

Cambridge SoundWorks 820HD AM/FM HD Radio Receiver

By Ken Reitz

Cambridge SoundWorks (CSW) is one of those innovative audio companies from the talent-rich area around Boston. It's no surprise then that CSW has entered the HD Radio fray with a product that continues the tradition of merging style and sound. As a stand-alone table radio, the audio is on par with any, including the much hyped Bose Wave Radio. Using the digital output from the 820HD's tuner direct to your stereo, via the fiber optic cable output, the audio is unparalleled. It brings any older stereo with fiber optic input immediately into the 21st century.

❖ Sounds as Good as it Looks

The 820HD is not a big radio. At a little over a foot wide, just 7.5" deep and only 4.5" high, this radio gives the impression of being a normal table radio, but at 8 pounds the 820HD is a weighty package of heavy duty speakers capable of filling a large room with real audio fidelity. From the heaviest bass intro to the final symbol crash, you won't miss a thing. That's the legacy of Cambridge SoundWorks products. If you've not heard them before – from earlier analog radios to their acclaimed loudspeakers – your ears are in for a treat.

The molded, shiny black cabinet is sealed to project the audio from the two front fired speakers and the molded bass port on the back. Making the most of only two multi-function knobs, the 820HD also uses micro switches on the front panel and a variety of ports for optimum flexibility.

Want the best possible sound from your iPod® or other MP3 player? Hear what's been missing from those dinky ear buds when you

plug it into the auxiliary port on the 820HD's side.

The slightly oversized remote control performs all front panel functions including direct entry tuning, station presets (up to 30 AM and 30 FM), seek/tune buttons and a switch to go from digital to analog tuning for those HD Radio stations that don't quite lock on.

❖ Tuning with the 820HD

AM reception on all of the HD Radios I've tested in the last year has not been impressive. Since this spring, when the FCC dropped its ban on AM HD Radio broadcasts at night, I've been hoping to be able to tune AM HD DX. While I can get the HD symbol on several models to flicker, indicating that it's sensing an HD Radio signal, none have been able to lock on. Daytime reception has been little better. One reason for both is that only a few hundred AM stations across the U.S. are currently transmitting an HD Radio signal. I have been able to lock onto one local AM HD Radio station some 60 miles away during daytime listening.

FM reception on the 820HD is typical of a radio in its class: it's good but it's not a "DX machine." There is no built-in AM ferrite loop antenna and no built-in FM antenna. The 820HD comes with a small non-tunable AM loop, a screw-in telescoping FM antenna, and a folded dipole wire FM antenna, all of which are of marginal use outside of most urban or suburban locations.

CSW advises that AM reception can be improved by using a tunable AM loop antenna in conjunction with the small loop. Not really. AM reception, even with a tunable loop added, was



Rear view of the arctic white 820HD: minimal design and maximum sound. (Courtesy: Cambridge SoundWorks)

not as good as, for example, Polk Audio's iSonic HD Radio. FM reception in a rural location is only optimum with the addition of an amplified Yagi antenna mounted at 30 feet on a rotatable mast.

❖ Final Word

Cambridge SoundWorks 820HD is a full-featured, beautifully designed, solidly built, HD Radio with unequaled audio. For playback of MP3 or streaming audio from your computer the 820HD delivers full-bodied sound which can fill a large room. Hooked up to a decent FM antenna and connected through the fiber optic audio cable to your stereo you'll get the best that today's FM multi-casting and HD Radio has to offer. At \$299.99 the 820HD is a better product at a far better price and with more features than the much advertised, non-HD capable, Bose Wave Radio II.

WHERE TO BUY:

Cambridge SoundWorks 800-367-4434
www.cambridgesoundworks.com
\$299.99



Front view of the onyx black Cambridge SoundWorks 820HD: stylish sound for HD Radio reception. (Courtesy: Cambridge SoundWorks)

MANUFACTURER SPECIFICATIONS

Cambridge SoundWorks 820HD

Dimensions:

4.5" H x 13.25" W x 7.5" D

Weight: 8 lbs.

Tuning Range:

AM 530-1710 kHz

FM 87.5-108.1 MHz

Station Presets: 10 AM 10 FM

Additional Favorites: 20 AM 20 FM

External ports:

75 Ohm FM coax antenna connector

3.5 mm AM antenna connector

3.5 mm stereo headphone connector

3.5 mm Aux. Input connector

Toslink fiber optic audio connector