

48 SHARP LX-52XS1E → £9,000 Approx → [www.sharp.co.uk](http://www.sharp.co.uk)



RGB LED-backlighting: the new kick-ass technology from the Land of the Rising Sun



HOME CINEMA CHOICE FEBRUARY 2009

# A perfect synergy of art and science

Costing £9,000, Sharp's 52in flagship thinscreen LCD flies in the face of the credit crunch. **Rik Henderson** is awestruck by its brilliance...



Generally, as a rule, we shy away from considering something as vulgar as expense when reviewing kit in *HCC*. We believe a product should always be tested and judged on its merits, rather than its cost. But what if it's a 52in telly ticketed at a whopping £9,000?

In this instance, the price is certainly difficult to ignore. Sharp's LC-52XS1E is the approximate price of a brand-new Peugeot 206 – and that's a lot of lolly, especially considering the current climate. Just think of what else you could buy with nine thousand shiny pound coins: a round-the-world holiday; a new Harley Davidson; a house in Wigan...

However, should you choose to lavish your wonga on any of these alternatives, you'd miss out on what is the best LCD TV yet to grace the *HCC* Tech Labs...

The Sharp LC-52XS1E certainly looks the part, thanks to the vision of renowned industrial designer (and Sharp regular) Toshiyuki Kita. Lusciously and lavishly encased in brushed aluminium rather than tacky placky, you'll want to stroke it as much as watch it. Naturally, I didn't actually fondle it, for fear of leaving greasy fingerprints on its bezel (and inviting worried glances from my colleagues), but it's tastier than a marshmallow bosom. The screen also comes with a matching Pioneer-made 2.1 soundbar that looks equally

buff. It can be detached, but its absence would upset the overall aesthetic impact. Even the desktop stand is a finely-crafted object, as striking as it is functional. Be warned, though: it weighs a ton!

## 23mm!

You'll also be wowed by the TV's depth, or lack thereof. The XS1E is currently the thinnest production model on the market – 23mm at its slimmest point. If wall-mounted, it'd sit as flush to the wall as you'd probably ever want, and there's surely little visible difference between its footprint and that of an OLED panel, for instance.

**To attain such elegance, the set comes with a separate media box** (aka the AVC System). This connects via a single HDMI lead, keeping cable runs to a minimum. Of course, the back of the AVC will end up looking like the store cupboard in a bondage dungeon, but at least that can be hidden away.

Another benefit of having the gubbins in a separate component is the amount of tech that can be crammed in. In this case, not only is there a Freeview tuner (and analogue for those with poor digital reception), there's a DVB-S satellite receiver too. While it's not strictly Freesat, as it doesn't use the relevant EPG, it'll receive all free-to-air satellite channels (when connected to a suitable dish). Unfortunately, though,

## AV/CV

**Product:** Flagship 52in LCD TV with proprietary RGB LED-backlighting and superslim form factor

**Position:** At the very top of Sharp's (and the AV industry's) range of flatscreens

**Peers:** Samsung LE55A956D; Sony KDL-52X4500; Pioneer KRP-600A

because it's not a DVB-S2 tuner, it's incapable of decoding HD signals. No Beeb or ITV HD, then, but better than a poke in the eye. And anyone willing to splurge £9K on a telly is probably likely to have Sky+ HD anyway.

The media box also has a USB 2.0 slot that allows connection to a memory stick (or external HDD), through which MP3 music files and JPEG pictures can be played. Admittedly, it's nowhere near as advanced as Samsung's WISELINK Pro (it can't handle video, for starters), but it's still a welcome feature.

The most impressive tech, though, is actually in the display itself. It's got Sharp's latest 100Hz picture processing, which stands up admirably against rivals' similar technologies, and a cornucopia of fine-tuning picture options. And, of course, it has LED backlighting...

## Colour of magic

Using LEDs for backlights instead of standard CCFLs is not a new concept. Samsung's Series 7 and 9 panels already feature a form of the technology, as does Philips' 42PFL9803 and upcoming models from Sony. I've always been impressed with the black level response achievable through its implementation. However, Sharp's RGB approach has taken the system to a new level.

In other sets, the backlight consists of hundreds of white LEDs, which illuminate in zones depending >



**Ace of bass:**

A Pioneer-designed soundbar helps deliver impressive versatile audio

on the image on screen. They don't switch on where there are dark areas of the picture, allowing for deep, involving, plasma-like blacks and a greater sense of depth. They also glow like an alcoholic's nose when the picture should be brighter. The end result is vivid, dramatic images and an enhanced dynamic range.

The XS1E, however, employs RGB-LED backlighting, utilising coloured Light Emitting Diodes. Not only does this improve the contrast ratio (to staggering effect), it bolsters colour fidelity, too – and this is what helps make the screen so special.

As the rear illumination is, essentially, matching each onscreen pixel's colour, the improvements in hue are tangible. Reds on this screen are more convincing than I've ever seen on an LCD. As are blues and greens. Ideal for watching Liverpool play against Chelsea on Sky HD, then.

But non-sports fans will benefit greatly, too. *Kung Fu Panda* on

Blu-ray, for example, is a spectral explosion. Every scene is awash with deep reds, greens and, obviously, blacks. And on the XS1E, this HD platter rocks. Pictures never look less than sensational – nigh-on 3D, without the need for silly specs.

One word of warning: while **the from-the-box picture modes are great for cartoon fighting bears**, real-life skin tones seem overcooked, and careless fiddling with the numerous options can actually make the images worse. If you're not confident, I'd suggest that you hire an installer to calibrate the screen for you – after all, if you're going to pay nine grand for a telly, you should pay a bit extra to have it set up properly.

**Flying the flag**

The XS1E is a stunning product, a perfect synergy of art and technology. Its HD and standard-definition images are equally great; even when scaled to fill the 52in panel. Audio performance, through the included Pioneer-branded soundbar, is also outstanding.

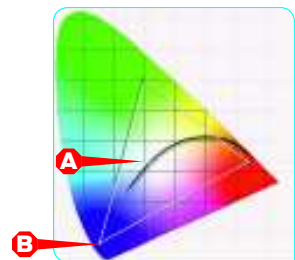
Indeed, the Pioneer branding just helps to reinforce an idea I'd been mulling throughout the test. The XS1E is the 'Kuro' of LCD TVs. Deep, involving blacks, brilliant colour reproduction and premium design have long been the sole domain of plasma, and, specifically, Pioneer's range, but no longer. LCD has grown up and this Sharp, regardless of its cost, flies the banner for the technology like no other. Superb! ●



→ **Specifications**

- HD Ready:** yes up to 1080p24
- Progressive scan:** yes PAL and NTSC
- Digital TV tuner:** yes plus DVB-S and CI slot for Setanta Sports
- Scart:** yes two (both RGB)
- Component video:** yes one set of inputs
- HDMI:** yes three v1.3 HDMI (all on media box)
- PC input:** yes one VGA input
- Sound:** 2 x 7.5W (+ 15W subwoofer)
- Resolution:** 1920 x 1080
- Brightness (claimed):** 450cd/m2
- Contrast ratio (claimed):** 100,000:1
- Dimensions (on stand):** 1,243(w) x 878(h) x 61(d)mm
- Weight:** 45kg
- Other features:** Separate media box; 2 x USB 2.0 slots; optical digital audio output; RGB LED backlight; Digital Comb Filter; Advanced Super View LCD; Clear Voice System

→ **Tech Labs**



The XS1E has a mega-impressive contrast ratio performance of around 150,000:1, but its colour temperature out of the box was excessively high at 10,729K (**Point A**) due to a Blue of 153% (**Point B**). Despite its plethora of hue, colour temperature and RGB gain parameters, some of which are counter-intuitive, we couldn't quite cajole it to a perfect 6,500K

**Before calibration**

**Colour temperature:** 10,729K  
**RGB:** 93/97/153 **Luminance:** 47.29fL  
**Contrast ratio:** 161,390:1

**After calibration**

**Colour temperature:** 6,687K (user)  
**RGB:** 107/97/99 **Luminance:** 43.82fL  
**Contrast ratio:** 150,294:1



**HCC VERDICT**

Sharp LX-52XS1E  
 £9,000 Approx

**Price check:** [www.techradar.com/487420](http://www.techradar.com/487420)

**Highs:** Gorgeous aesthetics; rich, involving pictures with HD and SD  
**Lows:** Complicated setup; satellite tuner not HD-capable

**Performance:** 1 2 3 4 5

**Design:** 1 2 3 4 5

**Features:** 1 2 3 4 5

**Overall:** 1 2 3 4 5