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Epson EH-TW3800 projector

Home cinema with the lights on?

by Jamie Carter published on 30 December 2008

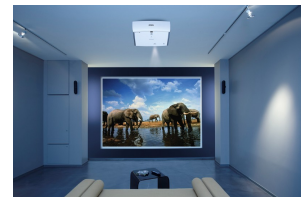
Touted as a semi-serious projector for Blu-ray players and games consoles that can be used in the day as well as in blackout home cinema conditions, Epson's EH-TW3800 uses 3LCD technology. As such it's rather unusual in the home cinema market; most of its competitors rely on DLP chips, which can offer more cinematic, contrasty pictures, though Epson is hoping its EH-TW3800 is about to change that.

And change is coming.

This large, Full HD resolution projector comes with a brace of HDMI inputs and component video for high-def sources, but it's the brightness vs. contrast battle we're most interested in. Its 20,000 ANSI Lumens of brightness is rather high for a home cinema projector, and it's a gamble: the more light is thrown at a screen, the less likely the viewer is to experience deep, lifelike blacks. But with a contrast ratio of 20,000:1 and 10-bit video processing, it should have a fighting chance of cinematic glory.

Used in a room with a few lamps on, the EH-TW3800's Cinema Day or Vivid modes both provide extra-bright images - and a noisy, hot operation (don't sit too close!). Colour holds up pretty well, though black areas of the image are the first to suffer - don't expect Blu-ray movies to look their best in this mode. But this mode isn't meant for cinema-like accuracy: a blast of bright, colourful fare such as Pro Evolution from an Xbox 360 is perfectly playable. It's impressive and a definite advantage over DLP models we've seen of late.

Switch-off the lights and move to one of the projector's other colour presets - such as Natural, HD or Silver Screen - and the EH-TW3800 quietens down dramatically. The less ambient light the better; in a total blackout images from Blu-ray discs contain strong colour and plenty of



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detail in back areas of the picture. Though it's not as profound as on a DLP mode of similar standing, there are other advantages to 3LCD - namely a much higher brightness for daylight gaming, and a total lack of distracting "rainbow effect". Luckily, there's no sign of the grid-like structure that can be visible from some LCD models; on the EH-TW3800 pictures are smooth and high on detail, with a modicum of picture noise and motion blur never becoming serious issues.

A nice bonus on the white and silver EH-TW3800 is its advanced menus, which are certified by the Imaging Science Foundation (ISF). This is the first time that Epson has embraced the concept, and helps bring the brand into high-end home cinema proper - a market sector it's only flirted with before now with its 3LCD projectors. That ISF certification basically means that a projector's colours can be extensively tweaked for exact gamma levels and hues; the finished product is as close to what the filmmaker intended as possible.

VERDICT

Another novel extra that fits in with the EH-TW3800 ambitions of total versatility is its easy installation credentials. Manual horizontal and vertical lens shift levers make positioning the projector off-centre possible, while the EH-TW3800 can also be mounted on a ceiling. Also fitted with Composite video and a VGA port for hooking-up a PC, the EH-TW3800 is versatility defined from almost all angles.

Its huge size might put some off, but if you're looking for a projector that can be permanently installed and used across a number of high-def sources, the jack-of-all-trades EH-TW3800 makes for a good value option.

At a glance

What is it?

Home cinema projector

Good

Gaming during the day, easy set-up, great build quality, accurate high-def images

Bad

Movies look washed-out during day, heavy and very large

Verdict

Its huge size might put some off, but if you're looking for a projector that can be permanently installed and used across a number of high-def sources, the jack-of-all-trades EH-TW3800 makes for a good value option

Price £1900

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10