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Onkyo HT SR800 - home theater system - 7.1 channel

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At a Glance

- **Release date:** April 15, 2007
- **Editors' rating:** 7.8 Very good
- **Average user rating:** 8.0 Excellent
- **The good:** Home theater in a box with component-grade 7.1-channel AV receiver; excellent connectivity compared to other HTIBs, including two HDMI inputs; three wall-mountable, two-way/three-driver speakers, four two-way satellites; 230-watt, 10-inch powered subwoofer; Audyssey 2EQ auto speaker calibration system; compatible with both XM and Sirius satellite radio subscription services.
- **The bad:** Bigger than most HTIBs; you supply the DVD player; no analog-to-HDMI video conversion; HDMI connections don't pass audio; no onscreen display.
- **The bottom line:** Despite less than ideal HDMI features, the Onkyo HT-SR800 delivers an amazing combination of performance and features for the price.

CNET editors' review

Reviewed by: Steve Guttenberg

Edited by: John P. Falcone

Reviewed on 7/20/07 Release date: 4/15/07

It seems like Onkyo's home-theater-in-a-box systems (HTIBs) have always offered a winning combination of value, features, build quality, and great sound. For 2007, the current top-of-the-line HT-SR800 improves on last year's [HT-S790](#) by adding Sirius *and* XM satellite compatibility, as well as Onkyo's winning Audyssey automatic speaker-calibration system. As with its past HTIBs, this big Onkyo's sound handily trumps its pricier and more stylish competitors, but the one possible stumbling block for some buyers might be the HT-SR800's bulky size: with a full-size AV receiver, seven satellite speakers, and a hefty subwoofer, the HT-SR800 is no petite virtual surround system. The receiver offers two HDMI inputs but lacks the latest and greatest conveniences found on Onkyo's standalone [TX-SR605](#) receiver. And, of course, you have to add your own DVD player--but these days, everybody already has one. Those caveats notwithstanding, the HT-SR800 represents among the best bang for your buck you can get in the home theater space for 2007.

Design

The Onkyo HT-SR800 comes with an AV receiver and an eight-piece (7.1-channel) satellite/subwoofer system; the system is available in [black](#) or [silver](#). Onkyo redesigned the cosmetics of the AV receivers and speakers for the 2007 models, and we think the receiver's new look is a little cleaner and better organized than that of last year's models. It's around 5.8 inches high by 17.1 inches wide by 14.75 inches deep--no different than the size of a standalone Onkyo receiver. It puts out a fair amount of heat, so it won't be happy placed in a confined cabinet. The partially backlit remote is pretty small, but it seems less crowded and intimidating than so many AV receiver remotes we see nowadays.



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The Onkyo HT-SR800 is bulkier than competing "lifestyle" home theater systems, but the larger size offers far better connectivity and sound quality.

One design lapse we noted was that the receiver's setup menus don't appear on the screen; they're instead limited to the receiver's front-panel display. Then again, with an auto speaker setup and calibration system as capable as the Audyssey 2EQ/HTIB's, we weren't really all that put off by the lack of onscreen menus. The Audyssey 2EQ/HTIB requires the user to run the setup program with the included microphone placed in three different positions in the room. It's easy enough to do--just plug in the mic and respond to the display's prompts. The Audyssey 2EQ/HTIB sends test tones to the speakers and sub, then adjusts the speaker equalization, size setting, subwoofer crossover points, channel volume level, and time-delay settings for each speaker.

We've been skeptical of the claimed benefits of auto EQ systems because they can sound worse than no EQ or produce ambiguous results, but the Audyssey 2EQ/HTIB worked wonders for the sound of the HT-SR800's speakers and sub. After we ran the auto calibration, the sound grew sweeter and richer with markedly better satellite-subwoofer blend. The equalization also benefited the vocal and dialogue sound to a significant degree. There was one change we didn't care for--the bass seemed a little too full, so we manually turned down the sub's volume just a bit.

If you still don't like the sound after the Audyssey 2EQ/HTIB does its thing, you can manually adjust the five-band EQ for each set of speakers--main left/right, center, surrounds, and back surrounds. The receiver also has a three-band EQ for the subwoofer. If all of that sounds too complicated, you could tweak the sound with the HT-SR800 front panel bass and treble controls and/or adjust the volume level of individual speakers and subwoofer from the remote. You'll want to crank up the sub volume for action movies--it just takes a second, and you don't have to mess around with setup menus. Tailoring the sound to your taste is easy as can be, something that can't be said for the majority of HTIBs.

All of the speakers are fabricated from medium-density fiberboard, with vinyl veneers and metal keyhole slots for easy wall mounting. That's nice, but since the front three speakers are ported, wall mounting will slightly reduce the speakers' bass output. The front-left and -right speakers' measurements are 17.1 inches high by 6.2 inches wide by 7.6 inches deep; the center channel speaker is identical but designed for horizontal placement. Their knit fabric grilles are removable, and the molded plastic front baffles are

attractive--well, attractive to anyone with audiophile aspirations. The four surround speakers are a good deal smaller: 10.5 inches high by 6.1 inches wide by 3.8 inches deep.



The surround and rear speakers are smaller than the front ones.

By HTIB standards, the subwoofer is pretty substantial, and its medium-density fiberboard cabinet feels nice and solid. Instead of the usual little rubber feet, this sub is supported by large plastic cone-shaped feet. The sub--20.1 inches high by 10.75 inches wide by 16.8 inches deep--is finished in vinyl and weighs 25.1 pounds.

Features

Unlike many HTIBs, the Onkyo HT-SR800 doesn't include a DVD player. We're not knocking it--everybody either already has a DVD player, they can pick one up for cheap, or they can use their game console for movie duties. Just be aware that you won't find one in the box.

The 7.1-channel receiver delivers 110 watts per channel and supports the usual assortment of Dolby Digital, Dolby EX, Pro Logic IIx, DTS, DTS-ES, DTS Neo:6, DTS 96/24, and Neural surround-processing modes. The HT-SR800 is somewhat limited when dealing with the soundtracks on HD DVD and Blu-ray players, however--if your player doesn't have built-in decoding and 5.1 or 7.1 analog outputs, you'll be stuck with the low-res DVD soundtracks listed above (see below for more detail).

When compared to the paltry jack packs of other HTIBs in this range, the HT-SR800's connectivity options are excellent: you get four AV (including the front panel's set), three component, and two HDMI inputs. But there is a catch: the HDMI jacks are *video pass-through* only--they support as high as 1080p resolution, but they won't carry the audio signals from your disc player, game system, or set-top box. Annoyingly, that means you'll need to connect a dedicated audio feed as well; stereo RCA or (for surround) optical or coaxial digital or analog multichannel. The latter option--running six or eight cables to the Onkyo's 7.1-channel analog inputs--is your only option for getting the best sound from HD DVD or Blu-ray players. Of course, you'll need to make sure your player has analog audio *outputs*, and can decode the Dolby Digital Plus, Dolby TrueHD, and DTS-HD soundtracks found on HD movie discs--not all of them do.

The other annoyance is that there is no video conversion--so for each video input type you use (composite, S-Video, component, HDMI), you'll need to connect the corresponding output from the receiver to the TV, then toggle the TV input in tandem when you switch the AV receiver source. (Your best bet is to get a good [universal remote](#) and do some judicious macro programming.) By comparison, a receiver that offers HDMI video upconversion--such as the Onkyo TX-SR605--can be connected via a single HDMI connection to a single HDMI input on the TV--and you're done.

Things are better on the audio connectivity front: there are four digital audio inputs (two coaxial and two optical), but no digital outputs. Plus, there's one stereo analog input, and a record in-out set for use with an analog cassette or CD recorder. The aforementioned 7.1-channel multichannel analog inputs round out the

audio section.



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Connectivity options go far beyond that of standard HTIBs, but some key HDMI features are missing.

The RI (Remote Interactive) jack can be used with the [Onkyo DS-A2](#) iPod docking unit. There are high-quality speaker binding posts for seven amplifier channels; and spring-clip connectors for a set of "B" stereo speakers.

The HT-SR800's receiver is compatible with both XM *and* Sirius satellite radio. To access the capability you'll need to buy either the [SiriusConnect Home Tuner](#) or the [XM Mini-Tuner](#) and home dock kit, then sign up for a subscription for the respective service (note that you can't hook up Sirius and XM at the same time--just one or the other). The XM, by the way, includes Neural Surround decoding, for reproduction of Neural-encoded XM broadcasts in discrete 5.1-channel surround sound. Also of note: with our old [XM Connect-and-Play](#) antenna, the HT-SR800 flashed "upgrade tuner" on its display, and we couldn't get it to work. The newer XM Mini-Tuner and home dock kit worked fine.

On the speaker front, the HT-SR800's front three speakers feature a *pair* of 5-inch woofers flanking a 1-inch dome tweeter; the four surround speakers have a single 3.25-inch woofer but no tweeters. The spring-clip speaker wire connectors accept the cables that come with the system.

The subwoofer has a down-firing 10-inch woofer powered by a 230-watt amplifier. The sub's port is located in front, so the bass won't be unduly affected by corner placement. The rear panel houses a single RCA line-level input and a volume control.

Unlike most integrated HTIB systems that require the electronics, the speakers, and the sub to be used together, you can upgrade from the HT-SR800's speakers and subwoofer--we exercised that option in the Performance section of this review (see below). Conversely, the opposite is also true: you can match the speakers with any other standard AV receiver. If you've already got a satisfactory receiver, however, you're probably better just going with the 5.1 [Onkyo SKS-HT540](#) or 7.1 [SKS-HT740](#) speaker systems.

Performance

The *Flyboys* DVD showed off the Onkyo HT-SR800's home theater moxie. This film, set in the early days of World War I, has a rousing music score that's loaded with crackling snare drums, and the front three speakers sounded quite detailed and richly balanced. The swooping air battle scenes and the *rat-tat-tat* of machine gun fire had the sort of visceral power few HTIBs ever muster. The center-channel speaker, even in the midst of noisy battles, handled dialogue with rare finesse. The HT-SR800 isn't the most expensive HTIB you can buy, but it's definitely one of the best sounding we've heard in a long time.

CD sound was pretty swell too. Rockabilly great Billy Burnette's *Memphis in Manhattan* features a particularly well-recorded acoustic bass, and the HT-SR800's subwoofer didn't miss a beat. Each deep bass note was clearly defined and wonderfully weighty in ways that few HTIB subs can match. This HTIB can

rock and roll without running out of steam, while the sub and speakers showed no signs of strain up to fairly loud volumes. *Above & Beyond*, a swinging live jazz CD from violinist Billy Bang, demonstrated the satellite speakers' clear sound. The backing band's piano and sax were beautifully presented--again, few HTIBs are as enjoyable playing music as the SR800.

The Onkyo HTIB's ability to upgrade is another reason we so highly recommend the HT-SR800. With most HTIBs, you're stuck with the speakers and sub that come with it. To finish up, we put aside the Onkyo speakers and subwoofer and hooked up Cerwin Vega's [CVHD 5.1](#) speaker/sub system (\$999). Wow--the CV's 12-inch sub has a far more massive, feel-it-in-your-gut impact than does the Onkyo sub, and the CV satellites can play louder and sound more alive.

In the final analysis, only the disappointing shortfalls in the video feature set--no video upconversion, no HDMI audio--are the major drawbacks of the Onkyo HT-SR800. Otherwise, this unit--which is widely available for under \$500--represents an amazing home theater value that delivers far better sound and more connectivity options than competing products, including some that cost hundreds of dollars more.

Basic Specs

Product Specifications:

Product Description: **Onkyo HT SR800 - Home theater system - 7.1 channel**

Product Type: **Home theater system**

Components: **AV receiver , Speaker system**

Enclosure Color: **Black**

Sound Output Mode: **Surround Sound**

Surround Sound Effects: **Neural Surround , Theater-Dimensional Virtual Surround**

Sound Effects: **CinemaFILTER**

Surround System Class: **7.1 channel**

Radio: **Radio tuner - AM/FM - 40preset stations**

Cassette System: **None**

DVD: **None**

CD System: **None**

MD System: **None**

Speaker(s): **1 x Active subwoofer - External - 230 Watt - 25 - 150 Hz , 2 x Right/left channel speaker - External - 130 Watt - 60 - 50000 Hz , 1 x Center channel speaker - External - 130 Watt - 60 - 50000 Hz , 4 - External - 130 Watt - 160 - 20000 Hz**

Remote Control: **Universal remote control - Infrared**

Product Basic Spec:

Components: **AV receiver - , Speaker system -**

Built-in Decoders: **DTS 96/24 , DTS Neo:6 , DTS decoder , Dolby Digital , DTS-ES Matrix 6.1 , DTS-ES Discrete 6.1 , Dolby Pro Logic IIx , Dolby Digital Surround EX**

DVD type: **None**

Tuner Type: **Digital**

Station preset qty: **40**

Driver Details: **Active subwoofer . 1 Subwoofer driver 10 in , Right/left channel speaker . 1 Tweeter driver 1 in , Right/left channel speaker . 2 Woofer driver 5 in Onkyo Micro Fiber (OMF) , Center channel speaker . 1 Tweeter driver 1 in , Center channel speaker . 2 Woofer driver 5 in Onkyo Micro Fiber (OMF) , 1 Tweeter driver 3.25 in**

Buying choices

for **Onkyo HT SR800 - home theater system - 7.1 channel** from online stores:

\$399.99 - \$499.00

[Circuit City](#)

[\\$459.99](#) | In stock: Yes

[J&R Music and Computer World](#)

[\\$399.99](#) | In stock: Yes

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