

DVD recorders

NEED TO KNOW

A DVD recorder lets you record from TV – with better picture and sound quality than a VCR.

RECORDING FORMATS Different machines work with different types of disc, as shown in the table. DVD-Ram is the most versatile: it can be recorded on over and over, and can record and play simultaneously so you can start watching a show before the machine has finished recording it. Unfortunately, DVD-Ram discs won't play in most DVD players. DVD+RW and DVD-RW discs can also be recorded on more than once and work with more players than DVD-Ram. If you don't want to re-record, use cheaper, write-once discs – DVD-R or DVD+R, depending on the machine.

COMBINATIONS Three models on test combine a DVD recorder with a VCR. This allows you to copy from VCR to DVD and vice versa, but you can't record in both formats at once. None of the models is good enough as either a DVD recorder or VCR to be a Best Buy. We hope to see the first DVD recorder combined with a personal video recorder (PVR) later this year (see p53 for more about PVRs). You'll be able to use the PVR element to record programmes to the internal hard drive, and the DVD recorder to archive your recordings to DVD discs.

LONG PLAY

In standard mode, you can record two hours of programmes on a DVD disc. Long-play mode increases capacity to three or four hours but picture and sound suffer. This Panasonic has much worse picture quality in long-play mode. The combis can also make long-play recordings in VCR mode, fitting six hours on to a three-hour tape. This also adversely affects quality.

BEST BUYS

Most of the DVD recorders on test work well. Our Best Buys have the best picture and sound quality, and are relatively easy to use.

The **Panasonic (1)** is available for £200 from Comet. It uses DVD-R and the versatile DVD-Ram format but is short on features, with no resume or bookmarking. It produces great quality picture and sound from both pre-recorded and self-



1 Panasonic

recorded discs, though picture quality is much worse if you use the long-play mode. It's one of the easiest DVD recorders to use, though still more complicated than a video cassette recorder.

The **Sony (2)** uses DVD+R, DVD+RW, DVD-R and DVD-RW discs. Playback picture quality isn't as good as the Panasonic but it's still a good all-rounder. It costs £300 from Argos and Index.

KEY

★ Best ☆ Worst
■ Best Buy

SCORE

Ignores price and is based on:
Picture quality 30%
Sound quality 30%
Ease of use 20%
Features 15%
Power use 5%

TABLE NOTES

We've tested all the newest DVD recorders on the market. The DVD/VCR combinations have two scores: the first is for the DVD recorder, the second for the VCR.

Specification

Price Lowest widely available high-street price. **Recording formats** See 'Recording formats', left.

Features

Bookmarks These let you mark sections of a disc so that you can find scenes easily. **Resume** This lets you start the disc at the point at which you stopped watching it. On the machines on test, this works

only when you leave the disc in the machine. **MP3, Jpeg** All models can play audio CDs. Most can also play CDs containing MP3 music tracks or images in Jpeg format.

Playback

Picture, Sound Quality of pre-recorded DVD discs.

Recording

Picture (SP) Picture quality in standard play. **Picture (LP)** Picture quality in long play (see 'Long play', above).

Use

Ease of use How easy it is to set up, play, record, access features, and follow the instructions.



PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN TRENNHOLM, STUDIO 21

DVD recorders

DVD RECORDERS

	Price (£)
1 Panasonic DMR-E55EB-S	200
2 Sony RDR-GX300	300
3 Samsung DVD R100E	200
4 Toshiba DR3	300
5 Philips DVDR615	280
6 Philips DVDR610	200

DVD RECORDER/VCR COMBIS

7 Toshiba DVR3	350
8 Philips DVDR630VR	350
9 Sharp DV-RW250	250



**BEST
ON
TEST**

VIDEOPLUS

Of the Best Buys, this Panasonic and the Sony (2) both come with VideoPlus, which makes recording from TV easy. Simply type in the relevant code from your TV listings guide, and the recorder sets start and stop times. All the machines with VideoPlus also have the programme delivery control (PDC) feature. After you've entered the VideoPlus code, they pick up signals from the broadcaster, and will alter timings if the schedule changes or the previous programme overruns. PDC works only with some analogue (and no digital) channels.

With VideoPlus, you set up recordings by simply keying in a code from the listings pages

12 more DVD recorders on test

The main table shows the Best Buys found in previous tests, as well as newly tested models – but there are 12 more DVD recorders from previous tests still in the shops. See www.which.co.uk/dvdrecorders for full details.

The following models all have built-in hard-disk recorders, giving you extra flexibility and greater recording capacity. They're not as easy to use as a PVR, though, as they don't have an on-screen electronic programme guide.

DVD recorder/ hard-disk recorder	Price (£)	Picture quality	Ease of use	Score (%)
Panasonic DMRHS2EBS	621	★	○	78
Toshiba RD-XS30	280	★	○	77
Panasonic DMR-E85HEB	300	☆	☆	75
Panasonic DMR-E100HEB	624	☆	☆	71
Toshiba RD-XS32	390	★	●	71

Last report December 2004



**BEST
BUY**

2 Sony

Specification		Features						Playback		Recording			Use	Score
Recording formats	Size (cm) wxdxh	Video-Plus	Book-marks	Resume	MP3	Jpeg	Optical output	Picture	Sound	Picture (SP)	Picture (LP)	Sound (SP)	Ease of use	(%)
-R, -Ram	43x28x8	✓			✓		✓	★	☆	★	●	☆	☆	73
+R, +RW, -R, -RW	43x35x8	✓		✓	✓		✓	☆	★	★	☆	☆	○	72
-R, -RW, -Ram	43x27x7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	☆	☆	★	○	○	○	64
-R, -RW, -Ram	43x27x7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	☆	☆	★	○	○	○	64
+R, +RW	44x30x7	✓			✓	✓		○	☆	☆	○	○	●	56
+R, +RW	44x30x7	✓			✓	✓		☆	☆	☆	○	○	●	56
-R, -RW, -Ram	43x8x34	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	☆	☆	★/●	○/●	☆/○	○	67/61
+R, +RW	43x8x37	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		☆	○	☆/●	○/●	○/○	○	60/52
-R, -RW	43x10x34			✓	✓	✓		○	☆	☆/○	●/●	○/○	○	57/56