



ON TEST / FREESAT HD PVR



Verdict ★★★★★ Approx price **£300**

Humax FOXSAT-HDR

At last, a subscription-free satellite PVR to rival Sky+

- ⊕ Easy to use; ITV in HD; media hub functions; recording quality
- ⊖ Slow to boot up; distracting LCD display; needs more HD channels



FREESAT WITHOUT A PVR is like Sky without Sky+: unthinkable. So the arrival of Humax's Foxsat HDR box is a welcome landmark for the fledgling digital TV format.

Freesat is the satellite version of Freeview and is the only place you can find ITV in HD, which makes it quite a compelling proposition for owners of HD Ready flatscreens eager to watch quality images without putting cash into the pockets of Messrs Murdoch or Branson every month. And for anyone who can't get a terrestrial signal, Freesat may also represent the only way to watch any TV.

Features ★★★★★

The back of the box reveals that Humax has added a second LNB input and provided a corresponding jack. A sad-looking composite video output means you can still use this box with non-HD Ready displays and can hook up a DVD recorder or VCR for archiving favourite

recordings (except those of HD shows, which are copy-protected).

Stereo analogue audio outs are provided and an optical digital output for enjoying Dolby Digital broadcasts. There's also a USB socket and an ethernet port that could be used for IPTV purposes in the future.

Under the hood is a 320GB hard disk capable of storing a maximum 80hr of HD or 200hr of SD content. A bonus Media hub function also allows you to store and playback MP3s and JPEGs, which can be copied over using the front-mounted USB input.

Ease of use ★★★★★

Anyone switching from Sky will need to make sure they have two LNB feeds from their dish. Previous Sky+ customers will be fine, but owners of standard Sky boxes may need an engineer to install a multiple LNB.

As per the non-PVR version of this box, installation couldn't be easier. It takes a few minutes to screw in the LNBs, connect the HDMI and the digital optical output to a home cinema receiver.

The booting up time, of around 30 seconds, is painfully slow, but the attractively-designed menu make the wait worthwhile, guiding you through the step-by-step process (TV aspect ratio, postcode, output resolution, etc) and has you up and running within minutes. It tunes in the 140-odd TV and radio channels very quickly with channels sorted into the correct order.

“SD BBC broadcasts and most other channels look as good as they do on Freeview and Sky”

The menu system shows how outdated Sky's system is now. The EPG here is a revelation with high-resolution graphics and icons, and, as it's overlaid, you can carry on watching a show while navigating the EPG. The 'back' button, meanwhile, enables you to swap quickly between two channels.

You can edit (or more accurately, delete) the channel list and create (and name) a number of favourite lists. Some channels can be customised so that you get another



region's local news shows if you so wish. Enter the EPG and first select the genre of programme type, which can then be viewed as a table, a list or a schedule of selected shows. You can also find a show by entering the name. Sky's EPG only enables you to enter the first letter of a programme, which is about as useful as a shopping trolley on a sand dune.

The only major failing of the EPG is that ITV's HD transmissions are neither listed separately nor searchable. You have to trawl through the entire EPG until an HD icon pops up over the odd Football match, drama or film. Even ITV's website listings are no better and the end result is very frustrating.

Humax is rather proud of its 'i-plate' programme information banner, which is packed with icons that tell you every detail about the current programme, including the signal quality and strength, picture resolution, presence of Dolby Digital audio, channel number, if audio description is available, if text is available and even the broadcast time and progress.

Teletext is much quicker to load on this unit than on Sky because there are no video streams, just text and images.

Performance ★★★★★

The box works almost flawlessly and is capable of delivering top-quality broadcast images and sound. Directly comparing

simultaneous broadcasts on Freesat, Freeview and Sky show that this system is on a par with, or sometimes better than, its rivals.

Standard-definition BBC broadcasts and most other channels look as good on the Humax as they do on Freeview and Sky.

ITV's broadcast bit-rate is often much lower than the BBC's so can look dire in standard-definition on Freesat. The switch to HD (by pressing the red button) illustrates the gulf between high- and standard-definition on ITV.

To access recordings you press the Media button on the remote. Playback is straightforward with options to fast forward or rewind at 2x, 4x, 8x, 16x, 32x, 64, 1/2x, 1/4x and 1/8x normal speed.

You can create bookmarks as you view, which is a handy function not found on Sky+. Playback quality is excellent. Sound quality is at the mercy of the original broadcast and the audio components in your AV set-up but the BBC HD's Dolby Digital tracks sound superb.

Value ★★★★★

As the first Freesat+ box on the market the Foxsat-HDR is a genuine winner. It does everything you'd expect it to without any major hassles or disappointments. The lack of HD content will hopefully change because, at around £300, it's not exactly a loose-change product, but anyone craving a Freesat PVR should seriously consider it ☺

STABLE MATES

Can't afford the Foxsat-HDR's £300 price tag? The Freesat-HD box from Humax is a sub-£150 receiver without a hard disk and is an

excellent box if you're happy using a separate recorder.



Lab report

/ Time in Lab: days
 / Serial No: 61 6004 228 000 36

380mm



freesat
brilliant for everyone



Spec check

HD support: Yes

Video formats: 576i, 576p, 720p, 1080i

Dimensions: 380(w) x 55(h) x 252(d)mm

Weight: 3.1kg

/ Other features:

Freesat HD and SD channel recording; simultaneously view one channel while recording another; record 2 channels at the same time; receive HDTV signals (MPEG4 AVC/H.264 and MPEG2); MP3 and JPEG storage and playback; less than 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); full colour hi-res electronic

programme guide; Dolby digital audio output (S/PDIF); automatic software upgrade via satellite; upscaling standard-definition channels; audio description/one touch subtitle

/ Supplied accessories:

Remote control; composite AV cable (RCA); Scart Cable; HDMI cable; 2 AAA batteries; User Manual; Quick Start Guide

/ Sockets:

Digital optical audio, 2 Scart, 1 LNB-out, 2 LNB-in, HDMI, composite video, analogue stereo audio, 2 USB, LAN

/ Contact:

0870 718 9677

www.humaxdigital.com/freesat

techradar.com www.techradar.com/420684

WHAT TV We say

Versatile and easy to use, this is a superb recorder that cries out for more hi-def content



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