

TUNER: SANSUI TU-9900**YEAR: 1974****PRICE NEW: £500**

It's hard to believe that the Sansui comes from the same year as the Yamaha, displaying – as it does – all the signs of late nineteen sixties styling, cues which incidentally are still prevalent in Japanese high end even today. To wit, it's big, shiny, button festooned and has chunky wood side-cheeks.

Sansui is a name that's faded from grace, at least in the UK. Construction quality is superb, giving little away despite its lower price. Still, remember that this was when £86 would buy you a brand new Linn Sondek LP12, so its £400 selling price wasn't exactly small beer (go figure!)... Most attractive is the large, expansive tuning dial and excellently weighted flywheel tuning knob. It's easy to forget now, but before the age of presets, the user interface was the beginning and end of a tuner. After all, what was the point of a stunning radio receiver if it has all the delicacy and finesse of a pneumatic drill? The touch and feel of machines was always so important to the Japanese. (Remember this was from an age when – arguably the most stunning Ferrari ever, the Daytona – was as genteel and well behaved as a Massey Ferguson tractor, and it wasn't until the Japanese arrived with the 1988

Honda NSX that the supercar breed was truly finessed).

The TU-9900 is about as gadget festooned as was possible in 1974 – there's a row of buttons proffering antenna attenuation, variable selectivity, noise cancelling, muting (fixed level), calibration tone and metering (signal or multipath). There's switchable FM stereo/mono and variable headphone level, plus the usual power switch. Round the back, there's the usual analogue audio outs, antennae ins and a scope out.

Inside, the Sansui is nicely detailed, neat and tidy with serious front end boasting with 5 gangs and 3 IF filters (two of which have 4 stages). There aren't many 'designer' passive components, but you're left with the impression that it's all been extremely thoroughly engineered, and isn't an embarrassment after looking under the hood of the much pricier Yamaha. Contrast this to Sony's rival offerings like the ST-5950, which was a veritable rat's nest of passive components stuffed in willy-nilly, and the Sansui must have been well regarded in this respect.

Indeed, power it up, let it warm through and you're not disappointed. I found the TU-9900 more sensitive and selective than the CT-7000, despite it being from virtually the same time in history (you have to remember that, by and large, tuners had improved noticeably in this respect by the end of the seventies). It pulled in weak stations with confidence, and there was an obvious lack of noises which I'd heard from

the Yamaha. Certainly it's superior to the CT-7000 in this respect.

What then of sound quality? Well, surprisingly, I'd say it was better here too. Of course, the caveat is that we're not listening to three new tuners here, so our subjective findings are contingent on alignment and component durability (basically, whether the Sansui's electrolytics have gone the distance better than the Yams...). Yet still I found the Sansui to be a warmer and more euphonic sounding device, closer to greats such as the Leak Troughline, than the Yamaha. Indeed, the TU-9900 showed the CT-7000 as a little on the analytical side for my tastes. The latter is certainly detailed, almost forensically so by comparison. It's easier to discern the four walls of a radio studio (on a Radio 4 speech transmission) through the 7000, while the 9900 is less precise and considerably more expansive in its stage width and depth. Again, the former locates front to back images with greater precision but lacks the sheer depth of field of the latter.

Never let it be said that the Yamaha CT-7000 is a cold and unlovely performer – by today's standards it's positively euphonic – but the Sansui TU-9900 was still blessed with a lovely, natural tonality that I came back to time and time again. This was actually of greatest benefit on AM, where its richness (colouration?) made it positively pleasant experience. Factor in the Sansui's superior front end (i.e. ability to pull in all and sundry from a poor twig) and I find myself surprised to say that, for me, this proved superior. What then of the mighty Revox B760...?

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