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test REPORT

HUMAX LGB32TPVR

Humax's hard disc LCD IDTV can record from an external source. Time to ditch that Sky Plus? Not quite, says Grant Rennell

➤ Humax is, to our knowledge, the first manufacturer to integrate hard disc recording into a flat-panel TV. And, as well having both analogue and dual digital terrestrial tuners, you can also use the LGB-32TPVR to record from an external source – including a digital receiver.

Build

Hard disc inclusion notwithstanding, this advanced big brother to the non-HD equipped LGB-26TT (tested in our April issue) is a little on the bulky side and comes poised on a detachable non-pivoting stand.

Pointing downwards on the rear and running along the left-hand side is a set of connections including everything desirable, bar a Sky HD-friendly HDMI input. However, the component and HDCP-compliant DVI-D inputs, and 1280 x 768 resolution, ensure HDTV readiness to a degree. The three Scart connectors are also most welcome and there's a common interface slot for Top-Up TV.

The slick silver-coloured remote control conceals small buttons for operating the PVR functions beneath a sliding retractable flap. There's also an additional compact remote with buttons for most of the key features.

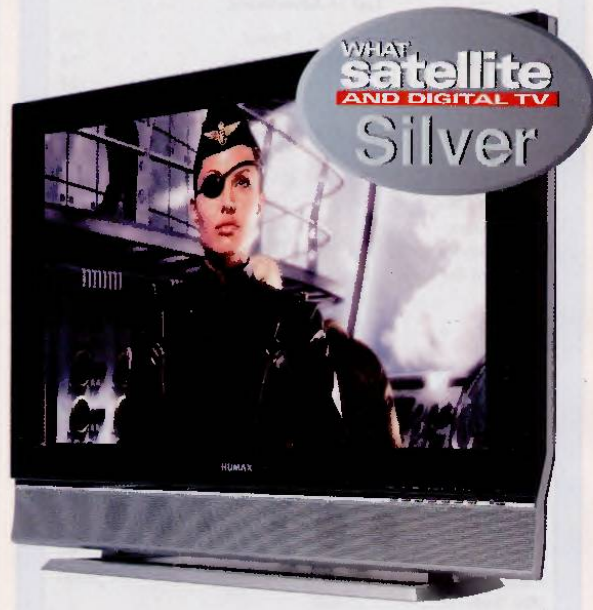
Operation

The EPG is populated by eight-day DVB data and shows a grid of five channels at a time alongside programme information for each – these can be expanded to show synopses. You can search for a programme using an onscreen keyboard or search by genre. The recording function gets its own set of menus. You can't record from two sources at once but you can record from an external source while watching something on the analogue or digital tuners, or from one tuner while watching another.

Aside from using the EPG, the quickest way to record is to press the record button when you're watching something external or internal. It's not instant, however; you are first prompted to select how long you want to record for before it starts selecting from 30 mins to a full 24 hours if you want. As we've come to expect from a PVR, there's also a timeshifting function with which you can pause a live broadcast up to 30 minutes.

The recording menus include a manual timer for external and internal sources, where you can specify quality settings and implement once, daily and weekly repeat options. Synchronised with your Digibox's timer or Autoview option, say, this does give you a semblance of Sky Plus-style functionality.

There's also the option to re-format the 40GB hard disc, or archive recordings on an external HD. However, there's no way to upgrade the internal drive and currently no way of archiving them to a VCR or DVD recorder.



Performance

Unlike Sky Plus, there are three quality settings to play with – high quality (HQ), standard play (SP) and long play (LP) with the high quality setting equating to around 1GB an hour of disc space depending on the quality of the broadcast (you can fit up to 31 hours on the 40GB hard disc at lower settings; 11 at the highest). High quality looks slightly inferior to the broadcast quality, and standard play is more or less equivalent to VHS.

Long play recordings, however, are so compressed and blocky they are little more than a last resort when you are desperate to save on disc space; a snooker match almost resembles an animated Monet painting. Recordings not scheduled via the EPG are labelled with the name of the source (e.g AV1), but you can rename them afterwards.

You can rewind and fast-forward (up to 24x) with an onscreen 'time bar' (also present when you timeshift) indicating where you are in a recording. However, the DTT tuner (in our test model, at least) isn't of the best quality to start with. Whether it's Price Drop TV or BBC1, pictures exhibit a faint sheen of artefacting, though Humax assures us this will improve before release.

Hook up a good quality DVD player using the component inputs, however, and there's a noticeable improvement in many areas, showing that the LGB 32TV PVR works best with high-quality sources. Colours are well contained, black levels are convincing, and the TV's 170° viewing angle keeps dimming to a satisfactory minimum – even at the extremes. However, movement is also prone to slight but noticeable trailing – as observed watching balls rolling in the aforementioned snooker match.

Verdict

The LGB-32TPVR is an admirable stab at a hard disc TV with features and style to spare. However, the current lack of dual recording (expected to be rectified in future with a software update) is disappointing, considering the multiple tuner arrangement. This, coupled with inferior DTT picture quality, means it can't really compete with more conventional PVR products out there ■

Features

Model: Humax LGB-32TPVR

Price: £1,600

Key features: 40GB HDD, timeshifting, 1280x768 native resolution, twin DTT tuners, analogue tuner, eight-day DVB EPG support, picture-in-picture modes, 2x7W speakers, common interface slot, Dolby Digital audio output, 170° viewing angle.

Key connections: DVI-D input, component video input, 2 Scarts, S-video input, PC input, optical digital audio output

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