

<http://www.pocket-lint.com/review/3671/sony-xel-1-oled-tv>

Sony XEL-1 OLED television

Sony goes organic

by Jamie Carter published on 3 December 2008

Not since LCD and plasma appeared in the late -90s has a new TV technology appeared. So Sony's first-out-of-the-blocks organic light emitting diode (OLED) flatscreen TV is something to behold. Costing a cool £1300 and available in the UK from January, there's no getting away from the fact that the XEL-1 is only 11-inches in diameter. That's about the size of a luxury digital photo frame, but ten times the price.

It is, however, just 3mm thick and weighs a mere 2kg. So delicate is the XEL-1's screen that it's propped-up by a small arm, itself supported by a black box that contains most of the TV's electronics. If its slimline looks gives it initial wow factor, the picture quality is where the real action is.

Before we get into the TV's performance, it's worth considering how this brand new organic LED screen actually works. The screen is made of organic material that lights-up only when an electric current passes through, and with no light leakage whatsoever it's capable of reproducing complete darkness. No LCD TV can manage anything like that, while plasma screens also spill some light from each cell.

We're talking colour, contrast (1,000,000:1, no less) and depth like you've never seen before - and no discernible blur. Fluid, smooth and lifelike images - Sony claims OLED is 100 times faster than LCD - the XEL-1 also produces a very precise picture despite not actually being HD Ready. There's little point at this size, though its 960 x 540 pixel resolution screen is small enough to fool your eyes into thinking you're watching the latest in HD broadcasts.

The sample we got our hands on was a Japanese version (the XEL-1 has been on sale in the US and Japan for almost a year), so we can't confirm the exact ins and outs - though they're not likely



...cont.

to change much on the European model. The Japanese model has two HDMI inputs, a USB port (capable of playing photos or video files stored on a memory stick) and a LAN connector, an optical digital audio output, a headphones slot and a RF aerial input. The Japanese version has a built-in digital TV tuner, which is certain to feature on the UK model.

The XEL-1 also includes the XrossMediaBar, which will be familiar to anyone with a PlayStation 3 - although it would be difficult to argue that the 11-inch XEL-1 is the perfect partner to the games console.

So what are its weaknesses? Well, just as sound quality from flatscreen TVs in general tends to disappoint, the tiny 1W speakers on board the XEL-1's separate tuner box are frankly awful despite its use of Sony's own S-Force Front Surround sound system.

There's also a question mark over its lifespan. Because it's made with organic material it will likely lose brightness and degrade quicker than either plasma or LCD screens. Sony says the XEL-1 will last around half as long as plasmas and LCD TVs, though we're pretty happy with its predicted total of 30,000 hours.

VERDICT

The engineers behind OLED technology have been trying to perfect it for years, with the main problem being cost-effective production - hence the huge price tag on the XEL-1. That said, if recent trade shows are anything to go by we expect to see both Sony and Samsung release bigger OLED TVs in the next year or so. But the XEL-1 is a stunning glimpse into the future of flatscreens.

At a glance

What is it?

11-inch OLED TV

Good

Fluid picture, no blur, stunning colours

Bad

Tiny, not high-def, very expensive

Verdict

The XEL-1 is a stunning glimpse into the future of flatscreens, but the price looks a little inhibitive

Price £1300

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10