

Freeview flexibility

Is this the best Freeview PVR on the market? **Martin Pipe** believes so



The PVR's twin tuner and HDD allow numerous 'trickplay' and recording options

Freeview+ should be considered a must-have for those without Sky TV, as it offers all the recording flexibility that the satellite broadcaster (and Ross Kemp) has been boasting of.

This twin-tuner Freeview+ PVR from Humax isn't the cheapest machine around, but in my opinion it's currently the best, with a generous 320GB HDD for up to 200 hours of recording; a CI slot; basic editing of recordings; and an upscaling HDMI port. Just plug it in, and the PVR9300T finds all of the available channels for you.

Recordings can be scheduled from the 7-day EPG. Supported Freeview+ features include split-programme (handy for ITV, which has a habit of shoving news bulletins into movies); recommendations of alternative showings if there's a timer 'overlap'; and automatic recording of complete series. There's also auto-tracking, which compensates for schedule changes. Naturally, this only works if broadcasters update EPG data on a regular basis, so you might want to instead use 'padding' to add minutes to the start and end times. Annoyingly, doing so disables series recording.

An EPG feature worth its weight in gold is 'find'; enter a keyword, and all of the programmes with that word in their name are listed.

The twin tuners facilitate all sorts of wizardry – you can record two channels simultaneously while watching an existing recording, if you really want to. And, as the Humax is always buffering the

currently-viewed channel to its HDD, you can use the handset's review and cue buttons to find the part of the programme you're after.

Pausing of live TV is offered, sports and movie fans will appreciate the slow-mo and instant replay functions, and archivists will be cock-a-hoop at the prospect of permanently preserving chunks of the buffer as recordings.

The PVR9300T supports digital teletext – and it's fast and responsive here. Indeed, the same can be said of every other aspect of the machine's friendly user interface. There are separate VCR and TV Scarts – both support composite or S-video, while the TV one also offers RGB. Pictures through the latter are superb; they're crisp, clean and capable of beautifully-vivid yet accurate colour.

Minor quibbles

But don't get the impression that the PVR9300T is perfect. Firstly, although it's capable of good results, the HDMI output only offers 576p and 720p settings. Why no 1080i/1080p? The onboard cooling fan on our sample was rather noisy, too, although Humax has said that an over-the-air software update is now in place that reduces noise significantly.

And a final weird point: our review sample had a rear-panel USB port that didn't function. It transpires that the USB port on the previous PVR9200T was being used so little that Humax has done away with the little blighter – later PVR9300Ts won't have a port at all. So if you find one on the back of yours, ignore it! ●

AV/CV

Product: Freeview+ digital recorder

Position: Heads the current Humax PVR range

Peers: Topfield TF5810 PVR; Humax PVR9200TBX

→ Specifications

Tuner: yes two of 'em
Scart: yes 2 (VCR and TV)
Component video out: no
RS232: yes
HDMI: yes but upscaling to 720p only
Stereo phono output: yes
Digital audio output: yes optical (Dolby Digital-ready – if only the broadcasters were!)
Freeview+: yes officially branded
HDD: 320GB, enough for 200hr of TV
Dimensions: 360(w) x 50(h) x 245(d)mm
Weight: 2.9kg
Connections: CI slot for pay-TV upgrades; picture-in-picture; digital teletext, 'find'; auto-tracking; divide/delete recording; user-definable bookmarks; timeshifting; instant replay; commercial-skip; retroactive recording; subtitles and audio-descriptions recorded and selectable as with live broadcasts; upscaling over HDMI to 720p



HCC VERDICT

Humax PVR9300T
 £200 Approx
 Price check: www.techradar.com/460642

Highs: Easy and responsive to use; fine AV performance; well-featured

Lows: USB port has been deactivated; limited HDMI modes

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5