



Denon **PMA-1600NE** £1,299



With tech trickled down from its flagship integrated, this one trades some power, but has all bases covered

INSIDE STORY

Denon's DAC Master Clock aims to deliver an accurate conversion of digital signals, whether from the two optical inputs, the coaxial digital in or the asynchronous USB Type B connection, which can accept ultra-high-resolution audio data from a computer or other storage device. In addition to this, the DAC section has a Digital Isolator, which seeks to exclude unwanted noise, while the Analogue Mode turns off the digital circuitry for the purest sound.

The power amplifier section employs a simple, direct design using an Advanced Ultra High Current MOS single push-pull circuit, designed to use a minimal number of high-current elements to drive the speakers for improved sound quality, its push-pull design claiming to combine delicacy and refinement with wide-ranging dynamic ability.

- DETAILS**
- PRODUCT**
Denon PMA-1600NE
 - ORIGIN**
Japan
 - TYPE**
Integrated amplifier
 - WEIGHT**
17.6kg
 - DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
434 x 135 x 414mm
 - FEATURES**
 - Quoted power output: 2x 70W (8ohm)
 - Inputs: 4x RCA; 1x USB; 2x optical; 1x coaxial; 1x 3.5mm fascia input jack
 - MM/MC phono stage
 - 6.35mm jack headphone output
 - DISTRIBUTOR**
Denon UK
 - TELEPHONE**
02890 279830
 - WEBSITE**
denon.co.uk

Flagship integrated, the PMA-2500NE (HFC 415), showed us just how much it is possible to extract from an amplifier costing less than £2k. Now, the special one has become a three-strong family, with the PMA-1600NE sitting plumb in the middle and looking every inch the cherry pick of the bunch. In Denon-speak 'PMA' stands for 'pre-main amplifier', informing us that the PMA-1600NE combines a preamp, a DAC capable of 32-bit/384kHz and DSD256 with 140W per channel (into 4ohm) in one chassis. Well, that's little more than par for the course in this group. Denon counters with its refinements – a 'six block' construction method that seeks to eliminate noise transfer between the various elements. Also, there are separate power supplies for the analogue and digital stages and what it calls 'Direct Mechanical Ground Construction' to minimise vibration.

The digital section is based around Denon's Advanced AL32 Processing Plus, which seeks to enhance the digital signal by interpolating extra

data points in order to produce a smoother, more 'analogue' output waveform. There's also an 'Analogue Only' function, which switches off the digital circuitry.

The PMA-1600NE additionally has a selectable MM and MC phono input for vinyl addicts. Line-level inputs are also provided, along with by-passable tone controls. Build is rock solid.

Sound quality

The built-in DAC is a good one and remarkably consistent across all the digital inputs. Sara Bareilles' exquisite performance of *I Can Let Go Now* is lushly detailed, beguiling, musical and emotionally replete. What a set of pipes this girl has and her extraordinary dynamic range and subtlety are given full expression.

Plug in the Chord Hugo DAC and switch off the amp's digital circuitry, and it can almost bring you to tears. Things get better still, especially if you prioritise pace, flow and rhythmic integrity. The DAC's overarching sweetness and smoothness isn't quite replicated by the Hugo, but dynamic contrasts are more precisely portrayed,

transients sharpen up, tempo and timing lock down and music acquires more solidity, focus and dimensionality.

The effect this has on the Alison Moyet cut takes what the Arcam achieved to another level. Her lung capacity seems greater. She's more in the room, and a larger room at that, the soundstage stretching well beyond the span of the speakers and some way behind as well. The Coryell and Beck guitar duet sounds cleaner and crisper too, but without tipping the balance away from the tonal body, reverberation and timbral textures created by the guitar bodies.

Most telling, though, is what happens with the massed voices of Naturally 7. The Denon's transparency and powers of discrimination most definitely win the day here, painting a collective composed of individual voices that makes the closely woven harmonies all the more spine tingling ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Superb build; decent connectivity; internal DAC; stunning sound quality

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** It doesn't look quite as special as it sounds

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** A terrific amp that does it all and sounds fabulous as it does so

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★