



82 HUMAX FOXSAT-HDR → £300 Approx → www.humaxdigital.com/freesat

First Freesat PVR

Humax's debut Freesat recorder offers a genuine alternative to Sky+ and may even change the way you think about HD. **Adrian Justins** dishes it out



Freesat is aiming to carve a major role for itself in TV's post-analogue age, competing against Freeview, Sky and cable/broadband operators. For those unable to receive a terrestrial signal, it represents a viable multi-channel TV (and radio) option. Freesat also offers an HD carrot in the guise of free-to-view BBC HD and, exclusively, ITV HD.

However, missing from the Freesat stable has been a digital recorder, something that can record standard-def and HD shows with all the usual PVR tricks such as live pause, rewind and series link. Until now, that is.

Humax's own vanilla Freesat box impressed me enormously when first

launched, so I was expecting the tastier PVR version to seriously tickle my AV palate. The specification includes a capacious 320GB hard disk, which can be used not just for recording TV and radio shows but also for storing and playing MP3s and JPEGs, copied over via the front-mounted USB port. This is an unexpected bonus and one that works in true plug-and-play fashion with files stored on a flash memory stick. Shame you can't import external video files as well.

The box itself looks serious if unflashy, but has an LCD window which displays the name of whatever you're watching in rather large letters,

Pig ugly: It's no looker, but the Foxsat-HDR has hidden charms

which can be quite distracting. It wouldn't be so annoying if it could be switched off.

Connections-wise, the roster is decent enough, with HDMI and digital optical audio the stars of the show. However, component video, which features on the non-PVR version, is omitted in favour of an extra LNB input and one output. Something of a shame.

Very dishy

If you already have a Sky dish in place, installation is a breeze, although to take advantage of the box's twin tuners you'll need dual LNB feeds. An LNB upgrade or dish



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installation can be ordered at the time of purchase, and costs typically £80 for the latter.

Switch on, wait for what seems an eternity (but is actually only 30 seconds) for the box to boot up, enter your postcode, and then sit back while the PVR does all the work installing. If you want Astra's non-Freesat channels, you can access them in non-Freesat mode, but without an EPG and hence without one-touch recording.

The menu system is currently way ahead of Sky's in terms of attractiveness and flexibility, with high-res graphics and icons and an EPG that lets you keep watching TV in the background.

You can delete channels from the channel list or create favourites (but these are nothing more than lists with no programme info). You can find a show by inputting the whole name, whereas Sky limits you to searching by the first letter only.

A major frustration with the EPG is that ITV's HD shows are given a separate channel listing, so you have to trawl the entire schedule until an HD icon pops up. This rather flies in the face of Freesat's ease-of-use mantra. To access recordings, you press the Media button on the rather

uninspired remote handset. You can search at up to 64x normal speed and enjoy slo-mo at 1/2x, 1/4x and 1/8x normal speed, and you can add bookmarks to recordings as you go. Annoyingly, though, you cannot delete a recording at the same time as you are making another.

HD MIA

In performance terms, the box delivers the goods by the skip-load, matching Sky for image and sound quality, although nothing can hide the shortfall in clarity of upscaled SD material compared with actual HD transmissions.

The Foxsat-HDR does have some annoying quirks, but overall is versatile and easy to use. **While it's no fault of Humax's, Freesat needs more HD content** before the benefits of the Foxsat-HDR become obvious. The current provision of just BBC HD and ITV HD, with the latter's output restricted to selected football matches, some movies and the odd drama, is really not enough to compete with Sky. The suits at Freesat are no doubt pulling out all the stops to get more HD content, but for now this is a great piece of kit to exploit what's currently available ●

→ Specifications

Tuner: yes two
Scart: yes 2 (One RGB)
Component video out: yes
RS232: yes
USB: yes two
HDMI: yes with upscaling to 720p/1080i
LNB: yes 2-in, 1-out
Stereo phono output: yes
Digital audio output: yes optical (Dolby Digital)
Freesat+: yes officially branded
HDD: 320GB, enough for 200hr of standard-def TV, 80hr of HD
Dimensions: 380(w) x 55(h) x 252(d) mm
Weight: 3.1kg
Other features: 320GB hard disk; Freesat HD and SD channel recording; simultaneous viewing of one channel and recording another; record two channels at the same time; receive HDTV signals (MPEG-4 AVC/H.264 and MPEG-2); MP3 and JPEG storage and playback; under 1W power consumption in standby; simultaneous playing of transmissions over HDMI, composite and Scart; DVB-S2 and DVB-S compatible; Ethernet support (for future use); audio description/one touch subtitle

AV/CV

Product:
 Freesat+ digital recorder

Positioning:
 Scart subscription-free satellite PVR

Peers:
 Sky+7+HD
 Globaltec
 STH700HDCI



HCC VERDICT

Humax Foxsat-HDR
 £300 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/489319

Highs: Cinch to operate; good performance; ITV in HD; JPEG/MP3 playback

Lows: Lengthy boot up time; annoying LCD display, dearth of HD content

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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