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Hauppauge WinTV MiniStick HD TV tuner

Will this get you TV on the move?

by Paul Lester published on 7 May 2009

The WinTV-MiniStick HD is the latest portable tuner from Hauppauge, promising to offer a range of digital Freeview channels along with any free -to-air HD programming in the area. It's the smallest we've seen to date, being around the same size as a USB drive, and comes supplied with a portable antenna, remote control, USB extension cable for tight spaces and WinTV version 7 to store and manage channels.

Setup is quite straightforward and involves installing the drivers and software before connecting the device and scanning for channels. One of the WinTV components - Signalmonitor - is particularly useful here, reporting the strength of the signal reaching the device.

Unfortunately the supplied antenna was extremely inconsistent and was rarely powerful enough to gather more than a handful of channels, and reception on these was poor. This performance is likely to vary to a degree based on location, but in our tests we certainly couldn't advocate use of the product using this supplied aerial. This leaves a hardwired rooftop aerial as the only option, which will not be useful for those who are looking to view television on the move.

Using this we were able to establish a good signal and populate the software with over 80 channels, including radio stations. These are displayed on a channel list or the built-in EPG, which is a little rough and ready but is responsive and functional enough to do a job. Up to 7 days are viewable across the channel range, and specific programmes can be selected and recorded with a single click.

A scheduler offers control over repeat recordings on a daily or weekly basis, or on specific days of the week. The software also offers time-shift and



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programme recording direct to the hard drive and though this generally works quite well, skipping back and forth through video is done in intervals of a few seconds, so don't expect the smooth performance you might be used to with Sky+.

Quality is very good though and there's access to subtitles and Teletext where relevant, aspect ratio control and further information on the current programme. Generally we were quite pleased with what is a basic but functional package that offers just the right amount of control.

One rather large caveat we should place on this performance though is that a rather powerful machine will be necessary for smooth playback and recording. Hauppauge states that a 1.2GHz processor or faster is necessary for SD streaming, and a Core 2 Duo 2.8GHz (or equivalent) for HD. These specifications are ambitious though, to say the least, and we'd recommend the HD spec as a general minimum, faster if you want HD playback to be smooth, for those lucky enough to live in an HD broadcast area.

With this in mind we were left with mixed opinions of the MiniStick HD. On one hand it's a tidy, portable product that works well in the right environment, but on the other it seems clearly oriented towards being used on the move, due to the small design and supplied antenna. We'd only really be comfortable recommending it for use with a rooftop aerial and a suitably powerful computer though, which may end up being a little too restrictive for most.

VERDICT

The MiniStick HD is a tidy, portable tuner that does what it's supposed to with a minimum of fuss, provided you use it in the right environment. In reality we feel that the hardware demands and inability of the supplied antenna to provide a steady signal would narrow the target market quite considerably, and most users may find more value from an internal solution with multiple

At a glance

What is it?

USB2.0 digital TV tuner with HD support

Good

Portable design, straightforward setup and operation, 7-day EPG and scheduler

Bad

Needs a rooftop aerial and a powerful PC, supplied antenna not good enough, not a lot of advanced features on offer

Verdict

The MiniStick HD isn't even worth considering unless you have a powerful computer and are happy to rely on a rooftop aerial, but in this situation it's capable enough.

Price £49.99

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10

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tuners for the same price.