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“... KNUCKLE-WHITENING,
ASS-CLENCHING PERFORMANCE ...
there’s just little else that can compete
at anywhere near this price point.”

Reviewed by Dennis Burger

My dad’s convertible Corvette is, to put it politely, rather lacking when it comes to trunk space. You can’t change the low beam headlights yourself. And I’ve definitely seen more refined interiors in my days. But the first time we ever took it out on the open road my dad punched the gas, looked at me, grinned mischievously and yelled, “Wooo, this baby’ll get up to a hunnerd before your butthole can close up good and tight!” Perhaps not the most eloquent summation of the C6 Corvette’s performance, but certainly one of the most evocative.

So, yeah, catch us if you can while we’re tearing it up on the winding unpoliced county roads north of town, sliding around tight

bends like a scampering puppy pawing for purchase on a freshly waxed tile floor, and ask us if headlights or trunk space or lackluster dashboards are anywhere near the forefront of our minds.

That’s pretty much exactly how I feel about Anthem’s new MRX 700 receiver. It lacks multichannel analog audio inputs (as well as S-Video ins, but who honestly uses those anymore?). Proper setup requires a PC with a serial port (in a continuing *who uses those anymore?* theme). And it doesn’t support front width channels, which I’ve grown to love on the last few Audyssey DSX-equipped receivers I reviewed.

Hunt me down while I’m sitting in the sweet spot, though, soaking in yet another play-

through of the Beatles: *Love* on DVD-Audio, basking in the MRX 700’s sphincter-tightening performance and ask me if I give a rip about any of the features and doodads the receiver lacks.

Spoiler warning: I don’t.

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In fact, I tip my hat to Anthem for not trying to compete in the features game with the big name manufacturers who crank out new models at least once a year. There's no way an audiophile-oriented North American manufacturer could ever win that game. Instead, Anthem is playing a game it knows it can win—one of balls-out audio quality and unique, rather than prodigious, features.

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Chief among said features—and not-incidentally, a significant factor in the MRX 700's exceptional audio performance—is **Anthem Room Correction** (ARC for short), the exact same calibration system that ships with the company's flagship Statement D2v A/V processor. Forget the flimsy hockey-puck microphones that come with most receivers these days; ARC comes with a larger, calibrated mic (and tripod stand), which connects to your Windows XP, Vista, or Windows 7-equipped PC via USB, which then connects to the receiver via a serial connection (or a good USB-to-Serial converter). If it sounds like a lot of fuss, it is. But it's worth it, especially for those who know (and care) a bit about the ups and downs of equalization. For set-it-and-forget-it types, it's certainly easy enough to run ARC in Automatic mode, let it perform its calculations in five positions around the room, upload the resulting EQ curve to the receiver, and be done with. For those who love to tinker though, Manual mode allows for numerous adjustments, including the ability to select the frequency past which ARC performs no equalization. By default, it leaves anything above 5,000 Hz alone (although you set the max frequency for equalization at any point between 200 and 5,000 Hz with different maximums for movie and music profiles), which is smart: not only do lower frequencies benefit more from EQing, but the room correction systems I've tested that do futz around with the high frequencies can create a rather sterile, dry, artificial sound. And the upper registers are where the MRX 700 really sings. Treble is sparkling, musical, without being overly bright. And once ARC has dealt with

egregious resonance spikes and nulls—in my system, a 6 dB spike between 300 Hz and 400 Hz in the front mains and between 150 Hz and 400 Hz in the surrounds, as well as a nasty 8 dB spike in the center channel at around 350 Hz and several peaks and valleys in the subwoofer—the receiver's high-end sparkle is a large contributor to its delicious channel separation. There's still a wonderful cohesiveness between the channels, especially between the front and rear soundstages, but individual sound elements ring through with a level of aural precision and pellucidity that sends me scrambling for my thesaurus to look up words like “pellucidity.”

Nearly two years after reviewing Anthem's flagship D2v processor, I still find myself gravitating toward the second disc of the extended edition of *Fellowship of the Ring* on DVD as the ultimate stress test for dialogue clarity, due to its ridiculously dense DTS ES surround sound mix. And the MRX 700 passes with flying colors, rendering every hushed word of dialogue effortlessly. (And yes: I do have *Lord of the Rings* on Blu-ray, and the MRX 700 decodes the DTS-HD Master Audio soundtracks beautifully; I just can't bear to watch the theatrical cuts.)

“The scenes in the Pass of Caradhras (‘Lord of The Rings’) also make for a wonderful example of what ARC does—and just as importantly doesn't do—to the sound. With ARC on, the score booms ominously as Boromir lifts the Ring from the snow; with ARC off, it's more of a bloated woof.”

The scenes in the Pass of Caradhras also make for a wonderful example of what ARC does—and just as importantly doesn't do—to the sound. With ARC on, the score booms ominously as Boromir lifts the Ring from the snow; with ARC off, it's more of a bloated woof. During the quiet talky bits that follow, “A/B ing” back and forth doesn't reveal much if any difference at all, which is good: it means that the room correction system isn't significantly changing the sonic characteristics of the speakers when it doesn't need to. But as the fellowship moves into the Mines of Moria, ARC really flexes its muscles. Sequences that are an absolute cacophony without ARC are ... well, still a cacophony with it, but one in which individual elements of sound ring through clearly.

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The louder I crank the MRX 700, the more difference ARC makes. And crank it loud I do. A lot. Although the receiver only features 90 watts per channel in surround mode, I would put it toe-to-toe with any of the so-called 125-watt-per-channel receivers I've reviewed lately and dare the rest to try to keep up. With GoldenEar's SuperCinema 3 speaker system hooked up (to a beautiful set of beefy binding posts I might add), and the volume knob spun to the right, the system runs like a striped ape (another aphorism I stole from my old man. “How does a striped ape run, exactly?” I asked him once. “Hard,” he said. “How do you know?” I asked. “Welp,” he said, “have you ever caught a glimpse of one?”) And it runs that hard, in typical Anthem fashion, without a lick of discernible distortion. Honestly, it's easy to push the MRX 700 way past the point where you should be able to sit in the room with it.

Speaking of the GoldenEar SuperCinema 3 System, I alluded in my review last month to the fact that the speakers sounded a little lackluster in two-channel mode. I need to retract that assessment, although in my defense it appears the receiver I was using at the time was to blame. Through the MRX 700, the SuperSat 3s sound scrumptious in stereo. Joanna Newsom's “'81,”

from her most recent triple album *Have One on Me*, rings through with a richness and depth of soundstage that was simply lacking through the Denon with which I previously drove the GoldenEars. And if you tend to take your tunes with a few extra channels, the MRX 700's AnthemLogic processing also adds multichannel depth and space to the recording—bringing the harmonies out into the room and broadening, enhancing the airiness of the mix—with more subtlety and far less coloration than other stereo-to-surround matrixed decoders.

If AnthemLogic is too subtle for you, though, the MRX 700 also boasts Dolby Pro Logic IIz capabilities, although as with most receivers I've seen thus far, you're forced to pick between height channels and rear surrounds; both can't be driven (or processed) at the same time.

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That's not a complaint. I like the effect the height channels add, and there isn't a room in my house in which rear surrounds really make much sense, so it's an easy choice for me. If I do have one legitimate complaint about the MRX 700, it's that the onscreen menus, while beautiful and easy to navigate—a significant improvement over the D2v's GUI—feature small text that's going

to be a little hard to read if you're sitting farther from your display than SMPTE's recommended viewing distance.

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Then again, if you're not following SMPTE's recommendations for viewing distances, it's a safe bet you're not really chasing the utmost in performance, and you're probably not in the market for the MRX 700 anyway because, quite frankly, for \$2,000, you can easily find a number of receivers that'll do a heck of a lot more than this one will. But I defy any of those receivers to do what the MRX 700 does anywhere near as well. When it comes to knuckle-whitening, ass-clenching performance, there's just little else that can compete at anywhere near this price point.

“As the old Corvette ad campaign boasts, ‘They don't write songs about Volvos.’ There's a reason they call the MRX 700 an Anthem.”

