

Sony's XDR-S3HD Table-Top HD Radio

By Ken Reitz

It took Sony a while to enter the HD Radio race and it has done so in typical Sony fashion. Their XDR-S3HD table-top HD Radio is fashionably designed, solidly built, and it sounds great, too!

❖ Design Simplicity

Right out of the box I liked the clean design and the simplicity of the controls of this radio. With its wood-look, heavy plastic case and fabric covered speaker grill, this radio sits handsomely on your desk, bookshelf, bedside table or kitchen counter-top. All of the main functions (tuning, volume, etc.) can be done directly via buttons on top of the radio or by using the fairly small IR remote control.

The XDR-S3HD has many of the features I've come to expect on the current crop of HD-capable table radios: station presets (20 AM and 20 FM), sleep timer (up to 60 minutes in 15 minute increments), alarm (lets you wake up to your choice of radio station or AUX input), scan (allows you to scan for all stations or only HD-Radio stations), and more, including LCD display brightness and audio tone controls.

The remote control has good range away from the set and can access the station presets as you've set them, but it can't input the frequency directly through the remote. The remote also lacks a mute button. You have to press and hold the volume button to reduce the volume.

❖ Clean Audio

This radio delivers excellent audio at a decent volume and compares favorably to other similarly priced HD table-top sets previously reviewed. The user can tailor the audio to inject a little more bass or treble by using the menu and the remote control. I found the best listening was when the

"surround" audio was set. The virtual sound separation made the speakers seem considerably farther apart and HD-Radio broadcasts really seemed to come alive.

Audio from external sources fed to the radio via the 3.5 mm input jack was excellent. Whether using an MP3 player, CD player or listening to streaming audio from the

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computer, the audio fidelity was very nice and capable of filling a large room without distortion. I also found that the audio output from the radio's 3.5mm output jack could be fed into a large stereo input using a 3.5mm-

to-dual RCA stereo patch cord which can be found at Radio Shack. This effectively upgrades your current analog stereo into an HD-capable set.

❖ Tuning the Bands

The XDR-S3HD lets you tune for all stations or only stations broadcasting HD Radio signals. If you're in an urban area you'll really enjoy the growing range of channels being multi-cast. But, for those in the country, HD-Radio reception is less fun. There are fewer FM stations operating HD transmitters and fewer still are multi-casting. There are only a few hundred AM stations broadcasting in HD-Radio nationwide and AM stations are not allowed to multi-cast.

The set includes a wire antenna and a folded dipole for FM reception. But, I have



Sony XDR-S3HD is the first Sony product with HD-Radio reception capability, but it won't be the last. Retailing between \$200-250, it compares favorably with the competition. (Courtesy: Sony)

found that even using a large, roof-top mounted, amplified FM Yagi antenna, the range of reliably tuning and keeping HD Radio signals is about 75 miles.

Of course, this depends on terrain and the power output of the station you're trying to listen to, but in general, if you're 80-100 miles from some of your current favorite analog stations, you're going to be disappointed with this or any other HD Radio receiver. Once, while I had this radio there was a good opening on the FM band and I was tuning in HD multi-cast stations from 150+ miles away perfectly. It lasted a few hours and then it was back to reality.

Tuning the AM band with this radio was a bit of a disappointment. AM reception was minimal even using a tunable AM loop antenna. The passive loop that comes with the unit is of negligible value. There was a certain amount of distinctive digital processing audible on the AM band in between AM stations. Once a station was tuned in, the processing sound was not heard. No such audio artifact was found on the FM band. AM reception was adequate, but I could not tune in the only HD AM signal 60 miles away on this set using a tunable AM loop antenna.

❖ Bottom Line

Sony makes an adaptor for their line of auto stereos to add HD-Radio capability to Sony brand car stereos and they will begin introducing HD-capable stereo receiver/amplifiers very soon. For now, the Sony XDR-S3HD is where it all starts. It's a great

looking, versatile, desktop radio that delivers excellent audio. I found this radio widely available from \$200 to \$250 from national outlets such as Crutchfield (888-955-6000) and Best Buy (888-BESTBUY).

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATIONS

LCD 4 line display
Frequency Range:
 FM 87.5-108 MHz
 AM 530-1710 kHz
Station Presets:
 20 each for AM and FM bands
Speaker: Two 5/8" diameter 4
Audio output: 2.8 watts x 2
Output: 3.5 mm stereo headphone jack
Input: 3.5 mm Line input jack
Antenna Connections:
 AM: spring terminals
 FM: 75 coax connector
Weight: 8 pounds
Size: 4-3/4" H 12" W 6-3/4" D
Accessories included:
 IR remote control (2 AAA batteries not included)
 FM wire antenna with coax connector attached
 FM folded dipole antenna
 AM loop antenna
 Audio connecting cable with two 3.5 mm plugs attached for your MP3, CD or Computer audio
Power: 120 v. AC



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