

Setting the record straight

With more channels than ever being broadcast into our homes, the need for a reliable TV recorder with vast amounts of storage space has never been greater

With the national switchover to digital television looming, and a fleet of new channels beaming into homes across the country, many of us are beginning to find ourselves in uncharted waters – having a genuine choice of programmes to watch. But with numerous options for recording from TV available, you don't have to miss out.

Below we outline the pros and cons of personal video recorders (PVRs), DVD recorders and DVD/PVR combinations – see opposite for full test results of Best Buy PVRs and p64 for

DVD recorders and combination machines.

Electronics companies Sony and Microsoft are also extending the reach of their games consoles to the heart of the living room. Later this year, Sony is to launch its PlayTV add-on, turning its PlayStation 3 into a PVR and digital receiver, using its hard drive to store recorded programmes. And BT and Microsoft have said that the on-demand BT Vision service will also be available for Microsoft's Xbox 360 games console later this year.



The options for recording from TV keep growing

WHICH TYPE OF RECORDER SHOULD YOU CHOOSE?



PVRs

What are they? Personal video recorders store digital programmes on a hard drive, requiring no external disc or tape.

Pros and cons With built-in digital receivers and their own electronic programme guides (EPGs), PVRs make it simple to directly select a programme to record up to a week in advance. The quality of picture and sound are identical to a live broadcast, and many models let you record one programme while watching another, or record two at once. But if you want to keep a recorded programme on a DVD you have to connect the PVR to a separate DVD recorder.

Who are they for? Anyone who wants a recording device that's easy to use.



DVD recorders

What are they? These record on to blank DVDs, allowing you to keep favourite televised films or programmes for posterity.

Pros and cons DVD recorders are more difficult to use than PVRs, and it can be a last-minute scramble to find a blank disc. Many programmes or films can also overrun the two-hour capacity of most discs. The 'long play' option can extend recording capacity, but the quality of picture and sound suffers. However, DVD recorders also function as standard DVD players, so you can watch bought or rented discs.

Who are they for? Anyone who wants to keep permanent recordings or share them with others.



DVD combis

What are they? DVD/PVR combis offer the best of both worlds, with a PVR and hard drive for recording, and a DVD recorder for saving the recording to a disc. DVD/hard-drive recorders have a hard drive but no digital receiver, so you have to connect them to an external output, such as a set-top box, to pick up a digital signal and EPG.

Pros and cons DVD/PVRs are expensive but can effortlessly record from the EPG to the hard drive, and can also transfer important recordings to DVD. The cheaper DVD/hard-drive devices are much trickier to set up and record.

Who are they for? Those who are willing to pay more for flexibility.

A hard drive makes life easy

Compared with VCRs, recording with PVRs is painless, especially with Freeview Playback

For recording simplicity, it really is hard to beat a personal video recorder, or PVR. All you have to do is highlight the programme you want to record on the electronic programme guide (EPG), and select 'record'.

Previous PVRs have been quite hit and miss, often let down by the small capacity of the hard drive and an EPG that is difficult to navigate. But standards have risen universally since the advent of Freeview Playback (see p65).

The latest models we've tested are a particularly strong crop. The Humax PVR-9200T (1) tops the pile, but several cheaper models remain great choices. The Wharfedale 250DTR (3), for example, offers a huge hard disk that can hold 112 hours of recording for a reasonable £150.

If you're buying a PVR on the high street, check out the EPG: one that is simple to navigate can revolutionise your recording life.

And if you're confused about which wires go where, see our connection wizard at www.which.co.uk/tvconnection for advice on how to connect your PVR to the rest of your TV equipment.



1 PVR

89% Humax PVR-9200T £180

Despite being the most expensive PVR on test, this model shone because it was so easy to use. The EPG is well laid out and simple to navigate, and an intuitive remote control keeps proceedings effortless.

Setting up the 9200T is straightforward, quickly leaving you ready to start recording onto its 160GB hard drive. You can record two channels at once while watching a prior recording, as well as being able to pause and rewind live TV. It's also the only model we tested that lets you edit recordings. Cheapest at John Lewis.

WORTH KNOWING You can get an automatic update via broadcast or online that lets you record an entire series.

Available Argos, Comet, Currys, John Lewis
Works with Freeview Capacity 72 hours
TV guide 7 days Pause live TV Yes Scart supplied Yes

WHICH?
BEST BUY



2 PVR

83% Daewoo DSD-9503T £130

A strong performer in our tests, the Daewoo is a high-scoring PVR that can store more than 70 hours of television on its ample 160GB hard drive. If you would like some parental control, an optional function automatically requests a Pin for recording any channel after the watershed.

The device is also easy to set up.

However, this model is not compatible with Freeview Playback (see p65), so you will lose some of the benefits of this technology, such as being able to record an entire series automatically. The Daewoo is available at Asda.

WE LIKE The Daewoo can add safety buffer time to the beginning and end of recordings.

Available Asda Works with Freeview
Capacity 72 hours TV guide 8 days
Pause live TV Yes Scart supplied No

WHICH?
BEST BUY



3 PVR

83% Wharfedale 250DTR £150

Its large hard drive, which, at 250GB, is capable of storing up to 112 hours of programming, makes the Wharfedale a great buy if you record a lot of TV.

This is especially useful if you take advantage of the 'series link' update available from Freeview Playback so that you can automatically record an entire series.

Simple to set up, with an EPG that's easy to use, this model will have you recording in crisp digital quality in no time at all. When tuning channels automatically you can apply parental controls or delete unwanted channels altogether. Available at Argos.

WORTH KNOWING No Scart lead is included, so you will have to buy one separately.

Available Argos Works with Freeview
Capacity 112 hours TV guide 8 days
Pause live TV Yes Scart supplied No

WHICH?
BEST BUY

MODEL	SPECIFICATION								WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE			SCORE %
	PRICE (£)	FREVIEW PLAYBACK	SIZE OF HARD DRIVE (GB)	TESTED CAPACITY (hours)	EPG (days)	RECORD/WATCH	PAUSE TV	RECORD SUBTITLES	EPG EASE OF USE	OVERALL EASE OF USE	PICTURE/ SOUND QUALITY	
1 HUMAX PVR-9200T	180	✓	160	72	7	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★★	89
2 DAEWOO DSD-9503T	130		160	72	8	✓	✓	✓	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★★	83
3 WHARFEDALE 250DTR	150	✓	250	112	8	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★★	83
4 ONN LEDSTB075	100	✓	160	72	8	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★★	81
5 DURABRAND DPVR801	70	✓	80	34	8	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★★	80
6 GOODMAN'S GHD8020F2	120	✓	80	40	8	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★★	78

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. For others, we give a guide. See www.which.co.uk/shopping for the latest prices. **Tested capacity** The number of hours of recorded programmes that the hard drive

can store. **EPG** How many days in advance the EPG lists programmes. **Record/watch** ✓ means the PVR has twin tuners so you can watch one digital channel while recording another.

Score

Ignores prices and based on:

Features	40%
Ease of use	40%
Picture	10%
Sound	10%

WHAT'S NEXT?

Making the most of your equipment – and looking forward to the future

■ **WHICH DISC?** Whether you go for a straightforward DVD recorder or a more expensive DVD/PVR combination, it's worth investing in good-quality blank discs for the best recordings. You can find our reviews of recordable and rerecordable blank DVDs online at www.which.co.uk/blankdvds, or see *Which?*, July 2007, p50.

■ **SETTING UP** Take a look at our connection wizard at www.which.co.uk/tvconnection for tips on setting up your recording devices.

■ **HIGH-DEFINITION RECORDING** If you're waiting with bated breath for high-definition DVD recording, be warned that it will be a while before this technology, which has not long been introduced in Japan, arrives in the UK.

With Toshiba's decision in February to stop producing HD-DVD discs, Blu-ray has won the high-definition format war. See www.which.co.uk/dvdplayers for our reviews of Blu-ray DVD players.

It will be a while before high-definition DVD recording arrives in the UK



Cable and satellite

Sky and Virgin's packages include PVRs



Sky and Virgin's PVRs are tied to their subscription TV services, allowing you to record from their movie, sports and entertainment packages at the push of a button. Sky HD+ adds a range of high-definition channels, but the subscription is pricier, as is the box itself. And both Sky and Virgin

charge extra for installation.

The extra channels make these systems more attractive to some consumers, but remember to check minimum contract requirements.

See www.which.co.uk/digitaltvoptions for reviews of these packages and details of the PVRs.

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. For others, we give a guide to what you should expect to pay. See www.which.co.uk/shopping for the latest prices. **Tuner** a = analogue; d = digital. With only an analogue tuner you'll need a set-top box to record digital TV. With only a digital tuner you can't record analogue TV. **Hard-drive capacity** Number of hours of programmes stored by hard drive. **Digital EPG** Whether the recorder has its own electronic programme guide for watching or recording from TV. **VideoPlus** Lets you record non-digital channels by typing in a number given in TV listings magazines. **HDMI** Lets you connect to a high-definition TV for a pseudo-HD effect (quality varies). **Firewire** Lets you transfer digital camcorder footage to DVD.

Test performance

Playback: picture/sound Our experts' assessment of the quality of picture and sound of bought or rented DVDs. **Recorded picture** Our experts' assessment of the quality of the recorded picture on hard drive and/or recordable DVD. SP = standard play; LP = long play. **Recorded sound** Our experts' assessment of the sound quality of the recording. **Ease of use** How easy it is to set up, play DVDs, record programmes,

access features, read the front panel and follow instructions.

Power use Based on consumption in standby, when switched on and when playing or recording a disc.

Score

Ignores prices and is based on:

Picture quality	30%
Sound quality	30%
Ease of use	20%
Features	15%
Power consumption	5%

Contacts

Argos
0845 640 2020
www.argos.co.uk
Asda 0845 300 1111
www.asda.co.uk
Daewoo
0870 100 2525
www.daewoo-electronics.co.uk
Goodmans
0871 230 1777
www.goodmans.co.uk

Humax
0870 247 8800
www.humaxdigital.co.uk
Philips
0845 601 0354
www.philips.co.uk
Pioneer
0870 600 1539
www.pioneer.co.uk
Samsung
0870 726 7864
www.samsung.com/uk

Sony
0870 511 1999
www.sony.co.uk
Tesco
0845 722 5533
www.tesco.com
Toshiba
0870 442 4424
www.toshiba.co.uk
Wharfedale
0845 458 0011
www.wharfedale.co.uk

MODEL	PRICE (£)
DVD RECORDERS	
1 SONY RDRGX350	90
2 PHILIPS DVDR5500	150
3 SAMSUNG DVD R150M	120
4 WHARFEDALE DVD-R24HDF	120
5 PHILIPS DVDR3480	80
DVD/PVR COMBINATION	
6 TOSHIBA RD-97DT	215
7 SAMSUNG DVD-SH855M	240
8 PIONEER DVR-550HX-S	270
9 PIONEER DVR-LX60D	500
10 WHARFEDALE DVDR24HD160F	150
11 DAEWOO DRHT630	225
DVD/HARD DRIVE COMBINATION	
12 TECHNIKA AEDVDRHDDS7	120

Freeview Playback

If a programme starts late, you won't miss the end

Most newer PVRs conform to the new Freeview Playback standard. This means that they constantly monitor the digital programme schedule as it is updated and automatically adjust your recording times if it changes. It is also possible to 'series link' – record an entire series of your chosen programme.

Future updates, which are received automatically via the TV signal, will allow you to set a

programme recording from a TV trailer for that programme.

To ensure that your PVR conforms with Freeview Playback, look for the badge (see below) on the machine. Go to www.which.co.uk/pvrs for more information on the latest developments.



OUR RESEARCH

When selecting TV recording equipment to test, we consult manufacturers, market intelligence reports and industry experts, then check availability on the high street and online. Tested models include top sellers from the most popular brands, products with innovative features and models from some lesser-known brands.



1 DVD RECORDER

71% Sony RDRGX350 £90

WHICH?
BEST BUY

This DVD recorder has only an analogue tuner, so if you want to record from Freeview you will have to connect it to a separate set-top box. However, you can also connect it to a Sky+ box or PVR to transfer recordings stored on a hard drive to DVD.

As a DVD player, this gives fantastic crisp images and clear sound, and its ease of use in recording marks it out as a great device. The Sony is cheapest at John Lewis.

WATCH OUT With no digital receiver of its own, the Sony is far from future-proof.

Available Argos, Comet, Currys, John Lewis
Tuner Analogue **Compatible DVDs** +R, +RW, -R, -RW, Ram **HDMI** Yes **Digital output** Coaxial
Scart supplied No



6 DVD/PVR COMBINATION

67% Toshiba RD-97DT £215

This model's 250GB hard drive will let you store an impressive 112 hours of television before you even have to think about transferring programmes to DVD, which is an effortless and very fast process. The Toshiba also excels as a DVD player, with terrific picture and sound quality from both standard and recorded DVDs. Cheapest at Asda.

WE LIKE You can use the built-in Firewire connection to transfer recordings from a digital camcorder onto DVD for sharing or keeping for posterity.

WHICH?
BEST BUY

Available Argos, Asda, Comet, Currys
Tuner Analogue and digital **Compatible DVDs** +R, +RW, -R, -RW, Ram **HDMI** Yes **Digital output** Coaxial
Scart supplied No

SPECIFICATION								WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE							SCORE %
SIZE (cm) (hxxwxd)	TUNER	HARD-DRIVE CAPACITY (hrs)	DIGITAL EPG	VIDEOPLUS	HDMI	FIREWIRE	PAUSE LIVE TV	PLAYBACK: PICTURE	PLAYBACK: SOUND	RECORDED PICTURE (SP)	RECORDED PICTURE (LP)	RECORDED SOUND	EASE OF USE	POWER USE	
67x430x287	a			✓	✓			★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	71
50x435x330	a, d		✓	✓	✓	✓		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	65
59x430x346	a, d		✓	✓		✓		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	62
57x430x337	d		✓		✓			★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★	58
50x360x335	a					✓		★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	54
59x420x334	a, d	112	✓		✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★	67
60x430x346	a, d	106	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	64
73x418x277	a, d	68	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	61
77x417x288	a, d	106	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	61
58x430x345	d	74	✓		✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★	55
59x435x352	d	66	✓		✓	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★	★	53
57x430x335	a	74					✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★	55