

Sherwood Hollywood at Home VR-670 Home-Theater-in-a-Box

You'll be hearing things that aren't there, like surround channels.



BY CHRIS CHIARELLA

The wheels of compliance grind slowly, but they do grind. With the ongoing mad rush to embrace DVD's audio and video

potential, many consumers have expressed an interest in wireless surround speakers to simplify setup, while others—spoilsports, really—insist that they lack either the room or the desire for dedicated surrounds. As a result, we saw and heard more products than ever at this year's Consumer Electronics Show that put all of the gear up front while creating an illusion of surround, some more successful

than others. So expect to see more reviews in this burgeoning category from me and the gang. Even your run-of-the-mill home-theater-in-a-box requires a dollop of basic HT know-how to configure: running wires, connecting speaker

cables, and, of course, allocating space for five loudspeakers and the subwoofer. Don't get me wrong: I've never viewed these steps as a chore, but, for some, it's just too much, and it's perpetuating the schism betwixt DVD wannabes and DVD gurus.

Are We in Hollywood Yet?

Sherwood's answer to this quandary is their new Hollywood at Home line of home theater solutions. The middle child of three proposed models, the VR-670 consists of two satellite loudspeakers, a sub, and an especially pretty DVD receiver. Rather than creating yet another proprietary phantom-surround algorithm, they have entrusted their processing to the good folks at Dolby, whose Virtual Speaker technology enables twin sats to transmogrify the two-channel signal to sound like many. (In a welcome display of agnosticism, Dolby Virtual Speaker

Corciello Studios

SHERWOOD HOLLYWOOD AT HOME VR-670 HOME-THEATER-IN-A-BOX

OVERALL RATING

84

An easy, attractive approach for the aesthetics-conscious movie/music aficionado who wants something more than stereo from his rig, but one who's not losing any sleep fretting over true high-end audio or video quality.

| Build Quality | Value | Features | Performance | Ergonomics |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → DVD receiver encased entirely in plastic → The wooden subwoofer housing has a pedestal base and large rubber feet | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Strikes a fair balance of features between Sherwood's higher- and lower-priced models → Comes with lots of processing modes and handy features | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Dolby Virtual Speaker does a lot to compensate for the lack of surround and center speakers → No video or digital audio inputs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Both stereo and enhanced listening modes were spacious and enjoyable → Video reproduction could look better | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Controls are well laid-out → Clear readouts on the DVD receiver → Setup was quick and easy |
| 86 | 84 | 82 | 83 | 87 |

General information

Hollywood at Home VR-670 Home-Theater-in-a-Box, \$400 → Sherwood America, (800) 962-3203
www.sherwoodusa.com → Dealer Locator Code SHR

AT A GLANCE SHERWOOD HOLLYWOOD AT HOME VR-670 DVD RECEIVER



FEATURES

Compatible Playback Formats: CD, DVD, DVD-R/RW, DVD+R/RW, CD-R/RW, MP3, VCD, SVCD, JPEG, Kodak Picture CD

Possible Playback Resolutions: 480p/480i

Processing Modes: DTS, Dolby Digital, Dolby Virtual Speaker, Dolby Headphone

Other: None

Number of Amp Channels: 2

Power Rating (watts, per channel): 25, into 6 ohms

Dimensions (H x W x D, inches): 4 x 17.1 x 10.9

Weight (pounds): 11.9

CONNECTIONS

Inputs:
 Video: None
 Audio: Analog stereo (2)

Outputs:
 Video: Component video (1), S-video (1), composite video (1)
 Audio: Digital optical (1), stereo analog (2), Sub preout (1)

Additional:
 AM and FM antennae

HIGHLIGHTS

- Dolby Virtual Speaker technology makes two channels sound like many
- Sleekly designed DVD receiver is compact and lightweight

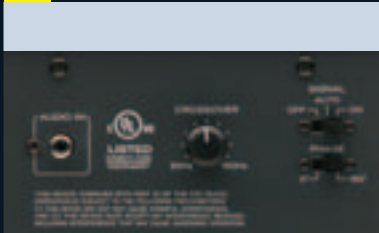
even works with DTS tracks, which the VR-670 also decodes.) Dolby Headphone mode is included, to enhance private screenings, and there are also analog stereo inputs for a pair of additional source components. The left and right channels are rated at 25 watts, while the powered sub contains a 100-watt amplifier. The main unit is not just slick but relatively compact and lighter than a typical DVD receiver, packing just two channels of amplification, at a total of only 50 watts.

For the record, the step-up, \$600 VR-700 adds audio/video switching for four source components through the Universal Video module that transcodes composite and S-video signals for component video quality. It also has a more sophisticated remote and a bigger, more powerful subwoofer. The VR-600 (\$250) keeps the same power output, satellite speakers, and subwoofer as the VR-670, but it has a simpler remote control and less head-turning cosmetics for the DVD receiver. Each model arrives with handy features like AM/FM radio, a digital clock, a timer, and auto power off.

Quit Yer Drooling!

I stopped admiring the VR-670's comely, unique design long enough to hook it all up. The literature promises ten-minute installation even for the novice, five if you've got skillz. I keep a component video cable at the ready, which was fortuitous since only a composite video

AT A GLANCE SHERWOOD HOLLYWOOD AT HOME VR-670 HOME-THEATER-IN-A-BOX



SUBWOOFER: ASW-670 ACTIVE

Connections: Line-level

Enclosure Type: Bass-reflex

Woofer (size in inches, type): 6.5

Power Rating (watts): 100

Crossover Bypass: Yes

Available Finishes: Black, Silver

Dimensions (H x W x D, inches): 11.9 x 7.9 x 12

Weight (pounds): 15.7

Speaker

Type: Two-way, monitor

Tweeter (size in inches, type): 1, soft dome

Midrange (size in inches, type): 2.5

Nominal Impedance (ohms): 6

Recommended Amp Power (watts): 25-30

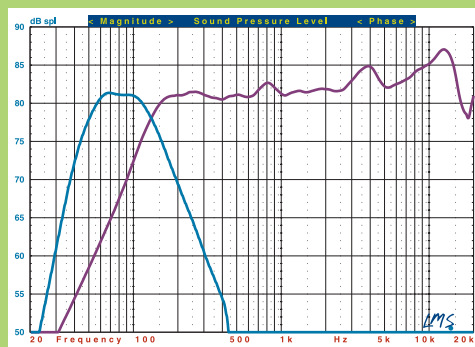
Available Finishes: Silver/Gray

Dimensions (H x W x D, inches): 8.6 x 4.3 x 4

ST-670 Front speakers

These listings are based on the manufacturer's stated specs; the HT Labs box below indicates the gear's performance on our test bench.

HT Labs Measures: Sherwood Hollywood at Home VR-670 Home-Theater-in-a-Box



- ◆ Two channels driven continuously into 8-ohm loads: 0.2% distortion at 25.6 watts, 1% distortion at 28.7 watts
- ◆ Two channels driven continuously into 4-ohm loads: 0.2% distortion at 28.9 watts, 1% distortion at 34.2 watts

This graph shows the quasi-anechoic (employing close-miking of all woofers) frequency response of the ST-670 satellites (purple trace) and ASW-670 subwoofer (blue

trace). The passive loudspeaker was measured at a distance of 1 meter with a 2.83-volt input.

The ST-670's listening-window response (a five-point average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal and vertical responses) measures +3.64/-0.98 decibels from 200 hertz to 10 kilohertz. An average of axial and +/-15-degree horizontal responses measures +4.61/-0.78 dB from 200 Hz to 10 kHz. The -3dB point is at 136 Hz, and the -6dB point is at 115 Hz. Impedance reaches a minimum of 7.12 ohms at 299 Hz and a phase angle of -38.86 degrees at 170 Hz. Sensitivity averages 81.5 dB from 500 Hz to 2 kHz.

The ASW-670's close-miked response, normalized to the level at 80 Hz, indicates that the lower -3dB point is at 50 Hz and the -6dB point is at 44 Hz. The upper -3dB point is at 134 Hz with the Crossover control set to maximum.

Crosstalk at 1 kHz driving 2.83 volts into an 8-ohm load was -70.45 dB left to right and -68.72 dB right to left. THD+N from the amplifier was less than 0.030% at 1 kHz when driving 2.83 volts into an 8-ohm load. The signal-to-noise ratio with 2.83 volts driving an 8-ohm load from 10 Hz to 24 kHz with "A" weighting was -93.19 dBra. —MJP

cable is included with the VR-670. The system doesn't come with audio interconnect cables of any kind, which is understandable since they would primarily be needed for input from other components. The bare-wire-terminated speaker cables required the most finesse. One touch of the I/P button on the clean, rectangular remote upgraded the component video output from factory-set interlaced to progressive scan. PAL is also supported. Ample on-unit controls, all in a straight line, do just about anything without the remote. And then it was back to oohing and ahing, this time at the accent light beneath the receiver, which coordinates with the subwoofer's lights: amber when off or on standby, blue when powered up.

You might be inclined to spend some time fiddling with speaker placement, but, in keeping with

the theme of simplicity, I will tell you, at no additional charge, that I experienced the best results when I merely aligned the left and right satellites with the two edges of the TV screen and placed the subwoofer off to one side, in the corner. When I cycled through the various Listening options—Stereo, Ref, and Wide being the Dolby Virtual Speaker settings—I noticed a definite improvement in movie watching while using the DVS modes, although Ref was the most natural. The VR-670 has a surprising ability to fill a room with sound with only 150 total watts at its disposal, including a convincing illusion of voices and other surround effects from the rear wall. Only slightly compromised are the more subtle 360-degree effects, such as the above-deck footsteps in the DTS track of *Master and Commander*.

Turned way up, there was some clipping, and the sub and sats have a hollow quality when cranked high; not distorted, per se, just a sign that one might be asking too much of them. The sub offers phase control and a variable crossover from 50 to 150 hertz. The satellites offer a frequency range of 140 Hz to 20 kilohertz, and the entire system operates without a lot of mechanical noise. Component video delivery of color was adequate, never eye-popping, while image rendering suffered from visible compression artifacting in scenes where it didn't need to appear. It's not the worst I've seen, but it's not the best, either.

Hollywood at Home is ultimately about convenience and style, and it delivers heaping helpings of both. It will certainly class up the bedroom or den. 🏠