



# Blu-ray of happiness

For the very best picture quality, look no further than a Best Buy high-definition Blu-ray disc player

Following years of consumer confusion, the picture is now a lot clearer in the world of high-definition disc players. Blu-ray has defeated HD DVD in the format war – making your next choice of DVD player a straight pick between standard-definition players and the new high-definition Blu-ray machines. If you want to watch high-definition films, you no longer have to worry about choosing the wrong format and getting stuck with an obsolete player.

The prices of Blu-ray players are dropping too – from a high of £1,000 when we tested the first generation of players 18 months ago, to a far more affordable £300 for a Best Buy today.

We expect prices to carry on falling, although a Blu-ray player still costs considerably more than a typical Best Buy standard-definition player.

A Blu-ray player – when used with a suitable HDTV – can deliver outstanding

picture quality (see what the Which? family made of Blu-ray, right).

It also plays normal standard-definition discs, so your old collection won't become obsolete. Both Blu-ray and standard discs will look great when played on our Best Buys.

If you do take the plunge, you'll have plenty of movies to choose from, with new Blu-ray titles hitting the shelves all the time.

Amazon features more than 1,000 titles, and HMV offers almost 500. But if you're interested in classics or hoping to delve round the bargain bin, choice is limited. We found some cinematic favourites, such as *The Searchers* and Bergman's classic *The Seventh Seal*, but most of the movies available are newer Hollywood releases. These typically retail for £18 – double what you'd expect to pay for a standard-definition DVD.



## Which? family in HD

**Which? family members Darren and Toni Jones were keen to see how Blu-ray measured up**

Equipped with the Sony BDP S1E Blu-ray player and a high-definition copy of *Pearl Harbour*, the Joneses were 'very impressed with the clarity and sharpness of the picture and astounded by the realism and vibrant eye-catching colours'. The main attack sequence was 'absolutely breathtaking' and 'far superior to standard DVD',

according to Darren. Fantastic picture aside, the Joneses had a few niggles with the player. They missed the resume feature and were frustrated by how long it took to load discs.

But thanks to the stunning picture, Blu-ray still got the thumbs-up: 'HD is definitely the way forward for us Joneses,' Toni said.

## BLU-RAY VERSUS DVD

### Is it worth upgrading to high definition?

#### Value for money

You can pick up a Best Buy DVD player for a fraction of the price of a Blu-ray machine – for example the Best Buy Sony DVP-NS15 (right) is just £45 from Argos. DVDs are a fraction of the price, too.

You'll also need to buy an HDTV to view Blu-ray images, and older HD-ready sets might not do justice to the quality of Blu-ray playback.

**VERDICT: DVD**

#### Features and usability

While the picture quality of Blu-ray is great, the manufacturers seem to have been blasé about basic features and usability.

Handy extras like disc resume (which starts playing a disc at the point you last watched it after switching off) are missing, and many people will be irritated by the sluggish operation of players.

**VERDICT: DVD**

#### Picture quality

When DVDs were introduced, they delivered a leap in image quality over VHS. Blu-ray images are even more finely detailed and realistic, often giving the impression of an almost 3D effect.

**VERDICT: Blu-ray**





1 BLU-RAY

**76% Sony BDP-S300** £300

The Sony BDP-S300 is half the price of the top-of-the-range Sony model (5) but delivers better high-definition picture quality.

Picture quality is excellent when watching Blu-ray discs or standard-definition DVDs, although DVDs looked soft in places. At higher frequencies the sound lacked some detail. The remote is well labelled and the instruction manual easy to follow. But, it takes one and a half minutes for a Blu-ray disc to load up.

**WORTH KNOWING** It has a disc-resume feature, but this works only on standard-definition discs.

Available Argos, Currys, Comet and John Lewis **Resume** Yes **HDMI** lead supplied No **Digital audio output** Coaxial and optical **Standby power consumption** 0.3 watts



2 BLU-RAY

**74% Panasonic DMP-BD30EG-K** £350

The Panasonic DMP-BD30 produces outstanding audio and picture quality, and comes with an SD card slot for viewing photos and a resume-disc feature. High-definition pictures have great depth, motion and colour.

Regular standard-definition DVDs look great and it also plays DVD-Ram discs. Our listening panel were pleased with the player's lively, energetic sound.

**WORTH KNOWING** Buttons on the remote are well spaced and feel good, but the front-panel controls are small and poorly labelled.

Available Argos, Currys, Comet and John Lewis **Resume** Yes **HDMI** lead supplied No **Digital audio output** Coaxial and optical **Standby power consumption** 0.6 watts



The LG BH100 feels like a bit of a throwback



3 BLU-RAY

**71% LG BH100** £900

The LG BH100 feels like a bit of a throwback – it's a combined Blu-ray and HD DVD player. But there's no mistaking the outstanding high-definition picture quality on offer, despite its price. Whatever type of high-definition disc you play, the LG makes movies look vibrant, sharp and detailed. It does not have a resume facility, but you can bookmark the current disc, though information will be lost if you take it out. It's cheapest online.

**WORTH KNOWING** It doesn't play standard audio CDs, WMA, MP3, DivX, Kodak picture discs, or Jpegs on CD or DVD-Rom discs.

Available Online and independents **Resume** No **HDMI** lead supplied Yes **Digital audio output** Coaxial and optical **Standby power consumption** 0.3 watts



MODEL	SPECIFICATION			WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE						SCORE %
	PRICE (£)	SIZE (cm) (h x w x d)	RESUME	HD PICTURE	SD PICTURE	SOUND	EASE OF USE	VERSATILITY	POWER USAGE	
BLU-RAY										
1 SONY BDP-S300	300	8x43x44	✓ <sup>a</sup>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★ <sup>b</sup>	76
2 PANASONIC DMP-BD30EG-K	350	6x43x36	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	74
3 LG BH100	900	8x3x26		★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	71
4 SHARP BD-HP20H	300	7x43x40		★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★★★ <sup>b</sup>	69
5 SONY BDP-S500	600	10x43x42		★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	66
6 SONY BDP-S1E	450	11x43x42		★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★★	64
7 PIONEER BDP-LX70	700	10x42x42		★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	61
8 SAMSUNG BD-P1400/XEU	300	8x43x34	✓	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	52
9 LOEWE BluTech Vision	769	7x43x39		★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★	★★★★	45

a Not for Blu-ray or data DVDs b Standby power consumption only

USING THE TABLE

The more stars the better.

Specification

**Price** For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price as we went to press. If we

couldn't find them at major high-street retailers, we give the most common online or independent price. Prices for other products are a guide. See [www.which.co.uk/shopping](http://www.which.co.uk/shopping) **Resume** Remembers where you

stopped watching a DVD, even if the machine is left in standby mode.

Test performance

**HD picture** Our expert panel's assessment of viewing high-definition discs.

**SD picture** The panel's rating of viewing standard-definition discs. **Versatility** The variety of useful features and connections that the player has. **Power usage** Measured in standby and when switched on.

Score

Ignores price and is based on:

Picture quality	35%
Sound quality	20%
Ease of use	20%
Versatility	15%
Power usage	10%

# Digital watch

Bring your TV into the digital age with a set-top box or PVR

The UK will switch over to digital TV by 2012. If you want to receive digital TV without any monthly fee, Freeview is a good option.

There are about 40 channels and 30 radio stations on Freeview, all received through your rooftop aerial – just like analogue TV. To receive a Freeview broadcast, you need either an integrated digital TV (IDTV) or a set-top box (£40 for a Best Buy).

If you can't get a Freeview signal, there are non-subscription satellite alternatives, such as freesat from the BBC and ITV. It is available to 98% of the population (via satellite), compared with the current 75% for Freeview.

A personal video recorder (PVR) is a slightly more advanced option. It's a set-top box with an internal hard disk (similar to a computer) for

recording digital TV and radio.

If you're used to battling with the timer function on your old VCR or DVD recorder, the simplicity and versatility of a PVR is a revelation.

There is no degradation of picture or sound quality and you can copy the recording to a disc or tape by plugging a separate recorder into the second Scart socket.

All the models we've tested have

two digital tuners, so you can either watch one show while recording another, or record two shows while playing back a third.

All the PVRs we tested work with Freeview digital TV. Sky and Virgin subscribers can also get PVRs that work with satellite and cable broadcasts. Check [www.which.co.uk](http://www.which.co.uk) for reviews of the Sky+, Sky+ HD and Virgin V+ boxes.



## 1 SET-TOP BOX

**77% Logik Vesa £40**

The Vesa set-top box from Logik is an older Best Buy but still stands head and shoulders above the newer models we've tested. It's easy to use, with a well-designed eight-day electronic programme guide. Its good features include two Scart sockets for easy connection to both TV and recorder and a Scart link which lets you set a DVR or VCR to record via the on-screen listings. It also has audio outputs so you can hook it up to your hi-fi system. It uses just over 4 watts when switched on and 1.52 watts in standby. Cheapest at Currys.

**WORTH KNOWING** It's also known as the Logik LDRV2 or TVonics MDR-200.

Available Currys EPG 8 days Audio output 3.5mm stereo/digital optical jack Audio description No



## 2 SET-TOP BOX

**63% TVonics MFR-200 £40**

The diminutive MFR-200 is an ideal choice for bringing an older TV that lacks Scart sockets into the digital age. It's the size of a cigarette packet, and can be stuck on the side of a TV with Velcro patches. It connects to your TV using the lower-quality aerial input, so you get lower picture quality and mono sound. It's intuitive and simple to use, and most functions operate through the central navigation and OK buttons on the remote. Cheapest at John Lewis.

**WE LIKE** It uses only 1.5 watts in standby and 4 watts in use and features an automatic standby option.

Available Argos, John Lewis EPG 7-8 days Audio output 2.5mm jack Audio description No



## 11 PVR

**67% Hitachi HDR082 £100**

The cheapest PVR in our test is also the best. The Hitachi may be missing some of the features of the other models and has only a 40-hour recording capacity, but it's easy to use and is a great introduction to digital TV. The remote is simply laid out, the EPG versatile and easy to navigate, and the front-panel controls clearly labelled. Standby power consumption is more than 10 watts. Cheapest at Argos.

**WORTH KNOWING** The Scart output supports a Y/C video signal, which means you'll get better pictures when copying from the hard drive to a DVD.

Available Argos Works with Freeview Hard drive 80GB EPG record/watch Yes Record subtitles Yes Audio description No

The MFR-200 is an ideal choice for bringing an older TV into the digital age



## BEST BUY COMPETITION

### Win a home-cinema package

One lucky reader will win a Best Buy home-cinema package worth £1,700: a Blu-ray player (Sony's BDP-S300), a 32-inch Sony Bravia KDL-32D3000 TV and a Sony DAVIS10 home-cinema system. One runner-up will win a 32-inch

Sony Bravia KDL-32D3000 TV and a Sony BDP-S300 Blu-ray player.

**TO ENTER, ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:** What price do Blu-ray movies typically retail for on the high street? (a) £8 (b) £18 (c) £23

To enter our Best Buy competition online, go to [www.which.co.uk/bestbuycompetition](http://www.which.co.uk/bestbuycompetition) or send your entry on a postcard to 'Best Buy August 08', Which?, PO Box 44, Hertford X SG14 1SH. Include your name, address and postcode, daytime phone number and membership number. Entries received by 14 August 2008 will be entered. Our competition is open only to current Which? members. Only one entry per household. Usual rules apply. For full set of rules see [www.which.co.uk/bestbuycompetition](http://www.which.co.uk/bestbuycompetition) or Which?, December 2007, p82.

MODEL	SPECIFICATION				WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE			SCORE %
	PRICE (£)	SCART SOCKETS	SCART LINK	AUDIO OUTPUT	FEATURES	EASE OF USE	POWER USE	
SET-TOP BOXES								
1 LOGIK Vesa	40	2	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	77
2 TVONICS MFR-200	40	0		✓	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★★	63
3 METRONIC Gemini Twin Tuner	60	2	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	60
4 GOODMAN'S GDB9	30	2		✓	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	57
5 PROLINE DFV152L	18	1	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	53
6 GRUNDIG GUDSTB2000	30	2		✓	★★★★	★★	★★★	51
7 WHARFEDALE LPDV832HDMI	40	2	✓		★★★★★	★★★★	★★	51
8 DAEWOO DSD-800M	30	1	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★	★★★	50
9 SAGEM ITD58NG	25	1			★★	★★	★★★★★	35
10 SAGEM ITD59NG	30	1			★★	★★	★★	33

#### USING THE TABLE

The more stars the better.

#### Specification

**Price** For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price as we went to press. If we couldn't find them at major high-street retailers, we give the most common online or independent price. Prices for other

products are a guide. See

[www.which.co.uk/shopping](http://www.which.co.uk/shopping)

**Scart sockets** These connect the set-top box to your TV and other equipment. **Scart link** Allows compatible VCRs and DVD recorders to be triggered to record using the set-top box's EPG. **Audio output** Sockets for hooking the box to a hi-fi or surround-sound system.

#### Test performance

**Ease of use** How easy it is to set up and operate the set-top box, remote control and EPG. **Power use** How energy efficient the box is in standby and in use.

#### Score

Ignores price and is based on:  
Ease of use **60%**  
Features **30%**  
Power consumption **10%**

MODEL	SPECIFICATION						WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE			SCORE %
	PRICE (£)	CAPACITY (hours)	SCART SOCKETS	EDITING	INSTANT REWIND	SERIES LINK	FEATURES	EASE OF USE	POWER	
PVRs										
11 HITACHI HDR082	100	40	2				★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	67
12 GOODMAN'S GHD1621F2	140	80	2			✓	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	61
13 BUSH BUPVR160F1160GB	120	80	2			✓	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	56
14 TOPFIELD TF5810PVRt	349	250	2	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★	★	54
15 METRONIC DVR-01	149	85	2			✓	★★★★	★★★★	★	44

#### USING THE TABLE

The more stars the better.

#### Specification

**Price** See above. **Scart sockets** For connecting the PVR to your TV and other equipment. **Editing** Allows you to edit recording, eg cutting out ads and/or top and

tailoring recordings. **Instant rewind** All the PVRs can pause live TV but those with a tick automatically record what you're watching so you can rewind at any time. **Series link** Part of the 'Freeview playback' suite of features. Select one programme to record and compatible

models give you the option to automatically record entire series.

#### Score

Ignores price and based on:  
Ease of use **60%**  
Features **30%**  
Power usage **10%**

## TVonics troubles

**TVONICS DTR-FP2500 £179** This is a great PVR. It's easy to set up and use and has a generous 125-hour recording capacity as well as several useful power-saving features and has a versatile instant-rewind facility. However, it has one big problem which means we can't make it a Best Buy. There is a slight, but noticeable, lip sync fault (a delay between the picture and the sound) on both recorded and broadcast programmes. We bought two samples of the FP2500 and both had the same problem. TVonics is aware of the issue and says it is trying to fix it. A software update is scheduled for this summer – check [www.which.co.uk](http://www.which.co.uk) for the latest news.



## Contacts

**Bush** 0871 230 1777; [www.albapl.com](http://www.albapl.com)  
**Comet** (Proline) 0870 542 5425; [www.comet.co.uk](http://www.comet.co.uk)  
**Daewoo** 0870 100 2525  
[www.daewooelectronics.co.uk](http://www.daewooelectronics.co.uk)  
**Goodmans** 0871 230 1777; [www.goodmans.co.uk](http://www.goodmans.co.uk)  
**Grundig** 0871 230 1777; [www.grundig.co.uk](http://www.grundig.co.uk)  
**Hitachi** [www.hitachidigitalmedia.com](http://www.hitachidigitalmedia.com)  
**LG** 0870 607 5544; <http://uk.lge.com>  
**Loewe** 01294 315 000; [www.loewe-uk.com](http://www.loewe-uk.com)  
**Logik** 0870 609 7493; [www.currys.co.uk](http://www.currys.co.uk)  
**Metronic** 01923 209801; [www.metronic.com](http://www.metronic.com)  
**Panasonic** 0870 535 7357  
[www.panasonic.co.uk](http://www.panasonic.co.uk)  
**Philips** 0845 601 0354; [www.philips.co.uk](http://www.philips.co.uk)  
**Pioneer** 0870 600 1539; [www.pioneer.co.uk](http://www.pioneer.co.uk)  
**Sagem** 0870 343 1111; [www.sagem.com/uk](http://www.sagem.com/uk)  
**Samsung** 0845 726 7864  
[www.samsung.com/uk](http://www.samsung.com/uk)  
**Sharp** 0800 262958; [www.sharp.co.uk](http://www.sharp.co.uk)  
**Sky** 0844 241 4141; [www.sky.com](http://www.sky.com)  
**Sony** 0870 511 1999; [www.sony.co.uk](http://www.sony.co.uk)  
**Topfield** 01795 429666; [www.topfield.co.uk](http://www.topfield.co.uk)  
**TVonics** 0870 803 0551; [www.tvonics.com](http://www.tvonics.com)  
**Virgin** 0800 052 2525; [www.virginmedia.com](http://www.virginmedia.com)  
**Wharfedale** 0870 600 3030  
[www.wharfedale.co.uk](http://www.wharfedale.co.uk)