

Digital TV receivers

NEED TO KNOW

The receivers in this test pick up Freeview digital TV via your normal rooftop aerial. They're usually referred to as set-top boxes.

To compare this option with satellite and cable digital TV, see 'The digital TV revolution', p10.

You simply buy your Freeview set-top box in the shops and plug it in. You can also buy set-top boxes with a built-in record function (see p55).

COVERAGE

Before you buy, check that you're in the coverage area. Go to www.freeview.co.uk or call Freeview on 08708 80 99 80.

Some homes also need an upgraded aerial; it costs £80 to £125.

RECORDING DIGITAL

A Freeview set-top box will work with your VCR or DVD recorder. But you can't watch one digital channel while recording another. (However, with most boxes you can record a digital channel while watching an ordinary TV channel.)

TOP-UP TV

Top-Up TV offers an optional 11 extra channels for a fee. A connection charge of £20 and an £8 monthly subscription gives you channels such as UKTV Gold (mostly old sitcoms) and TCM (classic movies).

Not all set-top boxes accept Top-Up TV, though – in fact, of all the models in our test, only the Sagems (4 and 6) did so.



ON-SCREEN TV GUIDE

Set-top boxes can display a TV guide for the next few days ahead; this is often called an electronic programme guide (EPG). It says what's on, with a summary of each show.

Most models show at least seven days in advance, so you can plan your viewing for the week ahead.

The only exceptions are the Sagems (4 and 6), which tell you only what's on now and what's on next.



BEST ON TEST

1 Sony

BEST BUYS

Our Best Buys stand out from other models because they have more useful features.

First off, you can use their on-screen TV guides to program a compatible VCR or DVD recorder: all you have to do is select the show you want to record. This is a lot less bother than messing around with the timers. (Have a look in your VCR or DVD recorder's manual to see whether it's compatible; if you've lost it, try the manufacturer's website.)

And both Best Buys have audio outputs, so you can hook them up to your stereo. A decent hi-fi will give you better sound quality than the

speakers in the TV and a better stereo effect.

Our favourite is the **Sony (1)** – it has a great TV guide that's easy to read and search.

You search the TV guide by scrolling through listings or via particular categories; for example, you could choose to look only for films.

The Sony is a tad pricey at £99 from Comet, Argos or Woolworths. For more value for money, try the better of the two **Philips (2)**. It's a great buy at £50 from Comet and Woolworths.

It's not as intuitive to use as the Sony – partly because the remote is cluttered – but it

does have some good features. For example, the seven-day TV guide allows you to view up to six channels for display at a time. (The Sony is also strong on this, showing five channels at a time.)

And the Philips also lets you set hi-fi volume via the set-top box's remote control – so there's no need to have two remotes to hand.

OTHER CHOICES

There are two reasons to consider other models.

First, both Best Buys connect to a TV only via a Scart lead. But older TVs don't have Scart plugs. If yours doesn't, your options are limited; you could try the Humax or Panasonic digital TV recorders shown on p57.

Second, neither offers access to Top-Up TV. If you like the look of this service, try one of the Sagems (4 and 6).

HELP WITH RECORDING DIGITAL TV

Both our Best Buys let you program a compatible VCR or DVD recorder through their on-screen TV guide. It's much easier than having to set a timer.

However, you can add this feature to the less expensive Philips (3), one of the Sagem (4) and the Panasonic (5). All you need is the Phantom+, which is £30 from Maplin.

Plug one end of the Phantom+ into your set-top box and the other into the cable that goes

to your VCR or DVD recorder. Then you can use the TV guide to select which show to record.

It's handy if you don't want to upgrade to a digital TV recorder (see p55). However, it won't readily work with the angled leads supplied with digital TV receivers (pictured below). You'll need to buy a straight Scart lead (about £8).

And it won't work with boxes that have only one Scart socket or no timer, such as the Sagem (6) and the Digifusion (7).

You need a straight Scart lead to use the Phantom+

Set-top boxes are supplied with angled Scart leads



The Phantom+ plugs into a Scart socket on the back of your set-top box



17 brand new digital TV sets tested online

Instead of buying a separate Freeview receiver, you can buy a TV that has one built-in. This type of TV is called an integrated digital TV (IDTV).

We just finished testing a batch of new IDTVs as we went to press, so here's a sneak preview of some of the models that did well. They're all slimline-style LCD or plasma TVs

and they're all compatible with high-definition TV channels.

We'll show you the full results in next month's issue. But if you want to look at them straightaway, go to www.which.co.uk/tvs.

Using the table The screen size is measured diagonally.

IDTVs	Price (£)	Screen (inches)	Picture	Score (%)
Panasonic TX32LXD52	1,160	32	○	68
Panasonic TH42PV500	1,800	42	☆	67
Sony KDL W40A12U	2,300	40	○	63
Sony KDLS32A12	1,142	32	○	62

Last report November 2005



USING THE TABLE

We tested the latest set-top boxes from best-selling manufacturers.

Specification

Price For Best Buys, we give the cheapest high-street price. For others, we give a guide price.

TV guide The number of days of programme listings that the box displays. **Scart sockets** These let you connect the set-top box to your TV and other equipment. Two

sockets are useful if you want to connect the box to a VCR or DVD recorder, for example.

Features

Record from TV guide When you link the set-top box to a compatible VCR or DVD recorder, you can use the on-screen TV guide to select what to record.

Top-Up TV Models with a ✓ allow you to subscribe to extra channels for a monthly fee.

Timer You can use this to set the box to switch channels. This means your VCR or DVD recorder can record more than one digital channel while you're out.

Hi-fi output Shows which models you can connect to a hi-fi.

Ease of use

TV guide Reflects the clarity of the on-screen TV guide.

Overall Includes the remote control and ease of setting up.

KEY

★ ☆ ○ ● ●
Best —————> Worst
■ Best Buy

SCORE

Ignores price and is based on:
Ease of use 50%
Features 40%
Power consumption 10%

Digital TV receivers

MODEL

	Specification			Features				Ease of use		Score
	Price (£)	TV guide (days)	Scart sockets	Record from TV guide	Top-Up TV	Timer	Hi-fi output	TV guide	Overall	(%)
1 Sony VTX-D800	99	7	2	✓		✓	✓	☆	○	74
2 Philips DTR320	50	7	2	✓		✓	✓	●	○	69
3 Philips DTR200	45	8	2			✓		●	○	63
4 Sagem ITD 72	60	n/a	2		✓	✓		n/a	○	57
5 Panasonic TU-CT41	50	8	2			✓	✓	●	●	56
6 Sagem ITD 68	50	n/a	1		✓			n/a	○	42
7 Digifusion FRT103	35	8	1					●	●	36