



Samsung uses LED backlighting to give this LCD TV pronounced black levels and amazing contrast

# Samsung debuts RSS feed LCD TV

With its Series 9 sets, Samsung claims to have taken LCD TV technology to another level. **Rik Henderson** gets a closer look



I've been like a kid at a wedding recently, running around in circles, whooping and hollering with my coat over my head. Why? Because it's been a good few months for high-performance TVs.

Pioneer set the bar high with its latest Kuro plasmas (which everyone tends to agree are superb), then Samsung's Series 7 LED-backlit 46in brought black to the grey world of LCD. And now we've got our hands on the Korean company's 55in Series 9 LCD TV – a flagship screen with no shortage of innovative features. The LE55A956D has got everything and then some: LED-backlight? Check. 100Hz processing? Check. Ultra Clear Panel? Check. USB connectivity and media-streaming? Check indeed.

## Fat-bottomed beauty

Looks-wise, this flatscreen is certainly different to the Samsung's regular Crystal Designed wares – there's no splash of red. This style is monikered 'Platinum Black', although – subtle mottling aside – it's just black, really.

Standard black it may be, but what a bezel it is. Other TVs boast superslim surrounds, but here the frame is as wide as a hippy's bell-bottoms. It makes the TV seem far larger than its 55in panel suggests. Indeed, 'slim' is entirely the wrong word to describe this screen. The 956's footprint harks back to the bygone days of LCD TVs before the AV industry went size 'O' crazy. But there's a good reason for this;

the extended waistline is padded with LED bulbs – one of the 956's crowning features.

LED-backlighting is actually, for those who read my review of the 46A786 last issue, old hat. Real world (tested) contrast ratios around 200,000:1? Yawn! Blacks the colour of a frost-bitten toe? Snooze. We've seen it before. That doesn't make it any less effective, impressive and exciting, though. And its implementation in a screen of this size further enforces its virtues. The larger the screen, the more pronounced and effective the localised dimming seems.

Take *Stardust* on HD DVD, and specifically Michelle Pfeiffer in a black robe hamming it up for the camera: her robe seamlessly blended into the top and bottom-ranged black bars, which, in turn, blended into the bezel. It was **a marriage of the kind of deep, unsullied blacks atypical of an LCD TV that's actually switched on.**

It's plasma-esque in its mastery.

Of course, with deep blacks come vibrant colours. With good HD material an almost three-dimensional image is achieved. SD pictures are less exciting and can look somewhat flat.

Another feature that adds 3D-like effects to images is 100Hz Motion Plus. Rather than simply doubling the frame rate (in order to reduce stuttering during movement), there

## AV/CV

**Product:**  
A 55in LCD TV with LED-backlighting and a host of intriguing features

**Position:**  
At the very top of Samsung's 2008 range in both price and technology

**Peers:**  
Sharp LC-52XS1E;  
Sony KDL-52W4500

are additional algorithms at work that further enhance objects on screen. The end result is reminiscent of Philips' Pixel Plus where – at times – people and vehicles, for example, ping from the background. Admittedly, the end result is a bit like Marmite (you either love it or hate it), but at least on this Samsung you can choose to tone it down or turn it off altogether. My advice? Switch it onto 'Medium' for normal TV and some standard-definition DVD viewing, and 'off' for any hi-def shenanigans, including games.

This Samsung offers three 'Entertainment' picture enhancements above and beyond your own calibration (in addition to the 'Standard', 'Movie' and never-to-be-used 'Dynamic' presets). 'Sports', 'Cinema' and 'Game' each aim to fine-tune the picture settings for their specific tasks but, to be frank, they're useless. Calibrate the telly yourself to your own personal preference and stick with it.

The same goes for the audio, which offers a similar range of adjustable presets. There are five options you can choose from (in addition to turning SRS TruSurround XT on or off) but I feel you'd be best off fiddling with the in-built equalizer yourself. Better still, leave it and take the audio from the included optical digital audio output into a dedicated system (Samsung's own HT-X715 all-in one would be a good match stylistically). That's not to say the >



**Cracking screen:** This Samsung delivers eye-popping visuals with HD material

two 15W speakers are useless – they’re quite functional actually – but a serious flatscreen like this deserves more support.

**Convergence**

There’s more to this 55in Series 9 than just video and audio performance. As it’s Samsung’s top-of-the-range model, it’s been lavished with most all of the company’s TV innovations, each of which are generally beneficial to those who like to dabble and muck-about with gadgetry.

Like some of its stablemates, the 956 features WISELINK Pro. This allows you to play DivX (and related) video files, JPEGs and MP3s on the TV via a USB stick. However, unlike the Series 7 equivalent, this set can also stream the same content from a PC over a network.

Once hooked up to your router via the LAN port on the back, or the included USB wi-fi dongle, the DLNA-compliant TV can access music, video and picture files. You might need to install proprietary software on the target computer, but afterwards hookup is a doddle. HD content won’t run smoothly using the wireless option, but it’s fine through a hard-wired connection, and everything else is trouble-free with both. I can’t stress enough how pleasing this feature is. I’ve been carping on about media streamers for ages, but here’s one built into a TV and accessible at the touch of a

button. The ‘net connectivity also comes in handy for InfoLive, although this feature doesn’t really live up to its promise at present. Essentially, the 956 can grab ‘net-based RSS feeds from Yahoo and display them as widgets on the TV. However, there’s only a few to choose from: News, Weather and Stock Reports. None of them offer anything that isn’t accessible through bog-standard digital text.

Another feature that’s interesting, but won’t wow the world, is the Content Library. **Stored on the TV itself is a host of recipes, simple games, fitness instructions and kids’ pastimes.** Like InfoLive, it’s a gimmick that will become better realised further down the line (on later models) but is barely more than a distraction at present.

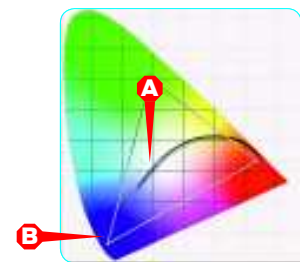
That is certainly a minor quibble though, as everything else this LCD TV does, it does with considerable skill. HD pictures are stunning (after calibration) and my faith in LED-backlighting is further strengthened on this showing.

The screen is perhaps less convincing with standard-def images than one of its main rival – Sony’s 52W4500 reviewed on p46 – but it’s still no slouch. The 956 is also a playground of interesting ideas, and although a couple of them are fairly hit or miss, the WISELINK Pro-DLNA media streaming is a welcome garnish on what is a tasty dish ●

→ **Specifications**

- HD Ready:** yes including 1080p/24
- Progressive scan:** yes NTSC and PAL
- Digital TV tuner:** yes plus CI slot
- Scart:** yes two (1 RGB)
- Component video:** yes one input
- HDMI/DVI:** yes four v1.3 HDMI
- PC input:** yes one VGA input
- Sound:** SRS TruSurround XT
- Resolution:** 1920 x 1080
- Brightness (claimed):** 500cd/m2
- Contrast ratio (claimed):** 2,000,000:1 (dynamic)
- Dimensions (off stand):** 1,364(w) x 882(h) x 337(d)mm
- Weight:** 41.4kg
- Other features:** 100Hz Motion Plus; Smart LED lighting; Anynet+; WISELINK Pro-DLNA; InfoLive; Movie Plus; USB 2.0 port; Content Library; LAN port; USB Wi-fi modem

→ **Tech Labs**



The amazingly high contrast ratings below were achieved only with the Smart LED system switched on, which can make the picture tiring to watch. With Smart LED off our Tech labs measured 546:1 after calibration. Colour temperature was hot at 10,053K (**Point A**) due to Blue levels of 144% (**Point B**). Manual tweaking of individual R/G/B levels delivered an almost perfect 6,498K

**Before calibration**

**Colour temperature:** 10,053K  
**RGB:** 88/99/144 **Luminance:** 83fL  
**Contrast ratio:** 283,114:1

**After calibration**

**Colour temperature:** 6,498K (user)  
**RGB:** 100/100/100 **Luminance:** 79.19fL  
**Contrast ratio:** 220,742:1



**HCC VERDICT**

Samsung LE55A956D  
£2,800 Approx

**Price check:** [www.techradar.com/476857](http://www.techradar.com/476857)

**Highs:** Black level; crisp and detailed HD images; WISELINK Pro-DLNA is an exceptional addition  
**Lows:** Mighty footprint in bezel and depth terms; pictures need tweaking; SD pictures can look flat

**Performance:** 1 2 3 4 5

**Design:** 1 2 3 4 5

**Features:** 1 2 3 4 5

**Overall:** 1 2 3 4 5