

Humax PVR-9300T Freeview PVR

Impressive specs, but does it deliver?

by Chris Hall published on 4 September 2008

Humax have always pleased their followers by offering good solid solutions at an affordable price. The PVR-9300T ticks most of the boxes on the spec sheet at a price that should appeal to most shoppers. But can the box from Humax live up to its billing?

The PVR-9300T follows the same lines as the PVR-9150T we looked at a few weeks ago and boosts the tech specs: as well as the twin Freeview tuners you find in the smaller sibling, you now get a substantial 320GB of harddrive space (good for about 200 hours) and more advanced connectivity options, with the claim of "upscaling" Freeview TV.

From a design point of view, the box is fairly plain, following the trend of Humax PVRs, in black with little detail on the outside. The centre of the front panel houses a basic LCD display, which serves as a clock in standby and gives you the channel name when watching TV. Recording, timer and other icons also inform you what is going on, but they are so small you'd never be able distinguish them from the sofa, unlike the clear information put out by a Sky+ unit for example, which this box squares up against.

Set-up is a breeze, following the connection of an HDMI cable and the aerial, the auto tuning quickly determines the available channels and builds you a list. If you do not have an HDMI equipped TV, you still get the option to use Scart or there are the normal RCA jacks. There is also an optical SPDIF connection for your digital audio. On the front is a common interface port for those wishing to add subscription content.

As with other Humax products, the menus are intuitive and simple to use, if a little basic in their appearance and slightly blocky: the same as the 9150T. You can't help thinking that for something coming under the broad banner of HD, that things



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should be slightly more refined; however, they do the job.

The 8-day EPG does take some time to populate as it is not stored on the device, so on every power-on you have to wait for it to be updated, which can be a chore - for daily users this will be less of a problem, but for occasional recorders, it might irritate. Once you have your EPG you can simply select the programmes you want to record. You are also informed if series linking is possible, which it usually is, and given the option to enable this feature. Advanced features like split programme recording mean you can get around the news in the middle of a film with no problems. However, this information is governed by the accuracy of that being broadcast.

The recording experience is pretty much the same as the PVR-9150T and it is worth reading that review too by way of comparison (link below), as this also details some of the other features. It has the same fan as the 9150T, so get used to that background humming - try a few different positions as we found the reverberation from furniture or other stacked devices exacerbated the problem.

Two tuners, of course means you can record two programmes at the same time, whilst watching another, or if using the aerial loop-through, you can still use the tuner in your TV. A word on warning on the loop through - if you turn on the "power saving in standby" feature, it will not pass the signal through very well, meaning some channels drop out.

This could present a minor problem for those who want to integrate the PVR into an existing Freeview set-up, but for those looking to "go digital" for the first time, it is less of an issue.

The HDMI connection means that you have a single cable for your digital video and audio content, be it direct to the TV or into an AV receiver. It also means that you are getting the

At a glance

What is it?

PVR with twin Freeview tuner and HDMI

Good

Ease of use, HDMI, capacity, connection options

Bad

Fan noise, EPG and menus a little blocky

Verdict

An impressive spec sheet and price that will appeal to many. Careful siting is needed to reduce fan noise

Price £199

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10

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best possible quality from the PVR eliminating any signal loss over an analogue connection. With the 9150T we found interference introduced when using the Scart, but we are happy to report no such thing with the HDMI - just a clear picture.

The "upscaling" aspect is perhaps something of a misnomer: yes, there is a setting to select 720p so it is an "HD" signal, but don't expect miracles. We found that the quality of the picture was better than the 9150T, but still it is recorded TV and overall comparable to the digital tuner in our existing TV set. Using HDMI won't make TV Blu-ray quality, but it will ensure you get the best you can.

There is also another inclusion on the back of the unit - a USB slot. Humax have short-sightedly dropped this feature (apparently based on a customer survey) and the socket will be removed from later release models.

VERDICT

Overall, a competitively priced unit, it is just a shame the menu visuals are not a little more advanced. The fan noise can also be a distraction, which Mrs Pocket-lint likened to "a fire engine sitting in the street" and seems to be the most common complaint with the unit. However, careful installation can keep this to an acceptable level.

The range of connections on offer makes the PVR-9300T an appealing prospect to a range of customers - those who want a degree of future-proofing, or just take advantage of the digital connection. The 320GB harddrive, whilst not the largest, is an impressive offering, and the ease-of-use makes this a great PVR.