

Denon DN-C640

A pro CD player that doesn't need a CD? Read on.

Text: /Brad Watts



DENON HAS ALWAYS turned out some impressive CD players for the professional broadcast and installation markets. Its relatively recent DN-C640, released early 2007, is still one of the more sophisticated disc players available.

The single unit rackmount design employs a slot-loading mechanism that quickly snaffles the disc, and won't let you push it back in after the disc is ejected and awaiting removal from the slot – idiot-proof operation, in other words. Equally as thoughtful is the eject button's locked status when a disc is in Play mode – again, avoiding embarrassing on-air blunders. Professional heavy-duty features are abundant, with pitch control, AES/EBU and S/PDIF digital output, variable and fixed attenuation RCA outputs and balanced XLR outputs, each XLR sporting its own level adjust mini-pots recessed into the rear panel.

Network Control

External control options include RS232 and parallel remote connections for interfacing with pretty much every broadcast studio installation, or integration with more contemporary technology such as AMX or Crestron systems governed via good ol' ethernet. That's correct. Aside from reading CDs and DVDs of both WORM, writable, and re-writable persuasions – all of which can contain any assemblage of MP2, MP3, WMA files and PCM (supported sample rates include 32, 44.1 and 48k, with all bit rates dithered down to 16-bit apart from PCM files, which will output 24-bit data) – it can also read all these file types over a network via TCP/IP. This is what makes the C640 such a viable playback medium for integrators and installers – the unit can access mountains of audio material kept on a central storage server, possibly avoiding having an optical disc inserted into its slot

load drive, *ever!*

The C640 is endowed with 'Web Remote' software for access to the unit from any terminal on the local network. The drill is reasonably simple: boot up a web browser application and log into the C640's IP address. From there you'll gain access to all of the unit's features. Adjust volume, choose tracks and organise playlists utilising the m3u format. IP addressing is as comprehensive as the TCP/IP protocol allows, with the ability to hook into a DHCP system automatically, or to have specific addressing as to DNS server and gateway set at the unit. These address settings can also be set remotely, with the C640 requiring a brief reboot before the newer settings will come into effect. From the player's end of a networked system, material can also be uploaded to a server, although naming tracks from the C640 is not supported – titling chores have to be executed from the server itself.

Not Very PC

Now the obvious argument against using a dedicated unit like the C640 for network audio streaming is that a computer can do all of this and more, but does a computer come standard with an AES/EBU digital output? It certainly doesn't without the further expense of a professional grade audio card and additional software. You'd also be hard pressed to find a computer-based system to offer four styles of remote control, let alone serial and parallel wired options. Plus the actual audio specs will also leave any DOS-box alternative floundering. Specifications such as 0.004% THD, a 104dB signal-to-noise ratio, and the ability to frame search down to 1/75 of a second could hardly be attained by the optical drive in most computers and as such the C640 is a very nice sounding playback device.

Thoughtful Design

Denon's CD players have a great reputation in the installed sound arena for rock-solid dependability and being able to withstand the attentions of itinerant DJs. There are a number of touches that reveal Denon's experience in this department that are thoughtful and welcome. For example, adjusting the playback pitch requires two button presses before the unit will allow the pitch amount to be adjusted via the jog dial – and yes the pitched output is available via the digital outputs.

Driving the DN-C640 is foolproof, and the unit feels (and is) staggeringly robust. Another example of thoughtful design: a Cue to Program button taking centre stage among the backlit transport controls. Of course, you can avail yourself of the infrared remote as an alternative to the front panel controls, with the remote accommodating far more buttons than the unit itself. In fact, there are a number of features that can be accessed more easily from the remote. Pitched playback, for example, can be instigated immediately from the remote rather than requiring the multiple button presses when using the front panel controls. I'd suspect in most scenarios the infrared remote may well find itself locked away from curious hands.

However, the big news with the DN-C640 is its network smarts. You could set this unit up to access terabytes of audio material without ever putting a disc in it, and will make sense in many installations and broadcast institutions.

Price: \$2195

Audio Products Group: 1300 134 400 or
www.audioproducts.com.au