

Terratec Cinergy HT Express

TV for your laptop, but does it work?

by Davey Winder published on 10 May 2007

The small and light Cinergy HT Express from Terratec is the first hybrid TV tuner supporting the ExpressCard standard.

Hybrid because it receives both terrestrial DVB-T digital (Freeview in other words) and standard analogue television plus DVB-T and FM radio for good measure.

With more and more notebooks coming with a spare ExpressCard slot these days, it makes sense to utilise that rather than fanny around with yet another USB device to fight for the attention of the USB connectors.

There is plenty in the box, including a mini-travel aerial, which we found to be as good as any such portable antenna in our tests. Unfortunately, that isn't great news as pretty much every such antenna has performed pretty poorly.

Using the magnetic base, the suction base stuck to glass or even waving the thing around by hand we were unable to get a really good signal. Thankfully you don't have to rely on just this, as an adaptor is included that will accept a bog standard aerial cable which really boosts the reception quality.

There is always going to be a trade-off between true portability and true display quality when it comes to TV on your laptop, and if you can find a decent antenna into which to jack your lappy a happier bunny you will be. Want a real world visualisation of what this actually means? Well at the office, with a powerful roof mounted aerial to feed the Cinergy HT Express it picked up a full compliment of Freeview channels and displayed them with a sharpness and clarity that just wasn't available for the few, and by that we mean eight rather than 40, channels that were picked up in the garden using the travel-antenna.



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OK, so assuming you have access to a decent signal then you'll also have access to a responsive electronic programming guide and a more than adequate personal video recorder courtesy of the bundled Terratec Home Cinema software.

You can even get some Sky+ alike timeshifting once you've toggled the function on in the software, it defaults to leaving it off for some strange reason. Having used it in earnest for an hour we can reveal the reason is that it will quickly gobble up all the available space on your notebook hard drive, unless you are fortunate enough to have a really big one that is.

What else did we like? Well the credit card remote is responsive at a longer distance, a good few metres, than some we have tried. But we really, really liked the free annual subscription to TVTV, a remote programming service that lets you set up recording schedules across an internet connection. Cool. Equally cool being the fact that this TV tuner will work with Vista as well as XP, something worth bearing in mind if you've just bought a Vista-enabled notebook.

The Dolby Digital (AC3) recording support is welcome, there's the to be expected Teletext and subtitles functionality, and even multi-tuner support which is nice at this price point.

VERDICT

A neat and powerful solution to the television inside a notebook problem, until you take it out of the house and away from that roof mounted aerial.

At a glance

What is it?

Dual mode analogue and digital TV/Radio tuner for ExpressCard specced notebooks

Good

Fully featured software, easy installation, Vista support

Bad

Poor performance from travel-antenna

Verdict

A small yet powerful way to turn that Vista notebook into a telly

Price £79.99

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10