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TVonics DTR-Z500 Freeview PVR

Will this let you get the most from your TV?

by Stuart Miles published on 30 October 2008

Pausing live TV isn't just about getting Sky+ you know, there are other variants that don't require you to pay a monthly subscription, but with Sky boasting such an easy interface can TVonics challenge? We get watching TV to find out.

Small, black and glossy, the TVonics DTR-Z500 is a personal video recorder that offers the ability to pause live television as well as record up to 268 hours of your favourite shows at the touch of a button.

The design, which looks like a cross between a large external portable hard drive and something you would find in a boy racer's modded Renault 5 won't be to everyone's taste, nor will it fit in with everyone's home cinema system due to the awkward shape.

Three lights on the front give you some understanding what is going on, and the unit itself is completely buttonless (that includes an on/off switch). Around the back and you get a rather basic offering. Aerial in and out, Scart in and out. No HDMI or optical sockets are present. HDMI is understandable: this doesn't support HD recording or content, however as so many devices are connecting this way, it's strange to see it missing.

Plug it in to the wall (remember you can't turn it on via a switch) and the unit jumps into action auto tuning ready to get you going. The whole process takes around 2 minutes and you'll be watching your new channels faster than you can say "what's that button do".

With 500GB of storage space the box suggests you'll get around 268 hours of recording and rather than give you a percentage always lets you know the hours you've got left. It's a nice touch as it gives you something you can understand rather



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than just reading "63%". I mean how long is that anyway?

The menu interface is simple but easy to understand although could easily get bogged down with 268 hours worth of recording to wade through. Series link selections are bundled together in a drop down menu to save space, but overall it's fairly easy to read. That easy to read EPG (electronic programming guide) gives you an 8-day TV guide in advance and you can record two channels while watching a third at any time.

Supporting Freeview+ you can series link programs at the press of a button and recordings and programmes due to be recorded are put into two separate areas to access later. It's the same as the Humax PVRs however we can't see why with the use of a logo you wouldn't want them in the same list so you can quickly see what's going on.

Nice features include a picture in picture option (thanks to that dual tuner, although you can't access it while recording) so you can keep an eye on the news while watching something else for example, a recording timeline appearing in the EPG so you can see whether you are recording something even if you've moved away from the page the channel is on, and finally the ability to see the shows that are on complete with info on other channels while still watching what you are currently on.

Rather than a 60 minute buffer as found on Sky+, the DTR-Z500 offers 2 hours as long as you've been on that channel for that amount of time and it is likely to come in handy if you've missed the start of a film (as long as you haven't changed channel).

Grumbles? There aren't many. With so many "crap" stations on Freeview now it's a shame that you can't create a favourites list. TVonics say you can choose to "hide" stations so you no longer see them however. It's a workaround, but not the

At a glance

What is it?

500GB Freeview+ recorder

Good

500GB of storage, easy to use, some nice features

Bad

Can't favourite channels, design is a bit niche, no off switch

Verdict

If you aren't looking for a subscription based offering (i.e., Sky) then this is one to check out

Price £200

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10

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same thing and therefore might not appeal.

VERDICT

At £200 this massive hard drive PVR offers plenty of space for recording, probably more than you'll ever use, and some nice features for the money. It's quiet too.

The only grumbles likely to stop you investing are its unconventional design, the lack of a favourites option to save you having to wade through channels like Bid TV or ITV4 and the complete lack of an on switch (but when was the last time you turned your TV off at the wall?).

If you aren't looking for a subscription based offering (i.e., Sky) then this is one to check out.