

Anthem MRX 710 AV Receiver Review

The best just got better

by [Steve Withers](#) Feb 3, 2014

HOME CINEMA review

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SRP: £2199.00

Introduction

When Anthem launched their first AV receivers back at the end of 2010, it would be fair to say we were impressed.

The combination of the refined power and sophisticated processing found in both the MRX

Now the Canadian manufacturer is back with their new line-up which is comprised of the flagship

700 and MRX 300 resulted in a level of performance that made a mockery of their respective price points. However what impressed us the most was Anthem Room Correction (ARC), a genuinely game-changing piece of software that took the performance of these receivers to an entirely new level when compared to the competition. The fact that the MRX 300 was only £1,099 - a price that included ARC, a calibrated microphone and a tripod stand - just begged belief, winning the Anthem a highly deserved AVForums Best Buy award. The MRX 700 impressed us even more and was also rewarded with a Best Buy Award. They weren't perfect of course, their looks were fairly plain, the build quality could have been better in places, the features were minimal and the HDMI inputs limited but, bang for buck, nothing came close.

MRX 710, the mid-range MRX 510 and the entry-level MRX 310. The new receivers have had a facelift, with a more attractive design, a revised remote control and an increased number of HDMI inputs and outputs. There's also 4K upscaling, faster HDMI switching, networking over Ethernet and software updates via USB. Best of all, ARC has been upgraded and now includes much faster processing, greater precision and a redesigned user interface. You can also control ARC 2, as the revised version is called, using a provided CAT5 cable rather than the old serial connector. In this review we're taking a look at the top-of-the-line MRX 710, which includes 7 channels of amplification at 120W per a channel. It's impressive on paper but can it live up to our impossibly high expectations?

Design and Connections

The MRX 710 has a very attractive design, with an elegant and understated black brushed aluminium fascia that is refreshingly free from clutter. It's good to see an AV receiver manufacturer who realises that you just don't need loads of buttons and controls on the front, you can do all that from either the remote control or through the menu system. If you keep it simple it looks better and is less likely to scare consumers, who must be terrified by the front panels on some AV receivers. The build quality is very good and overall the MRX 710 has a well made and nicely engineered feel, with dimensions that measure 439 x 372 x 164mm and a weight of 14kg.



On the left hand side there are some basic navigation controls for moving around the menu systems and a drop down flap, behind which is a headphone jack and an extra HDMI input. In the middle is a large blue LED display that is both informative and easy to read from a distance. Beneath the display are some basic buttons for setup, display brightness, mode selection, level selection, zone 2 selection and input. The MRX 710 supports up to 20 virtual inputs that you can cycle through these using this input button or the one on the remote control. On the right hand side there is a large volume control and two power buttons - a main one and one for zone 2.

Finally an AV receiver manufacturer has realised you don't need loads of controls on the front panel.

One of the few criticisms that could be levelled against Anthem's previous generation of receivers was that they were rather limited when it came to HDMI inputs but that's definitely no longer the case. The MRX 710 has eight HDMI 1.4a inputs, seven at the rear and one at the front, along with two HDMI 1.4a outputs. The HDMI connectors support ARC and 3D and the input HDMI1 accepts a 4K signal. The emphasis is very much on digital connections, which makes perfect sense and Anthem have wisely dropped a lot of the pointless legacy connections that still clutter many an AV receiver's back panel. Anthem also use a clever colour code

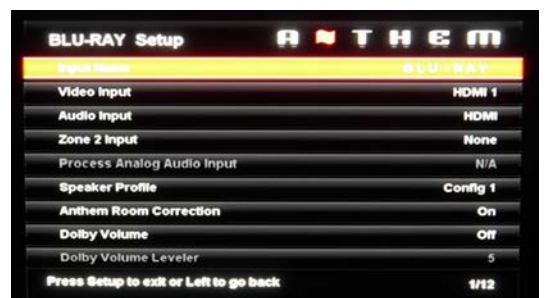
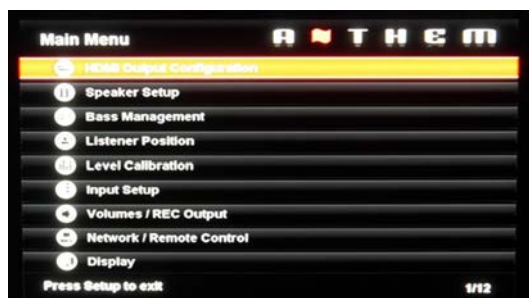
for the connections - inputs have a black background and outputs have a white one. There is now an Ethernet port, which is handy for IP control and is used to run ARC; as well as a USB port for firmware updates. There are 7.1-channel pre-outs, along with option to either use the back surround channels for a second zone or to bi-amp the front speakers. Finally there are some analogue stereo inputs, an IR in and out, a 12V trigger, a RS232 serial connector and a FM/AM antenna connector.



The remote control has also had a makeover, with a simplified layout and a more substantial feel. This makes it comfortable to hold and easy to use, thanks to a clear and intuitive design. The keys are laid out sensibly, allowing you to control any aspect of the MRX 710 without being faced with hundreds of tiny buttons. There is also a backlight, which makes the remote easier to use in a darkened home cinema. Anthem don't currently have a remote app available but apparently one is in the works. Last year Anthem provided a second, smaller remote for controlling zone 2 but this has been dropped with the new line-up. Instead there are controls for zone 2 at the bottom of the newly designed main remote control.

Menus and Setup

In terms of setup, Anthem have gone out of their way to make this as straightforward as possible and thanks to some clever design it takes no time at all. The sensibly laid-out and colour-coded rear connections make plugging in your various devices and attaching the speakers simplicity itself. The menu system is also well designed and intuitive to navigate, making the rest of the setup process relatively painless. It's also worth pointing out that the menus seem larger than the previous generation, which makes them easier to read.



There are sub-menus covering the HDMI Output Configuration, the Speaker Setup, Bass Management, Listener Position, Level Calibration, Input Setup, Volumes/REC Output, Network/Remote Control and Display. One of the really useful aspects of Anthem's menu design, is the ability to create up to twenty inputs, depending on your requirements. You can separate the audio and video assignments for each input and, best of all, you can assign the same HDMI source to different input setups. So, for example, you could assign your Blu-ray player to both the Blu-ray input and the CD input and then configure each differently.

The menu system is well designed, comprehensive and highly flexible.

Features

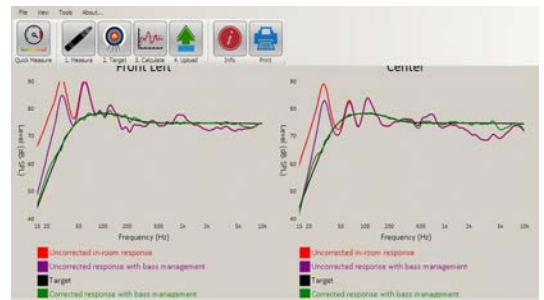
Some reviewers may feel that compared to the competition, the MRX 710 is rather light in terms of features but that very much depends on your point of view. In terms of the features that really matter, we feel the MRX 710 has everything it needs. There are plenty of HDMI inputs and outputs, along with support for ARC, 3D and even 4K pass-through and upscaling. The MRX 710 has seven channels of built-in amplification and also offers 7.1-channel pre-outs, along with the option to use the amplification for the back speakers to either power a second zone or to bi-amp the front left and right speakers instead. Anthem have dropped support for Dolby Pro Logic IIz and thus there is no option to have height speakers but we really don't feel this is a great loss. The same goes for DTS Neo:X support or the inclusion of pre-outs for extra width and height channels.

The MRX 710 includes a built-in AM/FM tuner but Anthem have dropped support for the vTuner Internet Radio application, along with their multi-media application. The MRX 710 also no longer supports direct connection of external USB devices and the dedicated iPod MDX 1 dock connector has gone, although again this is no great loss. You just don't need all these apps, multi-media and internet features on an AV receiver because there are already plenty of other devices that can handle these tasks and do them better. The ideal AV receiver should just concentrate on doing the important things well and that means an effective setup and great sound. In this respect the MRX 710 fits the bill perfectly, with a combination of advanced processing combined with well engineered and effective amplification. This means that on the Anthem, the Ethernet connection is only for IP control and ARC, whilst the USB port is just used for firmware updates.

Anthem's latest generation of receivers now include superior digital signal processing (DSP), which allows ARC 2 to implement more filters and ultimately create a room-correction curve that is closer to the intended targets. It also means that the software runs much faster than in the previous generation and the overall experience is slicker and more user friendly. Anthem has also incorporated Advanced Load Monitoring into the MRX 710, which constantly monitors voltage and current to ensure that the output transistors in the receiver are kept within safe operating limits. The temperature of the amplifier is controlled with a two-speed fan inside a heat sink tunnel and this allows the Anthem to protect itself from damage in situations where speaker impedance is low and volume is high. Of course the single most important feature found on the MRX 710 is Anthem Room Correction, so let's look at it in more detail and find out how the latest version of ARC differs from the previous generation.

ARC 2

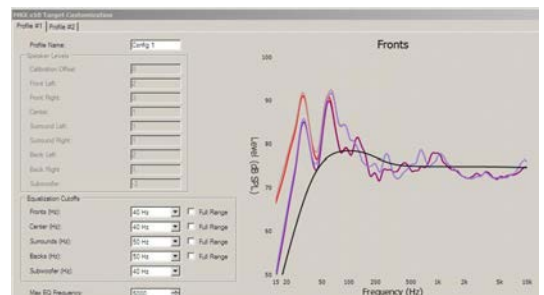
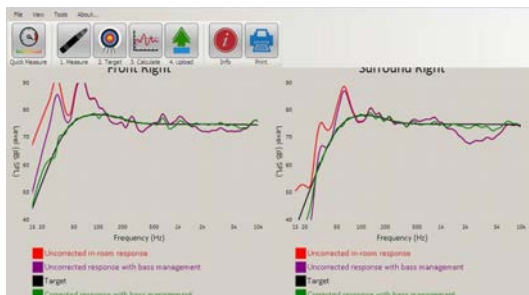
The first thing to mention is that, like the previous generation, an Anthem receiver comes with its own calibrated microphone in the box. There's also a tripod stand, an installation CD with the ARC 2 software on it, a USB cable for the microphone and a CAT5 cable for connecting the receiver to your network. The fact that you can now control ARC 2 over your network is good news because the previous generation used serial communication which could be a real pain to implement. You need to use the provided CD to install ARC 2 onto your laptop because a calibration file is automatically copied into the ARC 2 file directory, which contains the serial number for the specific microphone included with the receiver. Once you have initially installed ARC 2, you can then look for any updates on the Anthem website and the software will run on Windows Vista or XP.



Once you have installed the ARC 2 software, you then enter the distances to your speakers in the Listener Position sub-menu. You can choose between feet and metres and the increments are 1 foot or 0.3 metres. Once that is done, all you need to do is connect the microphone to a USB port on your laptop, connect the MRX 710 to your network and place the microphone in the sweet spot using the provided tripod stand. ARC 2 has both an automatic mode and a manual mode but for most people the automatic mode will be the best option. You just run the automatic version of ARC 2 and follow the instructions. The software looks for the receiver on the network and checks the microphone and the support file match. This is because each microphone's frequency response is measured precisely in the factory and then used to create the calibration file.

ARC 2 is the best auto-calibration and room EQ software that we have experienced on any AV receiver.

The automatic version of ARC 2 will take you through the entire process, beginning with selecting the number of speakers and the configuration. Then you can select the number of measurement positions, the system defaults to five but you can go up to nine. ARC 2 then begins measuring at the first position before promoting you to move the microphone to the second position and measuring again. The software will do this for all the positions you have requested and once all the measurements have been taken, ARC 2 processes the data and uploads it to the hard drive on your laptop. Then ARC 2 automatically uploads the room correction parameters and speaker levels to the MRX 710. Once this process is complete, you are given the option to preview the results and if you say yes, the software produces a full calibration report. This is a really nice touch and the ten page report shows all the before and after measurements for each speaker, along with speaker levels and crossover targets. The entire report can even be customised and printed out, which is great news for any professional installers out there.



The user interface for ARC 2 is a massive improvement over the previous version, it is very informative, beautifully laid out and genuinely useful. There are graphs for all the speakers and they show the uncorrected room response, the target and then the corrected room response with bass management. They also show the uncorrected room response with bass management and there is a Curve Viewer which allows you to view the plots for each speaker and see the equalisation curve that is being applied. There is also a Quick Measure feature that takes real time graphical measurements for a specific speaker, this is particularly handy for finding the best place to position the subwoofer. And we haven't even begun to mention all the manual features, which are just too numerous to cover in the scope of this review. Suffice to say, the only room equalisation software we have seen that's more impressive than ARC 2 is Dirac Live but

that costs £600 just for the software and microphone; but with Anthem you get all this for free!

Video Review

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Sound Quality

We had a good idea of what to expect, having already reviewed Anthem's MRX 300 and MRX 700 AV receivers but even our fairly high expectations were exceeded. We have always found that whilst Anthem's power numbers might not seem as big as some of the competition, they are actually based on some semblance of reality. As a result, despite only being listed at 120W per channel, the MRX 710 had plenty of power to fill our home cinema with immersive sound that delivered plenty of impact. That it could do this without embarrassing itself after the Datasat/Dirac Live processor/power amplifier combination we had reviewed previously is a genuine compliment to Anthem. In fact, whilst it isn't a fair comparison when you consider that the Datasat combo will set you back over thirty thousand pounds, the MRX 710 was able to hold its own in a way that a £2,199 AV receiver just shouldn't be able to.

This is in no small part due to the latest version of Anthem Room Correction (ARC) which equalised all the speakers in the room so effectively that they, and the room itself, just simply disappeared. The impact that ARC had on the overall sound quality was a revelation and the combination of B&W speakers and SVS subwoofer were perfectly integrated with one another. The result was a truly cohesive sound experience, with a nice sense of tonality and some extremely precise imaging. The audio performance of the MRX 710 was simply stunning, with a wonderfully realised sound field that delivered precise localisation and effects. There was a superb level of detail in the performance, with genuine clarity and dialogue was always clear, instruments sounded natural and bass was beautifully integrated.

It was the way the MRX 710 integrated the bass that really impressed us. It was tight and controlled but also fast and well timed, so the low frequencies supported the rest of the sound stage, enhancing the experience and delivering impact precisely when it was supposed to. Among the many films that we watched was Pacific Rim, which we have found can bring a lesser system to its knees with its wonderfully bass heavy soundtrack. Not so with the MRX 710 and the as the Jaegers and Kaiju fought it out, the Anthem kept pace with the storm. We were equally as impressed when watching Rush, as the sounds of engines and crowds surrounded us and helped transport us back to that incident-packed 1976 F1 season. We also watched Captain Phillips and again the MRX 710 played its part, delivering the soundtrack in such a way that it plunged you into the drama and ratcheted up the tension. Overall the performance was classy, subtle and controlled, never sounding overbearing but able to go suitably loud when needed.

As we have found with previous Anthem receivers, the MRX 710 was capable of sounding wonderful with both multi-channel audio and two-channel stereo. We listened to a variety of music, from the Manic Street Preacher's latest album *Rewind the Film*, to the complex arrangements on Howard Shore's orchestral score for *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*. We also ploughed through the recently released *Fisherman's Box* which, with over 130 tracks, is almost every recording from the two years Mike Scott and The Waterboys spent making *Fisherman's Blues*. With a mixture of rock, gospel and folk music the MRX 710 did a wonderful job of delivering Mike Scott's original vision for the album. This is level of performance with two-channel stereo is something of a rare feat but if you're looking for an AV receiver that can sound as good with your music collection as it will with your movie collection, then look no further.

Quite simply, the Anthem MRX 710 is the best sounding AV receiver we have reviewed to date.

Conclusion

10

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Pros

Cons

I own this 3

I want this 10

I had this 0

Somehow Anthem have done the impossible and made the best receiver on the market even better. The MRX 710 is a genuinely remarkable achievement that combines pure performance with a level of sophistication normally only found in products that cost ten times as much. Anthem appear to have addressed all the issues that people had with their previous generation of receivers, improving the build quality and making the design more attractive. They have also increased the number of HDMI inputs, revised the remote control and added useful features such as 4K pass-through and upscaling. Anthem are also to be congratulated for having the courage to remove unnecessary analogue connections and for dropping pointless features to concentrate on what is important - sound quality.

In order to achieve this they have updated their Anthem Room Correction software and ARC 2 is nothing short of a revelation, with a completely redesigned user interface and an improved level of performance. The fact that you now control ARC via your network is a welcome improvement and thanks to superior digital processing the software is more precise and runs much faster. Anthem also include a dedicated calibrated microphone, a tripod stand, a USB cable and a CAT5 cable as part of the package and the new software is easy to install and use. The rest of the receiver is equally as easy to setup, thanks in part to a well laid out and intuitive menu system.

The MRX 710 is also very flexible, with configuration for up to 20 different inputs and firmware updates over USB.

We often wonder how Anthem are able to deliver such a performance at this price point and once again the Canadian manufacturer has managed to surprise us. The MRX 710 would be worth buying if it was twice the price but at £2,199 it is nothing short of a bargain. The Anthem MRX 710 is, quite simply, the best sounding AV receiver that we have reviewed to date and is therefore the reference point against which all the other receivers will be compared.

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The Rundown

Sound Quality	10
Features	7
Connectivity	9
Build Quality	8
Value For Money	10
Verdict	10