



Outlaw 1050



Enlarge Photo

Description: **Dolby Digital/DTS A/V receiver**

Warranty: **2 years parts & labor**

List Price: **\$599.00**

Best Price: \$599.00

[See Pricing & Buy](#)

[Find Local Retailer](#)

[Compare This Product](#)

Product Review

EXCLUSIVE: Outlaw Audio

Model 1050 6.1-channel A/V receiver

Brent Butterworth

June 16, 2000 -- Last year, Outlaw Audio became the first virtual consumer electronics company, selling a high-quality but really low-priced 5-channel amplifier directly to consumers via the Web. Now the company is setting its sights a little lower with the Model 1050, a \$599 list Dolby Digital/DTS A/V receiver with 6.1-channel processing.

In these days when you can buy a Dolby Digital/DTS receiver for less than \$200 street price, a \$599 receiver isn't exactly a loss leader. The Model 1050, however, offers enough of a step up in build quality, sound quality, and features to make it a real bargain for the discriminating home theater enthusiast.

As the "virtual" moniker suggests, you can buy this receiver only from Outlaw Audio's own [website](#) or from OneCall.com. In fact, *we* actually bought one from Outlaw's site for this review.

Features:

- Dolby Digital/DTS/Dolby Pro-Logic A/V receiver
- proprietary 6.1-channel processing (in Dolby Digital only)
- recognizes EX flag on upcoming EX DVDs
- power rating: 65 watts x 6 channels

- music surround modes
- bass and treble controls
- center, surround and sub trim controls
- adjustable crossover point
- backlit universal remote control
- AM/FM tuner with 32 presets
- 6.1 x 17.2 x 14.3 inches (HWD); 36.3 pounds

That's a lot of features for \$599. The highlight is the 6.1-channel processing. It's not real [Dolby Surround EX](#), though. Instead, it's a proprietary processing scheme developed by Zoran, the company that makes the 1050's digital signal processing (DSP) chip. Does it sound as good as real EX? We'll find out below.

One downside is that while the 1050 will process DTS, it won't perform 6.1-channel processing for DTS-ES soundtracks -- the Zoran chip doesn't have the horsepower to handle DTS's higher data rate and to do the math for 6.1-channel processing at the same time. Personally, I find the advantages of DTS to be so negligible -- perhaps non-existent at the lower 768 kilobit/second bit rate used on DVDs with both Dolby Digital and DTS 5.1-channel soundtracks -- that I never would have noticed the lack of DTS-ES processing if someone from Outlaw hadn't pointed it out.

And no, you can't use this receiver for the new [DTS-ES Discrete 6.1](#) format.

At 65 watts per channel, you can bet that Limp Bizkit won't be borrowing this thing to power its P.A. system. But that's enough power to shake the room and annoy the neighbors if you have a reasonably efficient (88 dB or better) set of speakers. There's only one center rear-surround amplifier, not two as in THX Ultra Surround EX receivers. Outlaw says the 1050's single amp can easily drive two center rear-surround speakers, and my experience bore out that claim.

The other noteworthy feature is the adjustable subwoofer crossover. You can choose from 60 Hz and 80 Hz, for larger satellite speakers; 100 and 120 Hz, for smaller satellite speakers; and 150 and 200 Hz, for Bose Acoustimass-type micro-satellites. I've found this feature can make a huge difference in system performance. It should be on every receiver.

Features Rating: 85

Connectivity:

- four A/V inputs (three with S-video)
- three audio-only inputs
- recording outputs for VCR and audio recorder
- one coaxial, two optical digital audio inputs
- 5.1-channel (6-channel) input for DVD-Audio/SACD
- line outputs for all channels
- five-way binding posts for all channels
- 12-volt trigger output
- IR receiver input
- spring-clip AM antenna connector

- F-connector for FM antenna



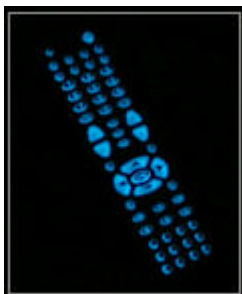
[Click for larger view](#)

There's enough here for most average home theater systems. The 12-volt trigger output is a nice plus, and a rarity in an inexpensive receiver; you can use it to turn on automatically a separate power amp, or to trigger a power strip with a 12-volt trigger output. The 5.1-channel input and output are must-haves, especially the output, which will let you hook up a bigger amp (like Outlaw's [Model 750](#)).

The downside here is the limited number of digital inputs -- as on my Denon [AVR-3300](#) A/V receiver, there's but a single coaxial and two optical digital ins. That's just not enough. (I have two source devices with only coaxial digital outputs, so I had to buy a coaxial-to-optical converter for about \$75.)

Connectivity Rating: 77

Look & Feel: If someone had brought me this receiver with the brand stripped off, I'd have thought it was made by high-end audio manufacturer [B&K Components](#). The internal layout is super-clean. Inside there's a beefy power transformer, a pair of sizeable storage capacitors and a large heat sink for the output transistors. (The sink's big enough to make a cooling fan unnecessary.) The front panel is simple and solid; it reminds me of NAD gear.



The remote control is a generic preprogrammed universal type that Outlaw bought somewhere, but I liked it quite a bit. It's certainly nicer than the remotes you get with most receivers in this price range. It's backlit, which is convenient, but I wish it had a dedicated button to trigger the backlighting functionality. As it stands, you have to hit one of the control buttons to get the backlight going, and that could change your settings.

The 1050 has no on-screen menus; you can set it up entirely from

the front panel, or by using buttons on the remote. I found it 100 percent intuitive -- no manual required. Even so, the 1050 comes with the best receiver manual I've seen. It's like a mini-handbook on home theater setup, filled with valuable tips. Read it!



[Click for larger view](#)

One ergonomic issue with this receiver is that if you're in 6.1-channel mode, it won't give you any sound with a 2-channel Dolby Digital soundtrack. You have to switch 6.1-channel off first. I found this to be a problem only when switching back to the menu of an EX-encoded DVD, because the sound on most DVD menus is just 2-channel.

Look & Feel Rating: 90

Performance: I tested the Model 1050 with a few different speaker systems, but relied mostly on a pair of NHT [VT-1.2](#) floorstanding loudspeakers and an NHT [VS-1.2a](#) center channel for the front, a pair of JBL [N24](#) bookshelf speakers for the rear-surround channels and Klipsch's [LF-10](#) powered subwoofer. I also used a Toshiba [SD-3109](#) DVD player, and compared the 1050 mostly to Harmon Kardon's comparably powerful [receiver](#).

[Let's get right to the 1050's 6.1-channel processing, then we'll talk about all the audiophile stuff. In direct comparison with Onkyo's TX-DS989](#) A/V receiver, which has an officially licensed Surround EX processor, I found the 1050's center rear-surround channel effect distinctly different. The 1050 produced a smoother transition from surround channel to surround channel, but it didn't produce as strong a center-rear effect as the Onkyo's EX processor.

The Outlaw's sound may be more natural, but I have to say that with two center rear-surround speakers hooked up, I preferred the Onkyo's more dramatic effect. With only a single center rear-surround, though, I think the Outlaw's processing works a little better -- it doesn't call your attention to the lone center rear-surround the way legit EX processing does.

Judged against other affordable 5.1-channel receivers, the 1050's sound quality shines. I found it smoother in the midrange and lower treble than the AVR 500. On many pop recordings and movie soundtracks, the difference wasn't dramatic. But on the acoustic

recordings I prefer -- such as Reverend Dennis Kamakahi's Ohana CD, a recording of slack-key guitar, tenor ukulele and vocals -- the Outlaw significantly outperformed the AVR 500. The Outlaw got the delicacy of the stringed instruments as right as an inexpensive receiver can, while the AVR 500's brightness made the nylon-stringed Kamaka uke used on this CD sound more like a steel-stringed instrument.

When I switched the sub off and ran the VT-1.2s full-range, I noticed that the Outlaw's bass, while admirably tight and controlled, didn't sound as full and satisfying as what I heard from the AVR 500. Not an issue if you use a powered sub.

I also convened an impromptu listening panel of **etown.com** staff writers Michael Goldberg, Meredith Massey, Brian Newman, Philip Ryan and Ellen Welch for a blind A/B comparison of the two receivers with stereo material. They found plenty of pros and cons in the sound of both receivers, but they split on their favorite. Surprisingly, the four youngest listeners found that the 1050 sounded *brighter*, and thus preferred the AVR 500. Must be something in the far upper treble (above 15 kilohertz or so) that they heard; the younger you are, the more you can hear of the very high frequencies. On the other hand, Philip, the oldest of the panel, agreed with my impression of the receivers 100 percent.

Performance Rating: 88

Value: I scoured **etown.com** for a better receiver in the sub-\$1000 price range, and couldn't find one. With a different mid-priced receiver, you might get a couple more digital inputs, some particular feature you like, or maybe even more power. But you certainly won't get better build quality or a nicer remote, and there's no way in *hell* you'll get 6.1-channel sound.

Value Rating: 85

Just as the Denon AVR-3300 A/V receiver seemed like the only \$500 to \$1000 receiver to buy when it was introduced last fall, so does the Outlaw 1050 seem like *the* \$500 to \$1000 receiver to buy today.

Overall Rating: 85

Please feel free to post your comments in [Your Two Cents](#), a folder on our Message Board.



[What the etown.com ratings mean](#)