Humax is back in Australia, and its very first PVR release scored a 2012 Sound+Image award.

Humax, a major Korean maker of digital TV receivers, has re-entered the Australian market after an absence of some years, beginning initially with a single offering, this HD twin-tuner personal video recorder, which in the mean time we are looking at the 500GB unit, but for $100 more you can go for a one terabyte model, which is otherwise the same. We have already announced this as our PVR of the Year, but we have never printed the same. We have already announced this as this HD twin-tuner personal video recorder, beginning initially with a single offering, and so we can only say when you want to record. Later you can adjust the output resolution from the remote control, using a dedicated key.

Then it scans VHF and UHF bands for stations. Two peculiarities here. First, it scanned the bands twice: first with 7MHz intervals and then with 8MHz intervals. I’m pretty sure that the latter aren’t used anywhere in Australia. Second, in my area SBS is broadcast on a both a local and a distant transmitter, the latter on Channel 30. Most TVTs and PVRs pick this up (although some later abandon it when they detect the higher signal strength version). With the Humax the scan paused for perhaps ten seconds on Channel 30, and then proceeded without accepting the signal.

Your keywords are retained, so you can just slip back into that screen and instantly display the schedule of your favourite programs at a moment’s notice. All this was a wonderful change from paging through hundreds of programs on an EPG.

The unit has Ethernet socket for network connection. It offers DLNA playback of media from suitable network servers, and also supports iLoveTV subscription EPG. The unit supports Wi-Fi with an optional adaptor. In the middle of the front panel is a large round button for OnStandby — it seemed strangely lacking in movement until the penny dropped: unexpectedly at this price point, this control was touch sensitive, and required the Merriest brush of a finger. There is also a hard-wired power switch on the rear, in case you want to save the one watt of standby power.

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After the scan, the Wizard asked whether I wanted the EPG to be ‘Humax’ or ‘iLoveTV’. You get a three-month free subscription to iLoveTV with the unit, and we are fans of iLoveTV — it provides excellent advanced features for setting timers from your smartphone and the like. But we went ‘Humax’ for this review.

As mentioned, we set it to 1080p output, and simply appreciated the picture. On both HD and especially SD, it produced the best picture quality I have seen short of a Panasonic DMR-EH900 single-tuner recorder. The upscaling and, importantly, deinterlacing was very clean, optimising what the picture was able to offer.

The unit is capable of outputting 720p/50 over HDMI if you want to use an external video processor, but it doesn’t have an ‘auto’ output resolution feature which would simply output the native resolution of the signal. Some PVRs, notably TiVo, offer excellent options for this. But then given the quality of processing here, I’d suggest just leaving the Humax on 1080p, unless you have good reason to change.

Of the other options of high video quality, the characters on the screen display were beautifully formed, clean and fastidious. But it’s technically difficult to performance, it still has a psychological effect. That’s just watching TV. Of course, you also want to record it. This is a full-twin PVR. You can record two different stations and playback a previous recording all at the same time. Or you can record two channels and watch a third one, so long as this is the same time as one of the two others. Thus you can record ABC News 24 and SBS HD, and watch ABC 1 all at the same time. When you’re recording from live TV you can record from the buffer, if it has been accumulating live TV for a while. Just rewind back to the start of it, and your recording will instantly work better, because quite often I don’t realise that I’d like to record something until after I’ve started watching it. Otherwise you can also record from the EPG (either the broadcast one or the internet one). There is a menu setting to switch on an FTP server function, but none of my FTP software would recognise the unit across the network, so the purpose of this was unclear.

This may be quite a low-cost unit, but some of the media support is excellent. In particular it has a key on the remote called ‘TV Portal’. This provides YouTube and ABC View video, Pleas Web photos, and Wiki@TV. This last is a portal into Wikipedia. It worked quite well, except of course for the clunky entry of text via the remote control.

There is also multimedia support from USB and the network. The operation of this was a little odd for some stuff. You hit the ‘Media’ key on the remote and it brings up your list of TV recordings. Then you hit the yellow button to choose videos, music or photos. On my standard test USB stick, there was only music shown when I chose ‘Music’ was the MP3 content, not WAV nor WMA (nor FLAC). But if you choose ‘Video’ it shows only FLAC files. In addition to WMA, the unit happily played my SD and HD MPEG2 files recorded on another top-box, plus an AVI and a .mp4, in all the players have difficulty. Photo support is for JPEG only.

The network support is via the DLNA protocol, and once again this worked with photos, videos and music. One seemingly cool feature was that the unit can also operate as a DLNA server. Indeed, this worked well — except for serving up its own recordings. It seems that it uses a ‘.ts’ file format. This is basically an MPEG2 video and multiplexed audio file, but the two or three DLNA client devices I used didn’t support it. I imagine that another Humax unit would do, so I could see you having a separate unit in two parts of the house, networked so that you could play back content from either one.

You can set the audio output to either ‘Stereo’ or ‘Multi-channel’. Choose the former and the Dolby Digital audio that comes on most of the HD channels is converted to stereo PCM. With the latter set, you get stereo PCM for the MPEG2 provided on the SD stations, but a bistream feed of Dolby Digital for the HD stations which carry it. If an HD channel does offer 5.1-channel surround and you have the unit plugged into your AV receiver, then Multichannel is the best setting. I mention this because while every HD set-top box can deliver Dolby Digital output, some will only do this over an A/SPER output, and insist on converting all HDMI output to PCM.

CONCLUSION

The Humax HDR-7500T HD PVR is an excellent unit, being in the lower echelons of our PVR of the Year (without warranty), while offering a solid set of recording, new media and networking options — and, most importantly with just about the best picture quality on the market for SDTV, while of course doing a fine job with HDTV as well. Hence our award. Feature: $449 (was $499 with 11TB drive)

VERDICT

- Excellent picture quality
- Very useful ‘Find’ feature for recording
- Useful network connectivity
- Need to use USB to transfer recordings to computer

FIRMWARE VERSION TESTED: UHFtaa 1.04.00, 17/10/11

INPUTS: 1 x optical digital audio, 1 x aerial out

OUTPUTS: 1 x HDMI, 1 x component video, 1 x composite video, 1 x audio out

POWER USAGE: 35W maximum (18W maximum), 15W minimum

DIMENSIONS (w/h/d): 380 x 55 x 246mm

WEIGHT: 2.75kg

WARRANTY: Two years

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