

with digital inputs on both optical and electrical connections, six stereo analogue inputs – it's also designed to be a high-quality preamp for music – and a 5.1-channel input to let you hook up DVD-Audio, SACD or those do-it-all 'universal' players. Eight-channel preouts are provided on normal phono sockets, and in addition there's a 5.1-channel output on balanced XLR connections, and it's these that give the best performance when used with a suitable amplifier.

directly to a TV or projector but might be a drawback in more complex set-ups. To add switching, the company can supply an SPV-1 high-quality video-switcher at extra cost, this handling six composite, six S-Video and two component sources, and taking its control from the SP1.7.

The up side of this lack of video switching is that video signals are kept well away from the audio, thus minimising any possibility for interference; the down side is that there's no slick on-screen display for set-up

There's no slick onscreen display for set-up and tuning – but then how many times do you set up a system?

Upgradability is a given with Bryston products – pro users don't like trashing expensive equipment just to add the odd new facility – and the SP1.7 is designed with a plug-in ROM chip to make software upgrades easy. The company points out that this isn't a vague 'one day we'll be able to' promise: it's already able to upgrade past generations of its surround processor to current specifications.

Other aspects of the design include the use of 192kHz-capable DACs throughout – they run at 96kHz/24-bit at the moment – and discrete components rather than integrated circuits throughout the analogue signal path, for optimal sound quality. Keeping an eye on music quality, the processor can be used in bypass mode, so that an analogue signal is kept well away from any digital circuitry, with even the volume control entirely analogue.

What the SP1.7 doesn't have is video switching, which will be no problem for those of us running a couple of sources

and tuning – instead this must all be done with the fascia display, which is no great hardship. After all, how many times do you set up a system like this? The whole procedure took me little more than 15 minutes, which was no longer than with any other amplifier or processor of this kind.

Yes, there's a little squinting involved in getting it done, but it pays off when you hear the Bryston combination in action: this is a package with all the welly any user could sensibly want, and then some in reserve for when you want to push it really hard. So what did I load up to test it out? *Master and Commander's* naval battles? A shrieking, snarling car chase? Nope – instead I slotted into the player Robert Redford's *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, which a friend had been insisting for ages had a superb sound mix.

Not being a golfer, I'd avoided it until I spotted it in a sale for seven quid the other week, and now I'm hooked. Through the Brystons it's a magical combination of enveloping soundfields and beautifully

NEED TO KNOW... BRYSTON SP1.7

Price £4725
Type Preamp/processor
Processing modes
Dolby Digital EX/Pro-Logic II, DTS-ES/Neo:6, THX Surround EX
Digital-to-analogue converters 96kHz/24-bit (192kHz-capable)
Analogue audio inputs 6 line, 5.1-channel
Digital audio inputs 2 optical, 4 electrical
Analogue outputs 2 tape, 7.1-channel (on phonos), 5.1-channel (XLRs)
Remote connections 12v trigger, RS-232
Dimensions (wxhxd) 43.1x9.65x34.3cm
Weight 10kg

BRYSTON 9B SST

Price £4450
Type Multichannel power amplifier
Output 5x120w
Inputs Phono and XLR, with switchable sensitivity
Control 12v trigger
Dimensions (hxwxd) 13.3x48.3x48.3cm
Weight 28kg

Made by Bryston, Canada
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www.pmccloudspeaker.co.uk

placed effects – a golf swing from the right surround, car horns offstage left and stuff like that – together with magical music and a real sense of warmth to match the excellent cinematography and the feelgood nature of the whole enterprise.

Oh yes, the Brystons can do the big power swagger thing with total ease – cue up any action scene you like and the combination of lightning-fast processing and huge power reserves ensures the soundtrack explodes into life all around you. But it's with atmospheric soundtracks such as *Bagger Vance* and Tim Burton's *Ed Wood* – another seven-quid bargain from the same shopping trip – that the qualities of this package are best appreciated. The effects steering is fast and smooth, and the ambience excellent.

The Brystons may not be what you'd call pretty, though you can have them in industrial-looking silver rather than sombre black if you'd rather, or with wider, pro-style faceplates, but looks are deceptive, as they have a delicacy that flies in the face of their rather macho styling. If you're building a high-end home cinema, they should be up there on the 'must listen' list.

Andrew Everard

Bryston SP1.7/ 9B SST £4725/£4450

The score

90%

Home Cinema verdict

Big and industrial-looking it may be, but this heavyweight processor/amp combination has finesse and all-out power in equal measure

