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Sharp Aquos BD-HP20H Blu-ray player

Does Sharp's Blu-ray player cut it?

by Doug Harman published on 10 July 2008

Most Blu-ray players are still expensive pieces of kit and so it's most welcome indeed to find that Sharp's BD-HP20H retails for under £400 and more importantly, it is available - with astute shopping around - for another hundred quid less.

However, to get to that low RRP, Sharp look as if they've had to cut a few corners not in terms of looks and build, which are both very nice indeed, but in terms of some of the multimedia features that it does not possess, as we'll see shortly.

But on the up side, while a lot of Blu-ray players take what seems an age to load discs, the HP20H's Quick Start function is a blessed relief; it'll have your Blu-ray disc up and running - even from standby - in a few seconds.

In terms of connectivity, the HP20H does not let the side down either since it has HDMI (of course) but compatible with the latest v1.3a specification so imaging features such as the much-vaunted Deep Color (when this picture enhancing feature finally appears on a disc) is built-in along with Dolby TrueHD 7.1-channel HD audio. The Component video output is capable of progressive, upscaled HD video feeds, and there's a service port for firmware upgrades.

Analogue 5.1-surround sound audio is standard so you can be bowled over by the Dolby TrueHD audio decoded by the player as well, albeit with the 5.1-channel limitation.

The HP20H includes 1080p HD up-conversion of standard resolution DVDs although this feature is more an Achilles Heel and is the rather uninspiring since upscaled images look overly noisy (though it depends on the DVD how bad it becomes), and in 1080p-upscaled mode, prepare yourself for horrible judder during camera pans.

However, excellent 1080p/24p output for Blu-ray



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discs provides top-notch performance in terms of output (and is a massive contrast to the upscaling) on compatible TVs (by the way I used Sharp's 40-inch AQUOS B20E model) and the 1080p/24p results were admirable indeed.

As for controlling the player, you can access all the HP20H's features, via the excellently thought-out remote control along with clear, easy to understand onscreen menus.

Overall, performance watching Spider-Man 3, Jumpers and Pirates of the Caribbean: At The World's End using the 1080p/24p output all proved very impressive indeed: fine detail, sharpness and colour, which are vivid but not overly so, are all superb.

Skin tones look natural too and while picture contrast can be extreme, it never gets out of hand. None the less, the 24fps output results in creamy-smooth fast movement and camera pans with only the odd instance of video noise marring proceedings.

But the Blu-ray Profile 1.1 specification means all players must be able to handle dual video streams for those neat picture-in-picture features but Sharp managed to keep the HP20H under the radar launching it before that deadline (November 2007), and so it lacks Profile 1.1 support. However, its firmware can be upgraded and Sharp have announced an upgrade on their website, but you have to call Sharp (0845 880 0421) to get more info.

One of the biggest issues however, is the lack of multimedia support, MP3, WMA, JPEG or DivX, are not compatible. The HP20H also lacks support for the DTS HD audio format, and there's no resume playback (of a Blu-ray Disc) either - annoying if you have stop a movie unexpectedly even if it is simply to change a setting in the Setup menus.

VERDICT

The BD-HP20H has a good price and good HD

At a glance

What is it?

Blu-ray player

Good

HDMI 1.3 out, HD image quality, 1080p/24p output, design

Bad

Lacks a lot of multimedia format playback capability, DVD upscaling not up to scratch, DTS HD support missing

Verdict

Sharp's new Blu-ray player is certainly a competitive beastie and one that looks nice too and while it does high-definition 1080p extremely well, the lackluster DVD upscaling and a lack of some key multimedia playback features might put off some thinking of ditching their DVDs

Price £399.99

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10

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1080p/24p performance with the HDMI 1.3 output and the Quick Start function of particular note.

That lack of DTS HD and multimedia support jar, as does the rather dull upscaling of normal resolution DVDs, which means it drops a point to eight rather than nine out of ten in final analysis.