

Widescreen TVs

NEED TO KNOW

Many retailers are pushing expensive liquid-crystal display (LCD) models while cutting prices on excellent conventional widescreens. For example, one of our Best Buys – the Panasonic TX-28PM1 (10) – is now £200 cheaper than it was six months ago, making it a steal if you're not bothered about flat-panel chic. Whatever telly you're after, buying online can often save 20 per cent on high-street prices.

LCD TVs

The new £1,500 Loewe Xelos is the only large LCD TV we've found that can match the picture quality of a standard widescreen TV. Its slim-line styling is classy, but overall we prefer the cheaper Best Buy Panasonic for just £300. If you're set on LCD, ask to see broadcast channels as well as DVDs before you buy – fast-moving sports clips will help you spot the good from the bad.

IDTVs

Integrated digital TVs (IDTVs) have inbuilt digital receivers, so you don't need a separate set-top box. Check whether you live in the Freeview coverage area (08708 809980 or www.freeview.co.uk) and whether the TV displays Freeview's full seven-day electronic programme guide. This makes watching and recording digital TV much easier, and we wouldn't recommend any IDTV that doesn't have it.



PICTURE-IN-PICTURE

Picture-in-picture lets you display a small image of one channel in the corner of the screen while you watch another – useful if you're waiting for a programme to start or checking the progress of a football or cricket match, say. All of the conventional Loewe TVs and the Dell (23) will let you watch another broadcast channel in this way. However, this Panasonic and almost all the other LCD TVs have picture-in-picture systems that let you monitor pictures coming only from external equipment, such as a DVD player or set-top box.



TEXT

Most people are familiar with Teletext on analogue TV channels. But if you have a set-top box or IDTV, you should be able to get the digital text services available from certain Freeview, Sky Digital and cable channels. These services look more like internet pages, and some allow you to watch an inset of the TV picture from the underlying channel at the same time.



BEST BUYS

To be a Best Buy, a TV must score at least ☆ for picture quality and ideally the same for sound quality, while suffering from no significant drawbacks elsewhere. Where we have information on a brand's reliability, Best Buy TVs must be average or above.

32 INCH

The **Panasonic TX-32PD50 (3)** is an excellent TV, offering unrivalled sound quality and very fast, easy-to-use Teletext. However, it only just scraped into the ☆ category for picture quality. Its stylised design makes it stand out from the routine silver box brigade, especially when seen from the front. Reliability should be very good. It costs £1,300 from Miller Brothers.

The **Toshiba 32ZP48 (4)** is almost as expensive as the Panasonic, at £1,000 from

Miller Brothers. It has good picture and sound quality, and is fairly intuitive to use. Toshiba TVs are average for reliability.

Finally, the **Sony KV32FQ86 (6)** offers excellent picture and sound quality and has quick, easy-to-use Teletext. It is not the easiest model to set up, but otherwise it's a very good set, at £900 from John Lewis and Powerhouse. Sony TVs are very reliable.

Unfortunately, our latest survey shows that conventional Loewe TVs are below average for reliability (full results will be published in July). So, although they do well in our tests, we cannot make any Loewe models Best Buys. The Loewe Nemos (1) and Mimo (2) both give really natural, high-quality images. The Nemos edges it on performance, thanks to its superb sound and ability to display still images, although the



4 Toshiba
32 inch



6 Sony
32 inch



8 Sony
28 inch



9 Panasonic
28 inch



10 Panasonic
28 inch

STILL PICTURES

With the popularity of digital cameras and photos stored on CD-Rom, TVs are increasingly used for 'slide shows'. The main ways to display digital photos on screen are by connecting your digital camera to one of the TV's audio-visual (Scart or phono) inputs, or by watching picture CDs via a DVD player. The Loewe (5) has a handy third option: it lets you insert memory cards from digital cameras directly into the front panel (right).



PICTURE FORMATS

TV broadcasts come in three main formats. Pictures designed to fill older, squarer screens are known as 4:3 and can appear 'stretched' on widescreen TVs; 16:9 pictures are 'true widescreen' and will fill a widescreen TV without any stretching; and, finally, 'letterbox' pictures have black bands along the top and bottom, usually for films and DVDs.

Most TVs now recognise when programmes are broadcast in widescreen and automatically switch to 'full screen' mode. We think it's sensible for widescreen TVs to show standard (4:3) broadcasts with black bands on either side (below), rather than stretching the picture to fit – although you may need to override the automatic settings to do this.

Mimo is a little easier to use. Neither model is widely available on the high street, but you can buy the Nemos for £1,100 and the Mimo for £1,350 from independents and online.

The lower-scoring Loewe Aconda (5) incorporates a memory card reader that accepts Compact Flash, SD, MMC and MS cards – handy for showing digital photos. However, you pay a premium for the privilege, as it costs £1,400 from independents and online. And its remote control and on-screen menu weren't as easy to use as on some other Loewe models we've tested.

28 INCH

A 28-inch widescreen TV is large enough for most living rooms and often considerably cheaper than a comparable 32-inch set.

If you're after an IDTV, the choice is simple. The three new digital-ready TVs on test from JVC, Philips and Samsung aren't able to knock our reigning champion, the **Sony KD28DX200 (7)**, off its perch. It's the only IDTV we can happily recommend, not just for its excellent picture and sound, but also because it displays the full seven-day EPG from Freeview. The Sony's EPG makes it simple to search through extra digital channels, and recording to a video recorder is easier, too. But extra functions mean it's a bit trickier to use overall than a non-digital TV. It's £900 from John Lewis.

For a TV without built-in Freeview, the **Sony KV28CS70 (8)** is our top buy, thanks to its very good picture quality. We also liked its easy-to-use, uncluttered remote control, clear screen menus and speedy Teletext. It costs £650 from Argos, Comet, John Lewis and Miller Brothers.

The **Panasonic TX-28PM11 (9)** gives the Sony (8) a very close run for picture quality, has better overall sound, and is excellent for displaying still pictures. It has only two Scart sockets, which seems a bit stingy (many TVs have three or even four these days), although, like most TVs, it has an additional input that can be used for connecting a digital camera, camcorder or games console. It will set you back £400 from Comet and John Lewis.

Finally, the **Panasonic TX-28PM1 (10)** is cheaper – mainly because it's not a 'flicker-free' 100Hz TV. But if this doesn't bother you, it still has great picture and sound and is easy to use. Panasonic TVs are very reliable, and with £200 knocked off the price since our test last autumn, this is an absolute bargain at £300 from Comet, Dixons, John Lewis and Powerhouse.

26-INCH LCD

A 26-inch LCD TV produces a picture of about the same size as a 28-inch conventional TV, because the image goes right to the edges of the screen. But LCD screens generally can't match our Best Buy 28-inch TVs for picture quality with all types of footage. However, they are all flicker free. We don't yet have reliability data for LCD TVs, so we haven't picked any Best Buys.

If you're interested in a flat-screen model, however, the Loewe Xelos A 26 (19) produces very good images for an LCD TV. Sound is superb, and it's also good for viewing stills and Teletext. Oddly, Loewe has dispensed with the perfectly good on-screen menu found on most of its TVs and introduced a baffling new system that makes this model a pain to use. It costs £1,500 from independents.



WHICH? EXTRA

You can find the results for 36 TVs that are still available from this report and previous reports at www.which.co.uk/tvs



19 Loewe
26-inch LCD

KEY



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%

TABLE NOTES

We tested a range of the newest models available from leading manufacturers.

Specification

Price Lowest widely available high-street price. **Size** Not including stand.

Features

IDTV Integrated digital TVs have a built-in Freeview digital tuner.

Flicker free If screen flicker bothers you, try a 100Hz TV or an LCD TV. **PC in** Can be connected to a PC for use as a monitor. **Scarts** Scart sockets let you connect VCRs, DVD players and set-top boxes to your TV.

Most TVs also have an additional AV input for plugging in games consoles or camcorders, for example. **Pic-in-pic** See p50.

Performance

Picture Technical tests and viewing panel's rating.

Sound Technical tests and listening panel's rating.

Still Quality of still images, such as photos, displayed on screen.

Convenience

Ease of use Ratings for setting up, everyday use and complex tasks. Also includes ease of using digital TV features for IDTVs.

Text Speed and legibility of Teletext and interactive features.

Widescreen TVs

Specification		Features					Performance			Convenience		Score
Price (£)	Size wxhxd (cm)	IDTV	Flicker free	PC in	Scarts	Pic-in-pic	Picture	Sound	Stills	Ease of use	Text	(%)
1,100	90x60x56		✓		3	✓	☆	★	★	○	★	73
1,350	81x61x55		✓		3	✓	☆	☆	☆	☆	★	71
1,300	81x58x54		✓		4	✓	☆	★	☆	☆	★	67
1,000	76x55x55		✓		3		☆	☆	○	☆	☆	67
1,400	86x62x59		✓		3	✓	☆	☆	★	○	☆	65
900	92x59x59		✓		3		☆	☆	○	○	★	65
32 INCH												
900	80x53x53	✓	✓		3		☆	☆	★	○	★	69
650	85x51x56		✓		3		☆	○	○	☆	☆	67
400	78x51x53		✓		2		☆	☆	★	☆	☆	63
300	78x51x55				2		☆	☆	○	☆	○	63
520	76x52x50	✓	✓		3	✓	○	☆	★	○	★	58
450	68x50x50		✓		2		○	☆	○	☆	●	58
400	81x51x54	✓			2		☆	○	○	○	○	55
350	68x50x49				2		☆	☆	☆	○	●	54
240	80x49x52				2		○	☆	●	○	●	51
330	84x51x50		✓		2		○	○	○	○	○	51
380	80x51x52				2		○	☆	●	○	○	48
400	80x50x57	✓	✓		2		○	○	●	○	●	46
28 INCH												
1,500	68x56x35		✓	✓	2	✓	☆	★	☆	●	★	62
1,300	85x58x33		✓		3	✓	○	★	○	☆	☆	57
1,200	70x58x25		✓		2	✓	○	○	●	☆	●	56
960	74x53x28		✓	✓	2	✓	○	☆	○	○	☆	51
900	83x51x21		✓	✓	2	✓	○	☆	●	●	★	50
900	66x56x29		✓	✓	2		●	●	●	●	○	40
800	79x50x26		✓	✓	2	✓	●	○	☆	○	●	37