



Technology focus

A trip to the Nevada desert is the best way to find the next big thing in electronics. Our tech expert, Mike Briggs, reports on the Consumer Electronics Show

Technology jackpot

WHAT IS CES?

The Consumer Electronics Show, or CES, is the world's largest consumer technology event. Held every January among the bright lights of Las Vegas, for the past four decades it has showcased a dizzying array of consumer electronics.

VCRs, DVD players, PVRs and plasma TVs have all made their maiden appearance at CES, going on to become familiar fixtures in living rooms around the globe.

This year, for the first time ever, Which? was there too – cutting through the jargon and reporting back on the products and technology set to shape the future of your home. And this year's show was the largest ever, with 2,700 exhibitors and 140,000 visitors jostling for position in a hectic exhibition space that was the size of 35 football fields.

Read on to find out which electronic products are going to revolutionise your home in the near future.



Manufacturers claim wafer-thin models – like the Sony XEL-1 and Pioneer prototype, pictured above – will be the future of TV

An exciting glance into the waif-like future of television

Tomorrow's TVs slim down

NEW TVS

Centre stage at this year's CES were Sony's new organic light-emitting diode (OLED) TVs – the mini 11-inch XEL-1 and a larger 27-inch prototype. This new flat-panel technology doesn't require any back-light to illuminate the picture. And everything else, such as tuner and speakers, is built into the stand – leaving a screen that's no thicker than three credit cards.

But size isn't everything. Sony reckons that picture quality should also set OLED apart from other flat-panel technologies. The picture can be viewed from extreme angles and boasts an extremely high contrast

ratio – that's the difference between how dark and how light the picture will go – resulting in more detailed and vivid images.

However, OLED is incredibly expensive. The 11-inch model, which isn't yet available in the UK, retails for \$2,500 in the US (about £1,277). Samsung is to begin producing OLED TVs in 2010, as it can't yet make the technology cheap enough for consumers.

Pick of the plasmas

Competition is fierce in the TV market and Sony's rivals are concentrating on improving existing plasma technology. Panasonic unveiled a 25mm-thick model – a

quarter of the thickness of most current plasma TVs – that should consume half the power of today's models. However, Panasonic's energy-guzzling 150-inch monster plasma screen, also at CES, undermined its green credentials.

But it was Pioneer that revealed the most impressive prototype. Its 50-inch plasma screen is a mere 9mm thick, with a technical specification that, according to Pioneer, should make the 'debate over contrast ratio irrelevant'.

VERDICT Most of this prototype technology sounds fantastic but the proof will be in the watching – and we can't wait to get these TVs into our testing labs.



\$160 billion
estimated sales of US
consumer electronics in 2007
CES



32,320
burgers were munched
at last year's CES show
CES

The fantastic new products heading for a high street near you

Best in show

CES HOT SHOTS

For years, the watchword for technology types has been convergence – merging different technologies into a single device. And mobile phones have long been at the forefront, fusing phones, cameras and music players into a single package. The trouble is that all these different functions can make handsets tricky to use.

Step forward the Motorola Rokr E8 mobile phone. At first glance it looks like any other swish new



The swish Motorola Rokr E8

handset: sleek, shiny, touch-screen display – we've seen it all before. But if you switch what you're using it for, the virtual keypad changes. There's a number keypad for making calls, for example, but select music mode and the numbers seamlessly melt away, to be replaced by dedicated



The speedy Exilim Pro EX-F1 takes 60 snaps a second

music buttons. Motorola has even built in a bit of tactile feedback – you feel a healthy click whenever you press an on-screen virtual button. The E8 should hit these shores by the spring, price to be confirmed.

Exciting new cameras

The world of digital cameras and camcorders was treated to a whole host of firsts. Casio unveiled the EX-S10, the smallest and slimmest 10Mp compact digital camera available – it costs US \$250 (about £128) and should be here soon.

Also due in the UK is the Casio Exilim Pro EX-F1, at about £500. This is a digital SLR (a digital camera that lets you change its lens) and has possibly the fastest shooting speed available to amateur photographers – it's capable of taking a remarkable 60 images a second, with each image recorded at 6Mp. We can't wait to test it to see if the picture quality is as impressive as the spec.

The CES award for best digital imaging product was bagged by Sony, with the Alpha DSLR A200. This is a new 10.2Mp digital SLR with a competitive £370 price tag. It's just out in the UK and we'll have test results by the end of May.

Film more video

Panasonic drew gasps from the assembled press hordes by revealing a prototype secure digital high capacity (SDHC) Flash memory card, with a huge 32GB of memory capacity – double the size of anything currently available. You can't buy it yet, but when it's released you can look forward to storing five and a half hours of high-definition video or absolutely thousands of still shots on any camcorder with an SD card slot.

Radio for deaf people

The hard of hearing will be able to follow live radio using captioning technology, familiar to TV viewers, thanks to the Harris Corporation. The technology also aims to provide visually impaired people with audio cues and voice prompts, as well as advanced radio reading services.

Just add water

Environmental issues were big news at CES, with major manufacturers falling over themselves to prove their green credentials. But the shape of things to come may well emerge from smaller innovators, like Horizon. Its £300, 8-inch HydroPak, left, lets you recharge portable electronics by simply filling its fuel cell with water.



Producing energy from water sounds fantastic, but the HydroPak isn't without some drawbacks. It can generate only ten to 12 hours' worth of power, and each cell has to be replaced after 30 days, at a cost to you of £15 to £20.

News in brief

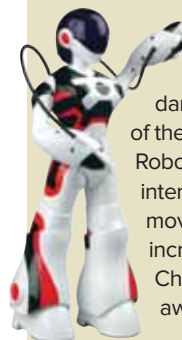
Rolly over iPod

It may be the luxury Christmas cracker gadget of the future, but Sony's dancing robot MP3 player – the Rolly – still impressed us with its dance-floor moves and pulsating flashing lights. Ten out of ten for entertainment and general silliness.



Future fembots

Among the robot lawn mowers and vacuum cleaners on display, Wowwee showed off its Femisapien – a dancing 'female' version of the bestselling toy Robosapien. It's interactive, and movements are incredibly fluid. A future Christmas bestseller award beckons.



Big screen specs

Myvu personal media viewers are designed for watching video from your MP4 player – projected on to the lenses of some rather flashy-looking shades. Built-in earphones complete the audio-visual effect. And for anybody who already wears specs, special mini glasses built to your prescription are available for clipping into the viewers. Available in the UK from around £150.

Curved display

If you've ever found playing computer games something of a flat experience, Alienware's prototype curved display could be for you. Based on digital light processing projection technology, the 36-inch wraparound screen effectively fills a player's peripheral vision. No word on price, but expect a launch in late 2008.



MORE ONLINE

For more details about CES, including video footage of the Sony Rolly MP3 player's dance moves, go to our Future technology 2008 pages at www.which.co.uk.