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Nec XR 50-inch plasma

NEC gets serious about plasma, but is the picture any good?

by Paul Lester published on 23 February 2007

NEC's recent foray into the home entertainment market is led by their plasma XR range, an HD solution for the high-end consumer that takes no prisoners in today's advancing digital age.

The 50-inch screen on test seems directly oriented towards those who demand only the best, in terms of both connectivity and signal quality, from their modern A/V setup.

From a user friendly point of view the XR50 is a bit of a nightmare, not only is there no standard RF connection for an aerial input you'll also find no scart, those who want to utilise this rather standard and still very current connectivity will be left wanting.

Instead you'll need to get your hands on both the cables and receiver compatibility necessary to feed the XR a composite, component or preferably HDMI signal.

To get the most from this screen you'll certainly need the latter, the most basic composite connection barely did justice to the quality on offer if you have the ability to feed it a high definition signal.

On top of the poor connectivity options you'll also run into a rather lengthy setup procedure, involving wiring up and bolting on the separate speakers provided, there is no audio built into the screen by default, and fitting an extremely heavy albeit convenient swivel stand.

In short the XR50 is not a display for the casual user, and although it sets its stall out as such from the start we still wonder exactly why it neglects to provide at least a single scart connection for the modern consumer.

Display quality, provided you feed it a signal of



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sufficiently high resolution through a connection that can make the most of it, is good without being outstanding. In recent times we've seen advances in the LCD market that force plasmas to work even harder to appeal, and after seeing some excellent recent offerings from Sharp, among others, the NEC doesn't argue its case particularly well.

With the most basic composite connection image clarity is particularly poor, and while this improves dramatically with component and HDMI signals it's not quite enough, considering the drawbacks outlined above, to encourage a purchase over capable alternatives.

Despite advantages such as a wider audio environment through the dedicated speakers and solid picture clarity with an optimum signal, we were frustrated by the lengthy setup and limited connections to really promote this new plasma with any enthusiasm.

The LCD market has advanced in such a way as to negate many of the plasma screen's benefits in recent times, and appears to be underlining its claim as the current technology of choice.

VERDICT

In this new range NEC has provided a capable screen in an optimum environment without really making the most of its potential.

It seems clear that NEC is aware of the screens limitations and stress a target audience of high-end consumers, bearing this in mind it's a decent enough display, but for the price you can pick more a better all-round LCD screen of the same size for less.

At a glance

What is it?

A new range of high-end plasma displays

Good

Decent picture through HDMI, impressive audio

Bad

No scart, poor image quality with lower quality connections

Verdict

Despite being clearly aimed at the high-end consumer there are a few frustrating drawbacks here and not enough in terms of performance to really make an impact on the current market

Price £2500

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10