

Small LCD TVs

NEED TO KNOW

Sales of sleek, space-saving liquid crystal display (LCD) and plasma TVs are soaring. But the large sets still cost thousands of pounds, so it's the smaller, cheaper LCD TVs (with 15- and 17-inch screens) that are most popular. Those we've tested are an ideal size for a portable second set.

LCD TVs work by shining light through a matrix of tiny coloured liquid crystal cells. The absence of the cathode ray tube used in conventional TVs means LCD sets are much slimmer: the Best on Test Sony is just 15cm deep.

PRICE AND QUALITY
Our Best Buys cost £400 and £650 on the high street – at least four times more than a standard portable TV, and £100 more than a 28-inch conventional widescreen set. But spending this much doesn't guarantee a good TV. Picture, sound and build quality are variable, and it's definitely not worth going for one of the cheaper sets.

SOCKETS

All the TVs on test have at least one Scart socket (for a DVD player or digital set-top box, say), and another audio-visual input (for a games console or camcorder). The LG and Samsung are the only sets without audio outputs to connect to a hi-fi. And all except the Sony Best Buy have a PC input, so you can use them as a computer monitor.

BEST ON TEST

1 Sony

VIEWING ANGLE

If you sit directly facing an LCD TV, or up to 45 degrees either side, the picture should be fine. Beyond this angle, the image darkens and colours are distorted. Sony, Philips and Toshiba have tried to address this: their TVs are watchable up to 60 degrees either side. The JVC (3) is the best – watchable up to a 70 degree angle.



Side view

BEST BUYS

The picture and sound quality of our Best Buys compare well to a 24-inch conventional widescreen TV (we tried the Philips 24PW6518/05) but the worst fall a long way short.

The **Sony (1)** has a stylish design in silver or black. It has the best picture and sound quality of all the TVs on test – on a par with a conventional widescreen TV. The rear sockets are tricky to reach and the remote control isn't great for Teletext, but its on-screen menus are user-friendly. Teletext is slower than on the other TVs but still acceptable. It's a steep £650 at Comet or Miller Brothers – buying online can save you £200.

The **Philips (2)** is a close second, with good picture and

sound. It's good for Teletext, and has helpful on-screen menus. But its wafer-thin, stylish remote control is uncomfortable, with poorly labelled buttons. Overall, it's a bit more versatile than the Sony, as it has two Scart sockets and a PC input. Richer Sounds is the cheapest high-street stockist, at £400. Prices are similar online.

We wouldn't recommend any of the other TVs on test as all have significant limitations. The JVC (3) has impressive pictures but the poorest sound in this group. The Toshiba (4) is an IDTV (see 'Digital ready', opposite) with good pictures and reasonable sound, but it's tricky to use and has a poor on-screen programme guide.

TABLE NOTES

We tested popular 15- and 17-inch models from leading brands. Panasonic and Sharp also make LCD TVs but didn't have any new models available when we tested.

Specification

Price Lowest widely available

Small LCD TVs

MODEL

- 1 Sony KLV-17HR3
- 2 Philips 17PF9946
- 3 JVC LT-17D50
- 4 Toshiba 17WLT46
- 5 Hitachi 17D4220U
- 6 DigiFusion LCD17W
- 7 Samsung LW15M23CX/XEU
- 8 LG RZ-15LA70



SCREEN RESOLUTION

Sales staff invariably mention the screen resolution of LCD TVs, implying that higher resolution means better pictures. But TVs with the same resolution differ in picture quality, and our ratings are a more reliable guide. The TVs we tested all have higher resolution than the basic TV standard (VGA quality): the 15-inch TVs show 1,024x768 pixels (known as XGA quality) and the widescreen 17-inch TVs display 1,280x768 pixels (W-XGA).

WIDESCREEN

With the huge success of DVDs and the country switching to all-digital TV by 2012, it's best to buy a widescreen TV (such as this Philips) if you want the full picture. The 15-inch LCD TVs we tested use the classic 4:3 screen ratio, which may be acceptable if it's your second set – but both of those we tested were let down by poor picture and sound.

Side view

Digital ready

As with larger conventional TVs, some LCD models come with a built-in Freeview digital tuner that lets you watch digital TV through your aerial. These are called integrated digital TVs (IDTVs). The Toshiba is the only LCD IDTV we tested, but it has a major drawback in that it can't display Freeview's seven-day electronic programme guide and isn't easy to use.

Before you buy an IDTV, find out whether you live in the coverage area (check at www.freeview.co.uk or on 08708 809980). And bear in mind that, unless you live near a digital TV transmitter, you'll need to use your rooftop aerial – and being tied to an aerial wall socket isn't always convenient for a portable TV.

WIN

We've got five Best Buy Sony TVs to give away

See p56 for details

high-street price.

Size Including stand.

Screen The viewable area.

Features

IDTV Integrated digital TV (see 'Digital ready', right).

Wall mount Optional wall bracket. **Scarts** These

sockets let you connect VCRs, DVD players and set-top boxes. **PC** The TV can be used as a PC monitor.

Performance

Picture, Sound Based on technical tests and expert rating. **Stills** Quality of still

images (such as digital photos) shown on screen.

Convenience

Ease of use Setting up, everyday use and complex tasks. **Text** Speed and legibility of Teletext and interactive features.

KEY

★ ☆ ○ ● ●
Best Worst
■ Best Buy

SCORE

This ignores price and is based on:

Picture quality	35%
Sound quality	20%
Ease of use	20%
Text	10%
Features	10%
Reception	2.5%
Power use	2.5%

Specification				Features				Performance			Convenience		Score
Price (£)	Size wxhxd (cm)	Screen (in/cm)	Widescreen	IDTV	Wall mount	Scarts	PC	Picture	Sound	Stills	Ease of use	Text	(%)
650	46x40x15	17/43	✓			1		★	★	★	○	○	63
400	53x39x23	17/44	✓			2	✓	★	★	○	○	★	62
600	47x37x20	17/43	✓		✓	2	✓	★	●	○	○	★	55
700	45x36x18	17/43	✓	✓	✓	2	✓	★	○	★	●	★	55
500	45x37x20	17/43	✓		✓	2	✓	○	○	○	●	★	54
290	55x37x18	17/43	✓		✓	2	✓	○	★	●	○	★	52
250	36x38x19	15/38				1	✓	○	○	●	★	★	52
300	47x37x21	15/38			✓	1	✓	○	○	●	○	★	48