

# Top players

We put the latest feature-packed DVD players through their paces and pick four Best Buys

When DVD players first appeared in the shops in the late 1990s, their extra features and ultra-sharp pictures made traditional VCRs look distinctly second-rate.

The latest generation of DVD players has even more bells and whistles than its predecessors – and claims to offer better pictures, too.

To find out how good they really are, we've tested six new players, including some of the first models to be launched in the UK that are

designed to produce images with a high definition appearance (proper high-definition DVD players won't be launched in the UK until later this year). We have picked four Best Buys from our tests, with prices ranging from £120 to £300.

If that's more than you want to pay, we have also included details of cheaper Best Buys from previous tests that are no longer widely available on the high street but can be tracked down online.



**82% Denon DVD-1920 £250**

The Denon was top of the tree in this test and gives an excellent picture. Our viewers were particularly impressed with the level of detail revealed in challenging conditions such as the rain scenes in *Sense and Sensibility*. The sound is great, too, with only minor weaknesses in the bass frequencies. Useful features include a resume facility and bookmarking. The Denon also has an HDMI output to hook up to high-definition TVs, but our viewing panel found that this gave only slightly better pictures. The Denon costs £250 from Richer Sounds.

**WORTH KNOWING** 82% is the best score we've given any DVD player in the last 12 months.

**Cheapest store** Richer Sounds **Bookmarking** Yes **Resume** Yes **MP3** Yes **Jpeg CD** Yes **Jpeg DVD** No **Surround-sound decoder** Yes **Digital audio out** Coaxial and optical **HDMI out** Yes



## How we test

Our team put each player through an intense examination

### Picture perfect?

Viewing and listening tests in our purpose-built screening room form the backbone of our tests. Our panel of five experts checks picture quality using extracts from movies such as *Sense and Sensibility*, the James Bond series and *The Matrix*, looking for vivid pictures with natural colours and lots of detail. We check for blurring using fast-moving sports clips,

while test cards reveal any underlying weaknesses.

### Blind testing

We mask out brand names to eliminate any bias and put each player through its paces twice to ensure consistency.

### Technical tests

We also put each player through 100 technical and feature tests to explore its capabilities.

## What you should look for

### HDMI output

Most models connect to the TV using a Scart cable. Using HDMI instead may boost image quality if you have a HD-ready TV

### Resume

This remembers where you stopped watching a film and restarts the disc from that point

### Bookmarking

This allows you to mark key scenes on a disc so you can find them quickly

### Music files and digital photos

Some models let you listen to music downloaded as MP3s and view digital photos in Jpeg format.

## Contacts

**Cyberhome**  
No UK number – visit  
[www.cyberhome.de](http://www.cyberhome.de)  
**Denon**  
01753 688495  
[www.denon.co.uk](http://www.denon.co.uk)  
**Goodmans**  
0870 8730080  
[www.goodmans.co.uk](http://www.goodmans.co.uk)  
**Onkyo**  
01494 681515  
[www.onkyo.co.uk](http://www.onkyo.co.uk)  
**Panasonic**  
08705 357357  
[www.panasonic.co.uk](http://www.panasonic.co.uk)  
**Samsung**  
0870 2420303  
[www.samsung.co.uk](http://www.samsung.co.uk)  
**Sony**  
08705 111999  
[www.sony.co.uk](http://www.sony.co.uk)

## Facts & scores

Interesting information uncovered by our tests

### Wasting energy

How much electricity are you wasting if you leave your DVD player on standby? The worst offender on test was the Goodmans, which used more than 5 watts of power on standby; best were Sony and Onkyo, which used 0.2 watts. As well as damaging the environment, the extra electricity used by the Goodmans will cost £18.55 over five years.

### MODEL

- 1 DENON DVD-1920
- 2 ONKYO DV-SP503E
- 3 SAMSUNG DVD-HD950
- 4 SONY DVP-NS92V
- 5 GOODMAN'S GDVD164
- 6 CYBERHOME CH-DVD 635S

### USING THE TABLE

We tested the latest DVD players from leading brands.

### Specification

**Price** Lowest, widely available high-street price. **Plays back** Which recordable disc formats the player will run.



## 74% Onkyo DV-SP503E £300

The Onkyo produced strong all-round results in our viewing tests. Pictures are not quite as clear as they are on the Denon but they're still very good and the sound is nice and sharp.

We found this player simple to use and its remote control easy to navigate. The only letdown is the absence of a bookmarking feature – something we would have liked to find on a machine in this price bracket. The Onkyo costs £300 from independent stockists.

**WE LIKE** The Onkyo's resume feature can remember where you left off watching up to five DVDs at a time.

**Cheapest store** Independents **Bookmarking** No  
Resume Yes **MP3** Yes **Jpeg CD** Yes **Jpeg DVD** Yes  
**Surround-sound decoder** Yes **Digital audio out** Coaxial and optical **HDMI out** No



## 72% Samsung DVD-HD950 £120

The Samsung produced superbly detailed pictures and lifelike colours on all the movie clips we viewed. The sound is good, too, but this player is more fiddly to use than the Denon or Onkyo – the front panel display is hard to read and the remote control layout is a bit cramped.

We weren't impressed with the high-definition TV facility, which actually made the picture look worse than with a conventional Scart input. The Samsung costs £120 from Richer Sounds.

**WE LIKE** The pictures on the Samsung are as good as on the Denon – and it's half the price.

**Cheapest store** Richer Sounds **Bookmarking** Yes  
Resume No **MP3** Yes **Jpeg CD** Yes **Jpeg DVD** Yes  
**Surround-sound decoder** Yes **Digital audio out** Coaxial and optical **HDMI out** Yes



## 69% Sony DVP-NS92V £180

In our viewing tests the Sony produced a crisp, vibrant picture with realistic colours – its only weakness was a loss of detail in gloomy scenes from James Bond and *The Matrix*. The sound is good, too.

The resume feature can recall where you left off watching up to 40 DVDs – enough to satisfy the keenest film fan. On the downside we found the front-panel display hard to read in a well-lit room, and the layout of the remote control is poor. The Sony costs £180 from independent stockists.

**WE FOUND** Connecting to a high-definition TV improved picture quality slightly.

**Cheapest store** Independents **Bookmarking** No  
Resume Yes **MP3** No **Jpeg CD** Yes **Jpeg DVD** Yes  
**Surround-sound decoder** Yes **Digital audio out** Coaxial and optical **HDMI out** Yes

WHICH?  
BEST BUY

## End of line

All our new Best Buys cost more than £100 and one will set you back £300. If that's beyond your budget, there are two cheaper Best Buys still available online. They lack some of the features found on dearer models, such as a built-in surround-sound decoder, but are excellent at the basics.



### PANASONIC DVD-S29 £50

This model is only £50 and has bookmarking, single-disc resume and, importantly, great picture and sound, too.

**SCORE 73%**



### SONY DVP-NS30 £50

This one is also available for £50 and is just as good where it really counts, with great picture and sound quality.

**SCORE 71%**

SPECIFICATION			FEATURES								WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE			SCORE %
PRICE (£)	SIZE (cm) WXDXH	PLAYS BACK	BOOKMARKING	RESUME	MP3	JPEG CD	JPEG DVD	SURROUND- SOUND DECODER	DIGITAL AUDIO OUT	HDMI SOCKET	PICTURE	SOUND	EASE OF USE	
250	44x33x8	DVD+R/+RW, DVD-R/-RW	✓	1	✓	✓		✓	Coaxial and optical	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	82
300	44x37x8	DVD+R/+RW, DVD-R/-RW		5	✓	✓	✓	✓	Coaxial and optical		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	74
120	43x26x5	DVD+R/+RW, DVD-R/-RW	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	Coaxial and optical	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	72
180	43x26x5	DVD+R/+RW, DVD-R/-RW		40		✓	✓	✓	Coaxial and optical	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	69
35	43x28x5	DVD+R/+RW, DVD-R/-RW	✓		✓	✓	✓		Coaxial		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	62
80	43x35x5	DVD+R/+RW, DVD-R/-RW	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	Coaxial and optical		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	57

### Features

**Bookmarking** Marks favourite scenes on the current disc.

**Resume** Remembers where you stopped watching a DVD. Number indicates how many discs each machine can hold data on. **Surround-sound decoder** Connects to external

amps and speakers for cinema-like sound. **Digital audio out** Links you to other audio visual equipment such as a surround-sound system.

### Test performance

**Picture/Sound/Ease of use** Based on the opinions of the

five experts who make up our viewing and listening panel.

### Score

Ignores price and is based on:

**30%** Picture quality  
**25%** Sound quality  
**25%** Features  
**20%** Ease of use

### WHICH? EXTRA

We've tested several other DVD players over the last 12 months and many of them are still available. To check out the picture/sound quality, and the extra features available on 12 other models, visit [www.which.co.uk/dvdplayers](http://www.which.co.uk/dvdplayers)