AOR AR8200D

US$900 £680 €830

The AOR company has a very good reputation amongst the HF listening fraternity and we have reviewed several of its receivers in previous editions. In fact we last looked at the AOR8200 in its Mk II incarnation in 2001. The 8200D is apparently an "upgraded Mk III" and includes APCO25 (P25) and CTCSS decoding, voice inverter descrambling, voice recording and storage on a Micro SD card and a USB interface. With the possible exception of the two latter features the additions are not likely to prove of much interest to HF listeners. The frequency range was extended in the Mk III and the specified coverage of the D variant is 530kHz-3GHz. In actual fact our sample worked quite happily down to about 150kHz albeit with reduced sensitivity. There is nothing to distinguish the newer version visually from any of the others apart from a letter 'D' on an orange label beneath the display.

The Mk II included a temperature-compensated crystal oscillator (TCXO) for better stability and reduced noise and this is carried over into the new version. Other changes such as the case colour (black) and the alteration of the keypad to a standard telephone-type format have been retained. We criticized AOR for providing relatively low-capacity 700mAh nickel-cadmium cells as the power source in the Mk II and it is pleasing to see that 1800mAh Sanyo nickel-metal hydride cells are provided in the new version. It is perhaps unfortunate that the section of the manual describing battery charging and power considerations was not re-written to take account of the fact that nickel-metal hydride batteries require quite different charging techniques from nickel-cadmium. Our sample of the original 8200 drew about 140mA on standby and the Mk II required about 165mA, presumably as a result of the inclusion of a TCXO. The current consumption of the D is approximately half-way between the two at about 150mA when muted.

We described the controls and functionality of the 8200 in detail in our earlier reviews and there seems little point in repeating this material here. In essence the receiver measures 145 x 63 x 40mm in size exclusive of the external antenna and weighs about 340g. As hitherto, the MW antenna is also external and takes the form of a small detachable bar which is slotted into position on the top of the unit. No doubt this design was adopted to save internal space although the antenna looks and feels vulnerable and should probably be left off if your interests do not extend to medium-wave broadcast listening.

In performance terms the specified sensitivity of 2.5µV for 10dB S/N between 2 and 30MHz was not substantiated by our measurements. There was a degree of frequency dependence but in very general terms it was 6-8dB worse. In absolute terms this is acceptable for a hand-held portable receiver. The overall strong-signal performance was not particularly good although measurements suggest that it was a little better than that of the Mk II. The 8200D coped reasonably well with the output of the Wellbrook ALA-1530 during daylight hours but the background noise due to RFIM quickly rose to unacceptable levels as darkness fell. The usable dynamic range appeared to be in the region of 70dB, which is in line with what can usefully be expected from this class of receiver.

Clearly the AOR AR8200D is not primarily an HF radio and its lack of overall HF performance would make it something of a poor choice if shortwave reception was your main interest in life. However, if you have a particular requirement for wide-range VHF/UHF reception and acceptable HF coverage, the 8200D will serve the purpose.