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test REPORT

HUMAX PVR-9200T

Humax takes on Topfield in the battle of the big disc DTT PVRs. Grant Rennell fills it up with Freeview goodness



The 9200T is one of several twin-tuner DTT PVRs on the market and features a 160GB hard disc capable of storing up to 100 hours of TV and a CI slot for Top-Up TV upgradeability. It's the nearest competitor to the current 'daddy' in this field, the Topfield TF5800T.

It's a certainly a smart machine. A large bright-blue LED display shows, among other things, the name of the channel you're watching and there's a thin row of small operating buttons underneath. A flip-down flap on the right-hand side conceals a USB (2.0) port next to a CI slot capable of taking the Top-Up TV CAM and card.

The well-specified rear panel includes twin Scarts; the TV Scart is able to output S-video as well as RGB and composite, and the VCR Scart caters for both S-video and composite. There's also a UHF loopthrough for outputting analogue TV, and a modulator is included for non-Scart users. Audio connectors including both stereo phonos and an optical digital audio output (with Dolby 5.1 passthrough) and there's an RS232C port for software updates via PC (also available over the air).

The long remote control is generally well thought out, with its easy-to-follow button arrangement and numerous additional buttons lurking beneath a slide-down flap.

The receiver's menu system is also well-presented and includes a wealth of configuration options.

You can create up to five favourite channel lists and rename them using an onscreen keyboard. There are several aspect ratios available: 16:9, 4:3, 16:9 letterbox, 14:9 letterbox or centre cutout – together with picture and quarter-screen picture-in-picture options.

The EPG is populated by eight-day DVB data and shows a grid of four channels at a time, with the current channel showing in the top right corner.

The channel order can be rearranged alphabetically or numerically; you can opt to view just TV, radio or favourite channels, and view listings day by day. You can also search for certain programmes using an onscreen keyboard or view lists of programmes for the coming week by genre.

The 9200T is capable of recording both TV and radio. Recordings are instigated either by pressing record, setting them directly from the EPG – or using the manual timer, which has once, daily or weekly repeat options. You can also set a recording buffer either side in advance.

It's possible to record two channels while watching a

third but, rather niftily, you can also watch a third live channel while two others are being recorded, provided it is on the same multiplex as one of the others.

Recordings are automatically labelled with the programme name (this can be altered), channel and showing time and are accessed in the Recorded Programme menu. However, playing back a recording from this menu is not quite as straightforward as we'd like. Selecting a recording from the list and pressing play causes it to appear in the top left-hand corner of the screen, but you can't play it in full-screen without quitting the menus first.

The best way to jump straight to watching a recording in full-screen is to hit the list button and select it although, oddly, this useful 'short-cut' button is hidden away underneath the flap on the remote when it should really have been more prominent.

There are no quality settings but you can edit recordings afterwards, splitting them in two or removing specific chunks. This is a rather crude and cumbersome process, however, and it takes some getting used to.

Humax's now-familiar time bar helps you navigate around a recording or when timeshifting. In the latter case, the 9200T keeps a running cache (up to two hours) of what you watch, within which you can skip back and forth. You can rewind and fast-forward at 2x, 4x, 16x, 64x speed and skip forward 30 seconds. You can also add bookmarks to recordings, 'instant replay' the last seven seconds and play them in slow motion.

In addition to TV, the 9200T also has some notable multimedia capabilities. You can transfer MP3 audio files via the USB port using the basic software application provided, and load and display JPEG image files. Even more impressively, you can copy recordings from the hard disc on to a PC and burn them to a DVD afterwards. There are also four basic puzzle games to play.

Picture quality is fairly robust generally. We did notice a thin sheen of artefacting creeping in on many channels, but this could often be attributed to the quality of the broadcast. The excellent tuner had no trouble pulling in a full complement of TV and radio channels.

It's a close-run thing but, to our mind, the 9200T's sorting capabilities in particular put it just ahead of the excellent (yet more expensive) Topfield 5800T. At this price, it's an absolute steal ■



Features

- Product: Humax PVR-9200T
- Price: £220
- Hard disc size: 160GB
- MHEG-5: Yes
- Teletext: Yes
- EPG support: 8-day DVB
- UHF modulator tuning: 21-69
- Common interface slot: Yes
- Software upgrade: OTA/PC
- AV outputs: 2 Scarts, optical digital audio output, stereo phonos
- Tel: 020 8547 4240
- Website: www.humaxdigital.com

Rating

- Build quality, big hard disc, lots of features
- A few operating and picture quibbles, editing is not great
- Build ★★★★★★★★
- Setup ★★★★★★★★
- Searching ★★★★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★★★★
- Features ★★★★★★★★
- Value ★★★★★★★★
- Overall 85%