



ELTAX EVOLUTION 5.2/DR-110

DVD home cinema system

£650

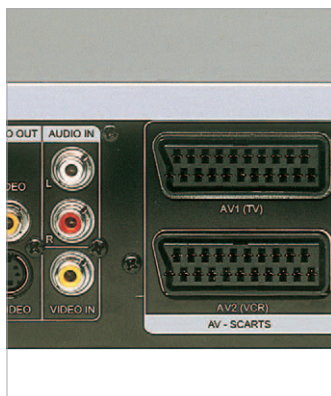
# TALL ORDER



**▶** Nicely sculpted, clearly labelled and sensibly laid-out



**▶** High-quality binding-post connections on the speakers



**▶** DVD output lacks RGB

Eltax defies convention with the meatiest of speakers in this DVD home cinema package. But can the amp satisfy these mighty beasts? John Archer finds out

**▶** We like nothing more than being surrounded by mountains of AV gear and a good cabling mystery to solve. But most 'normal' people would give their left leg to avoid being snowed under by big boxes and technological complexity. This is why all-in-one systems are so popular.

As well as being a doddle to set up, these one-box babies take up far less living-room space than a separates system. Within this framework, Eltax's approach to the all-in-one game looks a little risky...

## DESCRIPTION

The speakers in Eltax's Evolution/DR-110 package are, to be blunt, immense. Or at least, the front left/rights are. These floorstanders are a whopping 3ft tall and sport built-in active subwoofers.

The rear and centre speakers are more modest, but still resolutely 'real' speakers rather than tiddly satellites. In fact, the Evolution speakers in this package are identical to the separates reviewed in our July '02 issue. We were deeply appreciative then of both their beech/silver aesthetics and sound quality, so maybe we'll find their bulk easy to live with.

The DR-110 DVD/receiver section is a much more 'normal' all-in-one proposition. It's a strikingly sleek, aluminium-finished one-box affair

that resembles something from Arcam's lovely DiVa range. The main reason for its slimness is the use of digital amplification to achieve 5 x 45W RMS output.

Socketry looks fair on the surface. But look a little closer and there's a big disappointment: the Scart output can't deliver RGB. The best pictures you can get are therefore S-video quality. And a few more inputs would go down well with owners of other surround-capable AV sources.

## OPERATION

The DVD/receiver's features count is fairly basic. You get the customary relative speaker volume, size and distance adjustments, multiple aspect ratio support, different options to deal with different types of sound input, and all the other usual necessities – but little else besides.

The front left/right speakers have a couple of knobs worth acquainting yourself with. On the front are separate volume and low-frequency crossover adjusters, while on the rear you can tweak the subwoofer phase if the standard phase doesn't suit your room.

Setting everything up isn't as easy as with most all-in-ones. This is partly due to the unhelpful onscreen menus, and partly to the relative complexity of the

subwoofer-carrying front speakers. Rather stupidly, too, the speaker cabling supplied is exactly the same length for the rears as for the fronts, meaning those with largish living rooms will have to invest in extra cabling.

Once you're up and running, operation is mostly straightforward, largely thanks to a surprisingly practical remote control.

## PERFORMANCE

The DR-110 DVD/receiver gets off to a bad start. The absence of RGB shows, as with S-video feeds backgrounds look a touch noisy and lack lucidity in dark sections. On the other hand, fine-detail resolution seems fair and colours are natural. Also, aside from some traces of ghosting we didn't spot much electrical interference.

The DR-110's sound is decent but nothing more – and in this case its weaknesses are magnified by the superlative Evolution speakers. These are capable of handling far more precision and power than the DR-110 can deliver.

To prove this point, we fed the speakers a signal from a Denon AVR-3803 amp – and they really sang. The built-in subwoofers blend in a treat, with none of the bass dislocation that can afflict the sub/sat speaker systems normally found in this price bracket. And the



mid and treble ranges are both handled brilliantly.

The speakers understand their sonic limitations. So rather than trying and failing to deliver outrageous dynamics, they keep a tight rein on their presentation and always sound cohesive, smooth and detailed.

Switching back to the DR-110, the sound is noticeably less expansive and defined. What's more, the volume must be turned to maximum to achieve a 'big' sound level. And whenever you turn any amplifier to maximum, even a digital one, the potential for distortion increases hugely.

The DR-110 is uninspiring with two-channel material. Compared with our reference DVD/CD player, Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds' *Nocturama* CD sounds noticeably

less precise and transparent on the DR-110, particularly with the subtler tracks.

## **the speakers crucify those of almost every other all-in-one"**

At this point, though, we need to do a reality check. We are not, after all, reviewing this package as a separates system, but as an all-in-one solution priced to compete with the likes of Sony's DAV-S550 and JVC's TH-V70R. And within this context the DR-110's weaknesses are a whole lot easier to live with.

Think about it: for £650 you're getting a set of speakers that

crucify those of any other sub-£1,000 all-in-one, plus a DVD/receiver which, while undoubtedly not as good as the speakers deserve, still gets the job done. What's more, the Evolution speakers are the only ones we've seen on an all-in-one that can be partnered with a much more powerful amp if you ever want to upgrade.

## **CONCLUSION**

If you're an undemanding home cinema fan, we recommend you to save money and living room space and go for a more typical 'one-box' solution. But if you want a tidy and attractive first step into surround sound – that can be upgraded as funds allow without having to replace the speakers – this Eltax solution is unbeatable ■

## **SPECIFICATIONS**

### **FEATURES**

*Power Towers:* 170mm woofer; 200mm bass driver; 25mm soft-dome tweeter; 35Hz-22kHz frequency range; 90W (150W peak) handling; 50-250Hz adjustable crossover; 60W active subwoofer; phase adjustment  
*Centre:* 2 x 100mm woofers; 25mm soft-dome tweeter; 80Hz-20kHz freq resp; 100W power handling; magnetically shielded  
*Rears:* 100mm woofer; 19mm polydome tweeter; 70Hz-20kHz freq resp; 100W power  
*DR-110 DVD/receiver:* Dolby Digital, DTS, DPL II & MP3 playback; VCD (with PBC)/DVD/CD-R/CD-RW/DVD-R/DVD+R/DVD+RW/DVD-RW (Video mode) playback; test tone; 5 x 45W RMS; multi-aspect ratio support; pure/PAL NTSC playback; speaker size/range adjust; digital amplification

### **SOCKETS**

*DR-110:* subwoofer out; five-channel springclip speaker connections; S-video out; composite video output; stereo audio input; composite video input; two Scarts, one input, neither RGB; optical digital audio output; FM/AM input

### **DIMENSIONS**

*Power towers:* 835(h) x 220(w) x 280(d)mm  
*Rears:* 230(h) x 145(w) x 185(d)mm  
*Centre:* 145(h) x 400(w) x 185(d)mm  
*DR-110:* 430(w) x 80(h) x 310(d)mm

### **WEIGHT**

*DR-110:* 3.5kg

### **CONTACT**

Eltax ☎ 01908 226 464

### **TEST DATA**

Video jitter: 4ns (very good)  
 Signal-to-noise ratio: -74dB (very good)  
 Chroma AM/PM: -68.5dB/-66.7dB (exc/v gd)  
 Chroma crosstalk: -61.8dB (excellent)  
 Freq. response (S-vid) at 5.8MHz: -5.15dB (ex)  
 composite video at 5.8MHz: -5.79dB (very good)

## **VERDICT**

### **WHAT'S GOOD**

Speakers; looks; price

### **WHAT'S BAD**

No RGB Scart; DVD/receiver struggles to satisfy speakers

### **OVERALL**

Phenomenal value for money and the best all-in-one speakers ever

PICTURE ..... ★★★★★  
 SOUND ..... ★★★★★  
 FEATURES ..... ★★★★★  
 EASE OF USE ..... ★★★★★  
 VALUE ..... ★★★★★  
 OVERALL ..... ★★★★★