

REGA



High-Def heaven

is only a 32 inch
LCD television away



Transform your TV experience with a stunning 32 inch LCD flat-panel that looks superb today and will stun with high-def TV's imminent arrival

WHAT'S NEW?

2006 is a big year for local sport, with the Commonwealth Games, gold at the Winter Olympics, and the first time in elephant's years that Australia has made the soccer World Cup. So, now is a great time to upgrade your old CRT for a high-definition screen. The sweet spot for LCD is at 32 inches, and so we have compiled a monster list of the best TVs for watching all the sport you need. But it's not just about sport, High-Definition (HD) TV is coming with a vengeance, as Blu-ray and HD-DVD get ready to make a splash.

WHAT DO YOU GET FOR YOUR MONEY?

You get more than ever: all these sets sport the requisite connectivity and resolution needed to qualify as HD Ready, while some add a digital TV tuner to the list. Of course, if you are replacing a CRT telly, you free up space in your living room: on the floor or on the wall, these TVs are far less intrusive than your fat old CRT, and that's not forgetting their seriously sexy styling. Even better, these future-proof TVs are simple to use and, with

or without High-Def pictures, look far better than their flatscreen forebearers.

MOUNTING MAGIC

If you want to hang your sexy new 32 inch LCD television on the wall, check it's not one of those sets that takes the concept of 'flat screen' to its limit – some are deeper and heavier than others. Also, if you shop around you can often find cheaper mounting kits than manufacturers' own 'optional extras'. And if you are wall-mounting one of these TVs, it's not a bad idea to allow for a degree of swivel. Remember, the deeper the TV, the further out from the wall it must hang.

RATINGS EXPLAINED

Five stars indicates a strong performance from a TV that should give you many hours of viewing pleasure. Four stars signifies a performer that's definitely worth a look, even if it doesn't offer such value for money. As the stars fall away, so does the level of performance – if you can't afford a three-star, then think about buying a smaller screen. Don't bother with the rest. >

SMARTFEATURE



n BAUMANN MEYER 3220

HHHH
\$2499

Upstarts to the local market in the form of Acer and BenQ have seen the prices of LCD crash in the past six months. The last time we visited Baumann Meyer its set was worth \$3600 and now, six months later, its new model has been slashed by a whole grand. So the price is better, but what about the picture?

Edges are sharpened to a keen point thanks to BM's Quantum Interpolation Algorithm technology, with none of the 'jaggies' associated with other LCDs. But it's not at the expense of detail, for example the beads of sweat on Marky Mark's – oops, Mark Wahlberg's – face during intense scenes in *Planet of the Apes* are clearly defined.

Both colour and contrast are noticeably improved on its predecessor, as is movement. The 3200 had a quirk in that horizontal lines would show on moving textures, but no such bad habits are evidenced here. However, colour isn't quite yet perfect – blacks aren't quite black but more purple-black.

Connectivity is economical with DVI, PC, two component, two Scart, and S-Video and composite connections. HDMI is the only omission here.

Sound quality is acceptable, but there is very little bass weight. Detail levels are high, and the sound never gets nasty at extreme volumes.

The only disappointment is that while digital TV broadcasts are readily available, manufacturers seem steadfastly opposed to providing digital tuners. And so the tuner onboard the Baumann Meyer is, unfortunately, analogue only.

The price is one of the most reasonable here, but the lack of a true black and some of LCD's tell-tale ghosting on occasion hold this back from being a true cinematic bargain.

FOR: Enhanced contrast and viewing angles; excellent edge definition

AGAINST: Dated styling, no digital tuner, minor black issues

VERDICT: A very good set from locals Baumann Meyer, at a great price

n LG 32LX2D

HHH
\$3099

Just when we thought – due to the typical lightness of LCDs – that it was safe to start lifting TV boxes, this LG swims ashore. From the front, it's a stylish number, but take a peak at its rear and you get a better idea of this set's comparative bulk. In defence of the 32LX2D, there is a lot going on within this TV. The LG is supplied with a plentiful number of video inputs. HDMI is present and correct – as you'd expect from an HD-ready set – while, for more basic connectivity, the LG includes AV and S-Video ports. And let's not forget the meaningful looking remote: working in tandem with the screen's display – there's an LED read-out situated below the logo – it ensures swift and simple navigation. Considering all those extra features, that's no bad thing.

What's not quite such a good thing, however, is the LG's picture. The company promises and delivers a superior off-axis image, but overall results contain too much noise and lack stability. Even from a High-Definition source, and regardless of the set's High-Def 'XD function', you notice a layer of shimmer. Switch to either the analogue or digital tuner and results continue to underwhelm: dark scenes lack definition, while colours lack the verve of many similarly priced rivals.

Sound delivery is better, though: the detachable speakers deliver an authoritative performance and, but for a touch of sibilance, the sound is perfectly fine.

However, neither that sonic delivery nor the bellyful of features can save this LG from being swallowed by its rivals.

FOR: Good off-axis performance; big sound; well laid out remote control

AGAINST: Picture, regardless of tweaking, doesn't match the best; touch of sibilance from the speakers; it's bulkier than some on test

VERDICT: LG's feature-laden set is a bold move, but its picture is less so. One possibly best for fans of digital photography

SMARTFEATURE



n LOEWE CONCEPT L32

HHHHH
\$3999

As the LG heavyweight heaves itself out of our test arena, in bounces the Loewe flyweight. The Concept L32 is everything the LG isn't – compact, discreet and subtly stylish.

Given its manufacturer, this set's aesthetic charm comes as no surprise. German manufacturer Loewe has been around since the early part of the last century – but you would normally expect any Loewe entry to be the most expensive in a test. The Concept LCD range puts an end to that particular, er, concept – its \$3999 tag is bang on the money, and though it's unlikely to receive significant high-street price reductions (as some might), its performance means it's a bargain.

If you enjoy a bold and realistic image, you'll love what the Loewe throws at you. Regardless of movie genre, you get an excellent range of colours, class-leading levels of picture detail, and cracking depth of field. The result is an image that leaps from the screen. Using High-Definition or even regular DVD sources, the Loewe excels. Its off-air picture from the built-in digital tuner is also excellent. One advantage of the strong yet expertly portrayed colours is even the brightest and tackiest of TV programmes look realistic.

The sound system, a traditional Loewe strongpoint, adds further believability to proceedings, emitting (for an LCD design) remarkable levels of detail – you notice nuances overlooked by most of the others here. Sure, there's not quite the bass weight of more expensive Loewe set-ups, but that won't stop us raving about the L32's sound.

FOR: Wonderful colours; class-leading detail; overall sound and vision realism; chic design; top name, middling price

AGAINST: It has a touch more screen noise than the Metz

VERDICT: This price brings Loewe into battle with the Japanese LCD crowd, and the German set does itself proud

n METZ MILOS 32S

HHHHH
\$4499

Metz made its name in CRT TVs and has made the transition to LCD only recently. One difficulty many manufacturers have faced is that CRT is a mature technology, and LCD is still probably 12 months shy of its adolescence. Even so, the Metz uses a latest generation panel of Asian origin, and it's quite good.

Black levels of the Milos 32S are very good, but not up the level of Samsung/Sony panels, and detail is high. Colour is a little muted, especially when compared to the Candyland colour palette of the Sony Bravia, but instead produces tones which are incredibly lifelike. Especially flesh colours. Pictures courtesy of the onboard SD tuner are excellent, especially for an integrated design, with very little noise or digital artefacting.

And while this TV is a feast for the eyes, Metz hasn't forgotten the ears either. Sound is nothing short of superb, with driving bass and perfect dialogue intelligibility.

DVDs are replayed with vigour, the sophisticated configuration options able to boost realism (at the expense of some artefacts), and there is very little smearing or juddering to be seen.

The menu system is quite flexible, and it's very easy to navigate. Connectivity is comprehensive, with HDMI inputs, DVI and progressive. If fed a signal via component, the Metz's own image processing takes over and, when compared to the HDMI input, contrast and image depth increased exponentially.

This is an excellent screen with great sound. But the LCD TV market is becoming more and more cut-throat. Rivals such as Baumann Meyer are offering incredibly competitive offerings at a discount of \$2000 on this model. Here, you're paying for Metz's experience in image processing and beautiful sound. And for this, it's well worth the asking price.

FOR: Excellent image processing; excellent sound; dual SD tuners

AGAINST: High price; picture not as vivid as some rivals

VERDICT: An excellent monitor at a premium price, but as they say, you get what you pay for



n NEC NLT-32HD1

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\$3499

NEC is well known for its plasma panels, as it is one of the few manufacturers of plasma left. But unlike Pioneer, which is resolutely sticking with the format, NEC has branched out into a new range of LCD displays. The NLT-32HD1 is the fruit of these labours.

It's a decent-looking unit, with the familiar two-tone look in fashion at the moment, but with some attractive chrome accents, and snowboard-like stand. The speakers may look detachable but are integrated into the display.

Connectivity is average, with a single HDMI port, a component input, PC, two AV inputs and an S-Video. Unusually, the TV has an optical audio input as well. And generally, sound is acceptable, though nothing to write home about.

The NEC has an analogue tuner only, no surprise there, and pictures from it are acceptable, with no grain or noise visible. And likewise, general picture quality is good, but with one caveat – this TV has one of the most pronounced sweet spots we've ever seen. Directly in front of the display, the picture has good black levels, good edge definition, and when using HDMI, almost no judder or smearing. Move only a couple of inches – literally – and the screen takes on an ugly green tinge and contrast goes out the window.

The NEC brings most of the vitality and excitement of Tim Burton's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* to the fore, but that familiar 'green menace' is occasionally noticeable on-axis too, especially during the chocolate palace scene.

LCD technology is progressing quickly, and if this TV had been released even six months ago it would have been a good buy, but at this price and point in time, there are better.

FOR: Good picture on-axis; attractive styling

AGAINST: Poor off-axis picture; analogue tuner

VERDICT: An average performer with a decent picture that is let down by limited viewing angles

n SAGEM HD-L32

HHHH
\$2999

Expect to hear (and see) more from Sagem. The French manufacturer has long been 'big' in digital television set-top boxes, and is bringing High-Def TV to Australia with similar enthusiasm. Helped by an HDMI input, the HD-L32 is ready and waiting for High-Definition formats and upscaling DVD players, and it also sports a digital tuner, meaning access to HD broadcasts.

The gloss-finish design looks stylish, and the accompanying remote is one of the better drivers on test. The Sagem chassis reveals itself to feel less solid than (admittedly more expensive) rivals such as Loewe, but at \$2999 we have no complaints.

We would, however, caution against this set's width: if you want to place your TV into a corner, the speakers-either-side design makes it pretty wide.

In operation, the Sagem is by no means backed into a corner, though. For the money, the tuner offers a robust picture: only swift-moving action causes significant image break-up. And though there's a bit of extra noise, so long as your aerial's reception is good enough you won't be disappointed. A roof-top antenna is essential to get the best from it.

Switch to DVD, however, and your enthusiasm might be slightly tempered. Best results are via HDMI, though component comes close, but the picture is no match for that of the Loewe or the Metz. It's not a failing in one particular area, but simply an all-round slight malaise. The image lacks some realism, is short on black detail, and contrast isn't the best. This isn't a bad picture, but neither is it a fantastic one.

FOR: Slick styling (looks very upmarket); a well-appointed set for the money

AGAINST: Picture doesn't match that of its rivals; sound doesn't quite match speakers' promise

VERDICT: Sagem gives you lots for your money, and we'd be happy with this TV (but even happier with some of the others)

SMARTFEATURE



n SONY KLVV32A10

HHH
\$3999

"Bass! How low can you go?" asked Public Enemy in *Bring The Noise*. This Sony's response is, "Not very low at all." Yes, forget the Sony's drool-inducing styling for a slaving minute, and hear this. This set's sound system is curiously quiet and remarkably lightweight. Sure, it's 'only' an LCD TV and all that, but we expect more.

Back to those looks: this new V Series Sony is a compact-looking number, managing to look distinct without taking over your room. And – we know it's sad – we like the remote. On the business side, the Sony is pretty likeable, too – all set up for High-Definition TV, it sports an HDMI input, plus a set of components and a brace of AV inputs. Usability deserves a mention, too: recent Sony DVD players have offered impressive menus and this telly continues the trait. It's easy to tune in, and easy to tweak, which is how TVs should be. Once set up, though, the Sony doesn't quite fulfill its early promise. We've already criticised the lightweight sound, and a no-better-than-average picture only exacerbates our disappointment. The biggest letdown is when displaying swift movement. Via both component and HDMI, action movies suffer far too much judder, and black detail is in short supply. Using an HDMI link minimises this issue, but buy a long one – the input is high up the Sony's rear.

On the plus side, this Sony television offers impressive depth of field, plus effective reproduction of flesh tones. Switch to signals from an outboard digital tuner and this TV makes for an above-average performer. However, the slightly grainy picture still gives unwanted movement.

FOR: Beautifully styled, and put together; easy to operate

AGAINST: Both sound and vision disappoint: no match for some rivals

VERDICT: Sony's 32 incher promises much – in looks and performance – but the 40 inch model is so much better



CONCLUSION

THE FUTURE LOOKS awesome, and we've been there. During testing we used our HD-capable media centre PC, and on even three-star TVs, the results beat a five-star set playing regular DVDs. On class-leading TVs, pictures are stunning. Even better, the future (in the form of Blu-ray and HD DVD) arrives this year; all the more reason to ensure your next TV is HD Ready.

Which one bags top prize?

Of our six sets, the LG brings a bulging bag of extras, but up against its rivals its picture falls short. It's a similar report card for the latest Sony – sumptuous styling and simple usability don't replace performance.

Even worse is the utilitarian NEC with neither the looks nor performance to warrant the price. The Sagem is a great budget choice, but its good work is somewhat undone by the Baumann Meyer – it's even better!

That leaves Loewe to battle with Metz. The Metz has superior processing capability, but the Loewe has a great picture and great styling. They're both five star TVs, but in a photo finish it's the Metz by a nose.