



STEREO AMPLIFIER
CAMBRIDGE
AUDIO AZUR
340A SE



£ 180

FOR

A fast and punchy sound; good level of detail and crisp dynamics

AGAINST

Needs some care in system-matching

VERDICT

This great starter amplifier gets all the basics right – don't buy a budget amp until you hear the 340A SE

Classy sound from budget star

DON'T BUY ANOTHER sub-£200 amplifier until you hear this one. Cambridge Audio has dominated the budget amplifier market in recent years, and while the larger amps in the range may now be feeling the pinch from rivals, we can't think of anything we'd prefer at this price level to the 340A SE.

More power for your MP3s

The biggest changes in the switch to SE spec are a slight power increase – up from 40 to 45 watts per channel – and the inclusion of a 3.5mm MP3 input on the front panel to allow easy connection. We never formally tested the original 340A, but the SE version is great. Sure,

spend more and you'll get greater weight and authority, but when it comes to getting to the heart of the music, this amp is terrific.

This is a fast and punchy little unit. There's a hint of excess brightness at the top-end, but unless you

“When it comes to getting to the heart of the music, it's terrific”

go out of your way to aggravate the trait with bright speakers and an aggressive source you won't go far wrong. Give partnering equipment just a modicum of thought, and

you'll end up with an extremely involving and likeable performance. The 340A SE gets all the basics right: it digs up a fair bit of detail and assembles it in an organised and musical manner.

Budget price, great sound

Timing and dynamics are delivered in a confident manner, meaning Hans Zimmer's OST from the third *Pirates of the Caribbean* film is as over the top as it should be. Try something smaller scale like Tracy Chapman's *Let it Rain*, and this amp responds with finesse and insight.

That's what makes this model so special. The 340A SE is a budget amplifier that doesn't keep reminding you of the fact.



ALSO CONSIDER



MARANTZ PM4001



£200

March 2007
The PM4001 is a fine all-rounder sold at a very competitive price

NAD C315BEE



£180

October 2007
This NAD has a great midrange and treble, though lacks grip at low frequencies