



Technology focus

High definition Blu-ray DVDs have triumphed over the rival HD-DVD format. We tell you all you need to know about Blu-ray discs and players, and whether to buy now or wait

Start spreading the *blue*

Winner: the Blu corner

The fate of high-definition DVD has been resolved by Toshiba's decision to discontinue its own HD-DVD format, leaving Sony's Blu-ray as the last man standing in the next-generation DVD format war. Previously, many people were too apprehensive to invest in either. Neither Blu-ray nor HD-DVD players are compatible with each other's discs – and experience has taught consumers that picking the wrong format means getting stuck with obsolete technology.

Sony's success was buoyed by its sales of about 10.5 million PlayStation 3 (PS3) consoles worldwide, each capable of playing

Blu-ray discs. By contrast, only around one million HD-DVD players had been sold worldwide by the time of Toshiba's withdrawal.

Toshiba has declined to offer compensation to anyone who invested in a now defunct technology. Frustrated consumers who backed the wrong horse can console themselves with the falling prices of HD-DVDs. There are around 400 available titles but there will be no further releases beyond these – so it's not wise to buy a cut-price HD-DVD player as a way of picking up cheap high-definition films.



What will happen to standard DVDs?

Blu-ray's advantages over standard DVD are considerable, but tempered by substantially higher costs. Although Blu-ray discs look identical to standard DVDs, they can store up to ten times their capacity. This allows Blu-ray to store memory-intensive high-definition video and hours of bonus features, and means sound quality is improved. Normal DVD players cannot read this much information and are incompatible with Blu-ray discs.

Blu-ray players, however, will be able to play your old DVDs as well as new Blu-ray discs, although only the

latter will display in true HD quality. With this in mind, many might hesitate to replace their entire DVD collection with Blu-ray equivalents, particularly as Blu-ray discs currently cost around £18 each.

Standard DVD will still have a considerable life span. More than two thirds of the UK adult population owns a DVD player or recorder, and most new computers have DVD drives built in, so it will be many years before DVDs are phased out.



Replacing a typical collection of 30 DVDs with Blu-ray discs will set you back £540

**10**

a dual-layer 50GB Blu-ray disc has ten times the capacity of a standard DVD

WHICH? RESEARCH

200,000

the number of DVDs sold in the UK in 1998, the first year the format was available

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248 million

the number of DVDs sold in the UK in 2007

BRITISH VIDEO ASSOCIATION

What should you buy?

Buying a Blu-ray player is still an expensive proposition – £437 is the average price – and it may be worth holding back until prices drop. After all, when standard DVD players were first launched they cost up to £1,000, before prices rapidly dropped.

For now, you could pick up a PlayStation 3 (PS3) for under £300. As well as playing games, the PS3 plays Blu-ray discs and can be upgraded online to take advantage of new technology. Alternatively, the £300 Best Buy Sony BDP-S300 is easier to watch discs on than the PS3 – but if you're willing to spend about £18, a remote control makes the PS3 more straightforward to use.

high-definition glory without an HD-compatible TV, but some HDTVs cope better with Blu-ray than others. Look for the new official HD-ready 1080p logo (see below), as TVs without it may not do full justice to the quality of Blu-ray playback – a slight juddering effect is not uncommon.

Go to www.which.co.uk/tvs for more information about our Best Buy HD-compatible TVs and to find out how to connect your TV.

**HD
ready
1080p**

Choosing an HDTV

You will not be able to view Blu-ray in its

Looking ahead

This year alone should see around a dozen new Blu-ray players arriving in the UK. Blu-ray recorders have been available in Japan for some time now, although these are unlikely to reach the UK until late 2009. Meanwhile, both Apple and Dell are busy preparing laptops with built-in Blu-ray players.

But, for all its high specifications, Blu-ray may well prove to be the last hurrah of disc-based storage. With

the Xbox 360's HD-DVD add-on now redundant, Microsoft has been quick to emphasise the future of online digital distribution and Xbox 360 users will soon be able to download high-definition films to the console's hard disk.

As similar services improve in coming years, the trend of downloading films, rather than buying discs, may become more prevalent.

For now, we'll keep testing Blu-ray products – our next test is in August – so that you can be sure of buying only the best.

DID YOU KNOW?

Fascinating facts revealed

■ **Format war stories** Sony's triumph with Blu-ray was a long-awaited victory, following the past failures of Betamax against VHS and Laserdisc against DVDs.

■ **Why Blu?** Blu-ray takes its name from a specially designed blue laser which makes reading high-capacity discs possible. The technology's creator, Professor Shuji Nakamura (below), received the 2006 Millennium Technology Prize and €1m for his invention.



■ **Which? first** The first ever DVD player to be tested by Which? was the Panasonic DVD-A350, which would have set you back £700 when we reviewed it in June 1998. These days you can pick up a bargain model for under £20 – use our compare products tool at www.which.co.uk/dvd to help you track down a decent, cheap player.

■ **Favourite discs** The bestselling DVD of all time in the UK is *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl*, which has sold 4.7 million copies to date. The bestselling Blu-ray disc to date has been *Casino Royale*, with 80,000 sold in the UK.^a



XBOX 360

