



UNIVERSAL BLU-RAY PLAYER



For the money, you won't find a player out there that does what this Cambridge player does so well

UNIVERSAL
BLU-RAY PLAYER
CAMBRIDGE
AUDIO
AZUR 650BD
★★★★★
£ 400

FOR

Sturdily finished, extravagantly specified; impressive cross-format performance

AGAINST

Not quite the best Blu-ray pictures £400 can buy

VERDICT

The ongoing clamour for an affordable universal disc player addressed in some style



See the video review
whathifi.com/video

Azur plays it all – with assurance

ENTHUSIASTIC ADOPTERS OF new technology often have a number of players knocking about, what with Blu-ray, CD, HDCD, SACD, DVD and DVD-Audio discs to enjoy. Cambridge Audio wants to put an end to your multiple box/extravagant power consumption misery with the Azur 650BD.

As well as all the formats, the 650BD will handle eight-channel decoding of all high-def audio, and packs 1GB of memory for BD-Live access, and two USB 2.0 inputs. The casework is hefty, the remote comprehensive (though unlit and a plasticky imitation of the original metal Azur Navigator) and the on-screen menus crisp and coherent. Only the lack of wireless connectivity (the ethernet port is

“All aspects of home cinema performance are compelling”

for wired connection only) prevents a nap hand.

Blu-ray performance impresses. The 650BD loads discs a sight faster than most – *The Dark Knight* was ready to go in around 20 seconds. And the lustrous colour palette, bright contrasts, smooth

edge definition, assured motion handling and torrential levels of detail are amirable. A scene combining complex patterns with slow panning can provoke a smattering of picture noise, but, set against everything the 650BD does well, that's almost a gratuitous complaint.

“The even-handedness and musicality make it especially enjoyable”

Other aspects of home cinema performance are just as compelling. Whether sending undecoded audio to a receiver via HDMI, or taking care of high-def soundtracks on board, the 650BD sounds punchy, expansive and exciting, with nicely judged bite at the top end and a richly articulate midrange. It upscales DVD to 1080p with few alarms, and makes the most of Dolby Digital or DTS sound.

DVD-Audio and SACD sound clean, dynamically potent and spacious. It's the even-handedness and musical presentation that makes the 650BD's especially enjoyable here.

Even stereo CD playback isn't badly compromised – a degree

more focus wouldn't go amiss, but, for detail retrieval and midrange eloquence, this has little real competition.

The 650BD may not be a 'universal' player in the way the £5000 Marantz UD9004 is (it's not a master of every format it can play), but its price and competitive performance make it one of the most capable affordable disc-spinners around.



PLAYS

Blu-ray; DVD-Audio; SACD; HDCD; CD/-R/-RW; MP3; DivX; DVD-R/-RW; DVD+R/+RW; VCD; MKV; AVI

OUTPUTS

HDMI; component; S-Video; composite; digital optical; digital coaxial; eight-channel analogue

VIDEO SCALING

1080p

24FPS Yes

DIMENSIONS

9x43x31cm