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Rotel

Model No: RX975

stereo receiver

5 years parts & labor

List Price: \$699.00



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Product Review

Rotel

RX-975 stereo receiver

Steve Guttenberg

December 20, 1999 -- I'm relieved that the prevailing home theater 5.1 channel surround sound mania still hasn't done in two-channel audio. Stereo is hanging in there just fine, thank you very much. But stereo receiver sightings are becoming rare, rare enough to place them on the endangered species list. I'm not sure why this is happening. Fact is, virtually all music recordings are stereo, and stereo home theater ([HT 2.0](#)) is a viable alternative to 5.1. That's where Rotel's RX-975 100-watt-per-channel stereo receiver comes in.

Rotel didn't just dust off a tired old design, no they didn't. They fashioned a new kind of audio/video receiver, a stereo A/V receiver. What a concept! Home Theater 2.0 fans no longer have to squander resources over 3.1 channels they'll never use. The RX-975's features complement -- AM/FM tuner, eight audio inputs (plus a phono input), five video inputs, an A/V record out, and a nifty programmable remote -- should satisfy most two-eared listeners. In the performance department, the RX-975 is a real winner. It also holds its own in the value category. If you're a two-channeler, like me, this one's worth a long look.

Features:

- AM/FM stereo receiver
- 100 watts x 2 into 8 ohms
- video switching
- 30 tuner presets
- bass/treble controls
- moving magnet phono input
- RR-949 "smart" remote control



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- A/B speaker selector
- 5-year parts and labor warranty
- THD: .05%
- 6.25 x 17.75 x 15.75 inches (HWD), 25.4 pounds

Thanks to their sound-first design philosophy, Rotel's street cred among audiophiles is a couple of notches over that of most mass-market brands. But that performance priority didn't prevent their engineers from arming the RX-975 with a bevy of useful features, such as video switching and a phono input. The five-year warranty is a good two or three years longer than average.

Features Rating: 82

Connectivity:

- preamp output/amplifier input
- eight pairs of line-level stereo inputs
- moving magnet phono input
- two audio tape loops
- five composite video inputs
- one TV monitor output
- one video record output
- two pair binding-post speaker terminals
- AM/FM antenna connectors
- 3.5mm jack for external remote
- headphone jack
- two switched AC outlets (100 watts max)

The RX-975's generous selection of audio and composite video inputs will satisfy non-critical video fans. For some reason, Rotel didn't include any S-video inputs or outputs. What's up with that? Composite video is a bummer because it degrades picture quality relative to S-video. Videophiles beware.

Oh well, you can always run the output from your DVD player directly to your television set to get around that design quirk.

Those preamp outputs will come in handy if you ever want to upgrade the audio performance of your system. All you have to do is hook up a bigger, better-sounding power amp to the RX-975, or you could use the RX-975's amplifier section to drive remote speakers and a separate, higher quality amp for your main speakers.

Connectivity Rating: 82

Look & Feel: Sigh! Just another big black receiver with lots of buttons and fairly illegible labeling -- it's all very run of the mill. On the other hand, all of the controls are easy to use and well laid out. This is one A/V receiver that you can set up and use without ever consulting the manual.

I managed to set up the programmable remote to work with my TV and VCR in less than 10 minutes, but was unable to get it synched with my Zenith DVD player. Rotel says you can use the remote with up to seven different components.

If you cram the RX-975 inside a cabinet, make sure it has enough breathing space. This receiver runs a bit warm to the touch. You'll need

a pretty deep piece of furniture to squeeze in the nearly 16-inch deep RX-975. Once you include room for the cables, a clearance of 20 inches would be a safer bet.

Look & Feel Rating: 75

Performance: I used the RX-975 with two different systems: my bedroom two-channel home theater setup, and my pure audio system in my large listening room. Critical evaluations took place in the later system, and I used a variety of speakers -- including Totem Model 1s, NHT SuperTwos, Tannoy R-1s, and JMLab Mini Utopias -- to get a fix on the RX-975's sonic charms. Straight away, the tuner captured all of my favorite college and jazz stations reasonably well, and they sounded better than they usually do.

Charlie Haden and Pat Metheny's exquisite Beyond the Missouri Sky compact disc gave me goosebumps; what a wonderful recording this is. The RX-975 rendered every pluck, scrape, slide and throb from Haden's big fat acoustic bass with aplomb. Metheny's spiritual guitars floated and soared, and his gentle stirrings calmed my rattled nerves. The RX-975's sound was palpable, holographic, rich and juicy. I loved the way it revealed all of the little surging dynamic shifts between these two players.

I pushed the RX-975's 100 watts per channel to their limit with some full-tilt Neil Young/Crazy Horse forays. You gotta have real power on tap to make this music live, and the RX-975 delivered the goods. My trusty old NAD AV 716 receiver had a bit more *oomph* than the RX-975. As a result, its bass had greater impact at loud-ish levels. Even so, the RX-975 was far more transparent and vivid. This goes beyond any studied analysis. Young's cathartic guitar unleashed huge clouds of dense distortion through the SuperTwos -- it felt so good. And Ralph Molina's sledgehammer drumming wasn't too shabby either. Yeah, baby, the RX-975 can rock and roll. (Warning: Listening to this music over plastic mini-systems or boomboxes may result in severe depression. You need something with a real kick to it to fully appreciate Young's liberating music.)

I hooked up my Y2K compliant Linn LP-12 turntable to the phono input and spun some vinyl. RX-975's phono section was noise-free, but a little too thin and hard sounding for my taste. Budget-minded vinylphiles should check out NAD's nifty \$129 list PP-1 outboard phono preamp; it's very warm and natural sounding.

Rotel's got my home theater number, and the number is two. I admit HT 2.0 isn't for everyone. If you're into the big special effects flicks like "The Matrix," "Star Wars: The Phantom Menace," or classics like "Twister," 5.1 is the only way to go. Rotel's 5.1 receiver, the \$1199 list [RSX-965](#), would be a better choice than the two-channeler reviewed here. Then again, if your tastes run to straight dramas and comedies, HT 2.0 is a smart idea. If you're more of a music fan than a cinema buff, HT 2.0 is practically a no-brainer. Not everyone has the inclination, desire or space for six speakers in their abodes. Besides, investing your speaker budget in two higher quality speakers, rather than 5.1 lesser speakers, makes a lot of sense.

Slotted comfortably into my home theater 2.0 system, the RX-975 was a sonic knockout. I thought I knew the Best of Sessions at West 54th DVD inside and out. But the RX-975 dredged up sounds that I've never before heard. On the Rickie Lee Jones track, "Road Kill," the percolating rhythm section provided new thrills and chills. Bass was

especially taut and deep, so I was also more aware of the give and take of the whole band. Every track was filled with revelations.

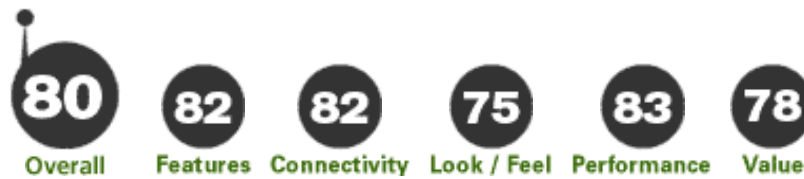
Performance Rating: 83

Value: Yes, you could buy a decent 5.1 receiver for this kind of money. But I doubt it would sound as nice in stereo as the RX-975. If you're not interested in the video switching functions or the tuner, you might want to look into Rotel's 100-watt integrated amp, the RA-985BX. But it will set you back an extra \$100. That five-year warranty adds value to the mix, too.

Value Rating: 78

Overall Rating: 80

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