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Humax PVR9200T Personal Video Recorder

Sky+ comes to Freeview, but can Humax deliver the goods?

by Paul Lester published on 27 October 2006

Those of us serious about getting the most from a home A/V setup will have undoubtedly invested in a Sky subscription by now. Those who can't afford the monthly outlay, don't want to pay it or have blown their cash on a 50" LCD can adopt the lite alternative of buying a Freeview box. For a one-off payment you get around 50 more channels to speak of, a good dozen of which you could argue are worth the expense.



With Sky carrying the standard with, originally, their Sky+ service and most recently Sky HD, Freeview is firmly nailed to the back seat. Thanks to Humax and subsequently a range of competitors you can now find Sky+ style PVR functionality in a Freeview box.

The Humax PVR 9200T certainly won't take the fight lying down either, boasting tools that are pretty much equal, both in terms of features and usability, to Sky+. Those who haven't encountered the magic of the PVR are in for a treat. It slots firmly into the kind of "mobile phone" category where initially you don't think you need it, but after 10 minutes couldn't possibly live without it. The 9200T, like all other PVRs, comes with a built-in hard drive that automatically records the channel you're watching, allowing you to pause, rewind and if you're behind time, fast forward at your leisure. You can also record while watching something else and in the Humax's case the dual-tuner allows you to record two separate programs while watching another, making it a versatile beast indeed. In addition it sports a 160GB hard drive offering room for around 90 hours of recorded TV, more than enough to prevent even the most avid of tube-heads missing their favourite shows.

The process of time shifting, as well as

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scheduling recordings and managing your programmes, is handled excellently, with a browsable programme list making it easy to see what's currently on and set up recordings with a single touch. You'll find plenty of other options and shortcuts that help you take full advantage of the time shifting functions such as advert break 30-second skips, repeat mode, and PIP (picture in picture) display. There's also support for 5.1 audio, should Freeview adopt this audio standard in the future, but on the video side you're restricted to Scart and composite, no component interface for that extra level of quality.

In addition to Freeview TV, the Humax allows you to play back MP3s or view digital photos that you've uploaded onto the built-in hard drive via the USB2.0 or network port.

If the Humax falls down anywhere it'll be from the all too common "unnecessarily bulky" syndrome. The 9200T isn't a bad looking player, but it wouldn't win any design awards and we really feel Humax could have slimmed the thing down a little. The remote control isn't much better, and the looks don't complement the fact that this is, in the world of PVRs, a pretty powerful, high-end device. It also would have been nice to see a DVD player taking up some of the extra room, or perhaps a card reader for your photos, as it is you'll have to get your notebook out if you want to upload image or audio content.

Aside from Sky+'s "Series link" feature, which records each episode of a series as and when it screens, the Humax PVR has matched the big boys in just about every way, offering great functionality and an effective solution that's a joy to use.

VERDICT

Priced at around £200, the Humax is reasonable value for a PVR with these sorts of features, and is a worthy investment if you'll taken advantage of them. In comparison to a standard Freeview box you're looking at paying around £150 extra for the

At a glance

What is it?

Freeview PVR with powerful features

Good

160GB hard drive for up to around 90 hours of recording, dual-tuner, very easy to use

Bad

No component output, DVD player or card reader, minus points for aesthetics

Verdict

The 9200T is a high-end performance solution for those who only need Freeview channels but want PVR functionality

Price £200

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10

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convenience of time-shifting and record, but any that have used it before will argue that it's worth the expense.