



Micromega FM-10 (£700)



After early successes with CD players, Micromega has now built up a complete range of audio separates including an FM tuner: the FM-10. This is the smallest unit in this test but its all-metal construction and brushed alloy front panel give an instant impression of high quality.

This is the only tuner here which is a true FM-only design; it does nothing else and so the design should be well focused. The tuner's front-end takes the form of a small module but the following IF amplifier and decoder stages are all of Micromega's own design and layout, based around integrated circuits from Sanyo.

Setting up isn't especially easy, as the instructions are in French only and some of the key sequences non-intuitive – in particular the essential one that switches the sensitivity from the default attenuated 'cable' setting to 'antenna' mode (press the mode key once and then toggle with the standby key, would you believe). The keys themselves are nicely weighted and the rotary tuning control works accurately and at just the right speed.

Memories for 50 pre-tuned programmes are provided: an excessive number I felt, given the capacity of the FM band. Once stored, stations are easily recalled using the tuning control. Unlike the more expensive Naim, an RDS station name display is also included.

AIR OF LUXURY

Even in 'antenna' (high sensitivity) mode the Micromega needs a good aerial signal to give a clean performance, of course one would not operate a £700 FM tuner with a bent coat hanger, but this is perhaps not the ideal choice if you seek long

distance reception, even if you have a high quality outdoor array.

The tonal character is unusual for a modern design, having a silky-smooth top end and rich, rhythmic bass. Such presentation was typical of European designs many years ago, and it is refreshing to discover that the experience is still available from new equipment. It gives an impression of luxury and this can draw you into almost any broadcast. The excellent plays that Radio 4 presents show the FM-10 at its best – voices seemed realistic and the full range of textures that they contained were explicitly rendered.

Orchestral music from Classic FM and BBC Radio 3 also powered along with impressive force and scale although the percussion section could lack the final degree of sparkle due to treble roll-off.

Simpler music and jazz was also a pleasure, but with the midrange slightly recessed and the bass sounding a little thick when compared, say, to the Audiolab.

Imaging proved satisfactory and the Micromega even managed to make a fair job of commercial pop stations such as Capital FM, its slightly muted treble taking away much of the glare that results from heavy processing.

Sound Quality: 80%

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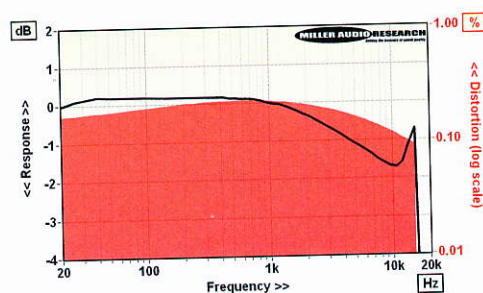
ABOVE: Aerial and power in, left; and audio out, right. Simple and functional but having the rear mounted mains switch is something of a nuisance

ABOVE: Compact and beautifully finished, the FM-10 should fit easily into any system. An overly bright blue display detracts

HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

Re-tested for this issue [see *HFN* Dec '10] the FM-10 remains a very insensitive tuner in 'cable' mode, requiring a full 44dBµ to fully break out of muting and a whopping 66.5dBµ (2.1mV RF) to achieve a 50dB stereo A-wtd S/N ratio (60% modulation). In 'antenna' mode its sensitivity improves to 32dBµ while its optimum S/N is achieved at 60.8dBµ. The FM-10 is well set-up to handle over-modulated FM, offering 820mV at 60% to 1.3V output at 80% with no increase in distortion. Indeed, supplied a decent signal strength (>60dBµ), this tuner offers very low levels of harmonic distortion, typically <0.2% across the entire audio range [see red infill, below] with a perfectly acceptable 65dB suppression of the 19kHz pilot tone. IM distortion is also very low, leading to an impressively clean-looking audio noise floor.

The pilot filtering is evident from its frequency response [black trace, below] which falls gently away above 1kHz to reach -1.8dB/10kHz before dropping rapidly at 17kHz and above. Incidentally, standby mode seems to do no more than mute the display as consumption remains 6W. **PM**



ABOVE: FM frequency response [black trace] with distortion vs. frequency [red infill] at 60dBµ (1mV RF at 75% modulation)

Maximum output level/Impedance	1.32V/820mV (60%)/ 465ohm
Muting threshold/Sensitivity (65dB SN)	160µV/40µV (cable/ant)/1.1mV
Distortion vs frequency (20Hz-16kHz)	0.08 to 0.22%
Pilot/Subcarrier suppression	65dB / 68dB
Ultimate A-wtd S/N ratio (75% mod)	63.5dB
Frequency response (20Hz-15kHz)	+0.2dB to -1.2dB
Stereo separation (1kHz)	40dB
Power consumption	6W
Dimensions (WHD)	430x70x250mm

GROUP TEST VERDICT

• CD PLAYERS • TURNTABLES • CARTRIDGES • AM/FM TUNERS • AMPLIFIERS • HEADPHONES • SPEAKERS •

If you've not heard what FM can do through your present system then you are missing out on a lot. The top models here can give the sort of performance that DAB and internet radio cannot hope to match and once you've bought the tuner and the antenna there's nothing more to pay, just sit back, tune in and enjoy.

The 'wooden spoon' must go to the Rotel RT-09. To be fair to Rotel, its model does offer a great deal more than just a tuner – but as a tuner the results can only be described as rather poor, completely negating the advantages that the FM system has to offer. Nor is it that easy to use and it's annoyingly slow to respond to instructions. A separate FM receiving stage and better internal screening might well have helped, but I got the impression that the radio section is seen as a useful addition rather than the likely major source.

Next up is the Audio Analogue Crescendo. This model, although considerably better sounding than the Rotel and good in some areas (notably background noise and stereo imaging), was spoiled by its odd tonality. The poor tuning display and the slow action of the tuning control also counted against it, as did the cheap-looking remote and the general finish of the main unit: its sharp edges and rough surfaces felt out of step with the other tuners. It may be a good partner in a system with small or otherwise bass-shy loudspeakers but overall I felt that more design work was needed.

NARROWING THE FIELD...

Is it surprising that the first two models to be dismissed are those that sought to provide additional digital functionality? This spreads the available resources more thinly, and in addition digital circuitry may generate interference which

tuners can pick up, subtly degrading the sound. It would be wise to avoid such extras unless really deemed necessary. It is also not surprising that the Creek Destiny 2 should be the next in the list. It is technically similar to the Audio Analogue and shares its distinctive audio fingerprint, although the designers have done a better job in taming its sound. The Destiny is a good tuner however, and well worth auditioning, especially if you mainly listen to classical music and news.

Separating the Audiolab 8200T and the Naim NAT 05 XS was difficult. Both offer similarly correct measured performance and both sound crisp and dry in practice. That the 8200T can rival the NAT 05 XS at less than half the price and offer both FM and DAB justifies its 'Outstanding' ranking. Nevertheless, in absolute terms, Naim takes the honours with its superlative build quality and clean, quiet and precise

sound. We should also take into account the excellent service backup that the company offers.

VIVE LA FRANCE

Finally then, it is the Micromega FM-10 that takes the top honours. Not only the smallest but the most

basic model on test here, the FM-10 is the only true just-FM design in this test, and perhaps this focus has enabled the designers to obtain such marvellous results.

Its main drawback is below average sensitivity, so a really good antenna is a must, and even then really clean reception from distant stations may not be easy. But when the signal is good the Micromega makes radio so enjoyable that it is impossible to ignore. It lacks perhaps the 'academic correctness' of the Audiolab but these things are as nothing when the concert starts or the drama draws you in. A bit more gain, a nicer display and clearer controls would make it perfect. ☺

'Micromega's FM-10 is the only just-FM design here'



ABOVE: The 'budget' Audiolab 8200T (top) looks, feels and sounds like a more expensive tuner. It offers good sensitivity and entirely separate DAB/FM front-ends. The Micromega FM-10 (below) may be small and basic but is very well constructed and makes radio listening a real pleasure, provided you've a decent aerial.

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