-to-noise ratio				
Composite (-69.9dB)		✓		
S-Video (-74.2dB)	✓			
Component (-75.3dB)	✓			
Chroma				
AM (-74.1dB)	✓			
PM (-65.5dB)		✓		
Chroma crosstalk (-57.5dB)		✓		
Freq response @ 5.8MHz				
S-video (0.48dB)	✓			
Component (0.13dB)	✓			
Composite (-0.04dB)	✓			
Audio jitter (191.9ps)	✓			

Compatibility

DVD-V	●	Video CD	●
DVD-A	●	Super Video CD	●
SACD	●	DiVX	●
CD	●	DVD+R	●
MP3	●	DVD-R	●
WMA	●	DVD+RW	●
JPEG	●	DVD-RW	●
HighMAT	●	DVD-RW (Video mode)	●
CD-R	●	DVD-RW (VR mode)	●
CD-RW	●	DVD-RAM	●

FEATURES

Specifications: Progressive video universal DVD-Video, DVD-Audio & SACD player. Faroudja FL2310 DCDi, six Analog Devices ADV-7310 12 bit 216MHz Video DACs with NSV (Noise Shaped Video). Burr Brown 1790 24 bit 192kHz audio DACs with Denon AL24 curve smoothing algorithm. Internal Dolby Digital, DTS & SRS TruSurround decoders. HDCD decoder. Pure direct mode. Speaker management for all audio disc types includes bass management crossover settings 40Hz – 120Hz in 20Hz increments. Various picture enhancements & trick play modes. Video scaling to 480p, 576p, 720p, 1080i. Supplied with remote control.

Compatible disc types: DVD-Video, DVD-Audio, SACD, CD, CD-R, CD-RW, MP3-CD, WMA-CD, Video CD, Kodak Picture CD, Fujicolour CD, DVD-R, DVD-RW, DVD+R, JPEG

Video connections: 2x composite video, 2x S-Video, 2x component video (3x phono & 3x BNC), DVi-HDCP digital video out. Audio: 2 channel & 6 channel output (8x phono), 2x IEEE1394 (Firewire) audio for full bandwidth encrypted digital out from CD, DVD-Audio & SACD. Coaxial & optical digital out (for CD only). 2x Scart for loop through connections, inc RGB. Denon Link SE (Second Edition - requires amplifier with Denon Link SE) for full bandwidth encrypted digital out from CD & DVD-Audio. RS232 control socket, AMX & Crestron compatible. Remote control in/out (3.5mm sockets)

Dimensions: 434(w) x 139(h) x 434(d) mm

Weight: 12.8kg **Finish:** Champagne gold or black

HOME CINEMA
Choice
Best Buy
★ GUARANTEE

Tried & Tested



'Put simply, this Denon helps establish a new quality yardstick for sound and picture replay'

including (but not limited to) Pioneer and Sony.

DVI is essentially a computer digital video interface, but with the addition of HDCP encryption it is now available for use for transmitting DVD video, which is how it is used here. In encrypted form, DVI can handshake with players which have the newest interface of all, HDMI, which carries audio (currently data reduced only, meaning Dolby Digital, DTS and fellow travellers only at present) as well as video. All you need is a converter cable.

But although the two are sometimes described as synonymous from the video point of view, DVI and HDMI (sometimes known as digital Scart) behave and perform differently under the skin. In the fullness of time, HDMI looks likely to become the standard audio and video interface for home cinema. This won't happen overnight though, partly because the current HDMI will not work with

DVD-Audio or SACD. All things considered, it will probably be a couple years before this becomes standard.

METAL MICKEY

Setting the digital outputs to one side, the DVD-A11 is still an extremely well endowed player. It is built to a very high standard, with solid metalwork and other measures to reduce microphony and ensure a stable interference-free platform for the disc. The Denon also has an extremely strong power supply section, and internal measures to minimise interference between the various operating blocks of the player. There is also a Pure Direct mode which switches off digital outputs, along with video and other circuitry when not required, and this makes a significant further contribution to sound quality. Dolby and DTS decoders are built in. Not a high end provision, but what certainly

is high end is the leading edge Faroudja FL2310 PAL/NTSC progressive scan chip, which works hand in hand with a range of preset picture adjustments for different types of source material.

Put simply, the Denon DVD-A11 helps establish a new quality yardstick for sound and picture replay. Picture quality is simply outstanding, and not to be compared to previous generation players with analogue video outputs. Used with DVI-HDCP equipped projectors from SIM2, Marantz and Infocus, picture quality is remarkably clean and noise free, giving a smooth homogenous result that cannot fail to grab the eye.

Difficult near-blacks and near-whites are handled with great subtlety, and picture resolution is clearly of the highest order, showing more detail than you will have experienced before from DVD. The Faroudja processing does a very complex job extremely well,

which means smooth, artefact-free moving images, no noticeable MPEG nasties and an absence of jagged moving edges.

Sound quality is no less impressive. Even as an analogue player, it outperforms the (much cheaper) Denon DVD-2900 universal player but the opportunity to perform D/A conversion just ahead of the power amplifier potentially adds a transparency and clarity to the sound that is not otherwise apparent.

The situation differs from video to the extent that there is a D/A conversion state at some point, where projectors and plasmas screens can be driven directly by the digital video signal with no further degradation at all. With audio, quality is dependent on the performance of the amplifier, which have been improving steadily over the last few years. The current breed of high-end multichannel amplifiers are astonishingly sophisticated products and the A11 would be a good match. Overall, this is a gloriously over-engineered DVD deck that those with a lust for the exotic will find difficult to resist ■



Note the DVI input (top left) and Denon link (bottom left)



The build quality here is uncompromising



A complex remote controls the All



There's a choice of gold or black finishes