

WHAT HI★FI? SOUND AND VISION

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AWARDS 2008

The results are in! Read the reviews that matter



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AWARDS 2008

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

TELEVISIONS

SONY KDL-40W4500

**2008 AWARD WINNING
SONY KDL-40W4500**

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SONY RDR-HXD890

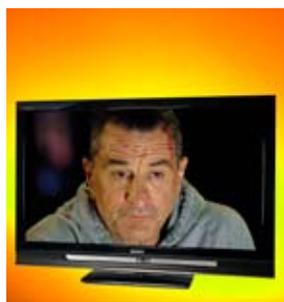
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BEST 46IN TV

SONY KDL-46W4500



October 2008

TELEVISIONS

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Sony KDL-40W4500

SIMPLY PUT, THIS year Sony has reinvented the LCD TV. The rather well-populated new generation of 4000-series sets has banished the age-old criticisms of the technology, like poor black levels and unrealistic colours, by being supreme in these areas, while also retaining the established LCD qualities of punch and detail. The KDL-40W4500, along with its 46in sibling, is the king of this crop.

Incredibly colourful performer

We thought the 'W4000 had mastered the art of combining dark blacks with punchy whites and colours, but this 40in 'W4500 takes that particular ball and runs with it right to the end-zone.

Try the *I Am Legend* Blu-ray for a great example. As Will Smith looks for his dog in the unlit nest, the petrifying darkness is inky black, with the occasional sweeps of the flashlight cutting through the scene with brilliant, pure whiteness.

This set was clearly built with HD in mind, and the pin-sharp edges and very high detail levels immediately bear this out. What's more, this set boasts a

VERDICT

Sony's LCDs play plasma at its own game, and this 40in TV is the pick of the bunch

FULL HD HDMI x3
Freeview
24FPS



motion processing mode that most of the review team actually likes; turn Motionflow to 'standard' and moving edges are sharpened and action is made

"The pin-sharp edges and detail levels prove this set was built with HD in mind"

smoother, but it avoids looking unnatural.

What's even more impressive is that this Full HD LCD is also a hugely accomplished standard-def performer, revealing detail in your DVD collection

that you didn't realise was there, and handling the upscaling without introducing any noise or instability. True, the Freeview tuner exhibits just a trace of noise, but the otherwise natural and insightful picture is still a pleasure, and sound is decent by prevailing standards.

The truth is, this was an easy decision to make – the 'W4500 beats everything else in its class, including Panasonic's new plasmas. Even Pioneer must be looking over its shoulder at this little beauty.

Video review www.whathifi.com

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PRODUCT OF THE YEAR TELEVISIONS SONY KDL-40W4500

BEST 32IN TELEVISION

Sony KDL-32W4000

IN A MARKET in which you can get a 32in TV for as little as £400, one costing £700 really has its work cut-out justifying its price-tag. The Sony KDL-32W4000 does just that – and then some.

In the 40-42in and 46in categories this year, the only thing that's beaten the Sony W4000s is the Sony W4500s, but the absence of a 32-inch '4500 leaves the KDL-32W4000 free to romp to victory.

"It all adds up to a picture performance that attracts and holds your attention"

It didn't get there unchallenged, though. On the contrary, we've probably seen more 32-inch sets than any other TVs this year, and the 'W4000 not only had to fight off seven other sets in the August *Supertest*, but prove itself against a further five TVs in the subsequent three issues, plus a couple of late entries.

The one that pushed it closest was the high-end Panasonic TX-32LZD85. However, despite its undeniably better

VERDICT

Sexy, spec-heavy, and nigh on picture-perfect – a clear Award winner

FULL HD HDMI x3
Freeview
24FPS



sound performance, when the sets are running next to each other, it's undoubtedly the Sony that we'd go for.

Pristine picture proves decisive

Whether feeding it standard-def or HD material, the punch, black depth and all-out crispness adds up to a picture performance that attracts and holds your attention, and no amount of sonic superiority will change that.

What's more, this is a supremely stylish and useable set, from the attractive casing and 'Midnight Sky' finish, to the brilliant,

PlayStation 3-inspired XrossMediaBar, which makes navigating menus more exciting than it should be.

There is some discussion on the *whathifi.com* forums regarding the fact that this is 'only' a 50hz TV, and that it must therefore have inferior motion handling to a 100hz model. We would say this: higher numbers don't always equal a better performance, and we've seen a number of 100hz sets with very unnatural motion. A well-calibrated KDL-32W4000 is just as stable and smooth as the competition, and it is unquestionably the best 32in TV available right now.

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TELEVISIONS BEST 32IN TV SONY KDL-32W4000

BEST BUDGET 40-42IN TELEVISION

Sony KDL-40V4000

MAKING A GREAT TV and selling it for a massive price is easy. The real challenge lies in building a great TV and keeping the price down. That's what Panasonic has done with the TH-37PX80B, and it's also what Sony has managed with this KDL-40V4000. We thought it was cheap when we first reviewed it at £900, but now you can get it for £750, it's a truly brilliant deal.

To keep costs down, Sony has removed some of its higher-end bells-

VERDICT

Sony can now deliver great budget sets

FULL HD HDMI x3
Freeview
24FPS



"Motion is handled almost as skilfully as the very best premium sets"

and-whistles from the 'V4000, so you get an 8-bit panel instead of a 10-bit one, and you have to do without the XrossMediaBar and the Motionflow 100hz processing of the 'W4500.

Do all those things matter? At this price, not a jot – the 'V4000 is an astonishing performer for the money.

Plug a Blu-ray player into one of the three HDMI sockets and the results are

excellent. The impressive detail recovery reveals all of the lines in Daniel Craig's wonderfully characterful face on the *Casino Royale* Blu-ray, while its edge definition easily does justice to the beautiful lines of his Aston Martin DBS.

Images throughout are given tangible three-dimensionality, and motion is handled almost as skilfully as the very best premium sets.

The 'V4000 also gets close to the top-dogs where standard-def is concerned. Sure, there is a hint of noise to the Freeview picture, and the DVD

performance misses that little bit of extra detail that the 'W4500 finds, but the overall performance is natural, insightful and largely stable.

A great performer at a fine price

The combination of deep blacks and punchy whites isn't quite as dazzling as that of its high-end siblings, but it still beats the non-Sony competition in this regard, and although the sonic delivery is nothing special, it's perfectly decent.

Simply put, nothing gets close to the KDL-40V4000's performance at anything like such a reasonable price.

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2008

TELEVISIONS BEST BUDGET 40-42IN TV SONY KDL-40V4000

BEST 46IN TELEVISION

Sony KDL-46W4500

WE'VE BEEN WAXING lyrical about the Sony 'W4000 series all year. But just as we started to get bored of banging-on about the same bunch of televisions, they were beaten, by another superb Sony, the 'W4500s.

The KDL-46W4500, like its 40in sibling, only just made it in time for Awards consideration, but boy, are we glad it did – this is hands-down, the finest 46in TV money can buy.

"Never before have TVs created deep blacks and punchy whites as well"

Once again, the extra-impressive contrast levels provide the greatest wow factor. Never before have TVs managed to create deep blacks and punchy whites as well as these Sonys do, so as the camera glides over the Vegas Strip during the 21 Blu-ray, the bright neon lights glow seductively against the pitch-black night sky.

This is far from a one-trick pony, though, and the exceptional sharpness and detail the 'W4500 produces really helps push images from good, to great,

VERDICT

The KDL-46W4500 doesn't so much beat the competition, as smash it – a true star

FULL HD HDMI x3
Freeview
24FPS



and then on to amazing. Side by side with any other set in its class, the Sony is deeper, more natural, more realistic, and more downright exciting, and the Motionflow 100Hz option produces smooth movement without making edges or action look unnatural.

Standard-def performance shines

Of course, you may want to watch a source other than Blu-ray, and that's ok, too. Fed DVD content, this set still produces one of the most natural and detailed pictures around, and stability is extremely impressive for a set this size.

The built-in Freeview tuner is eminently watchable, too. True, there's just a little bit of noise evident, but this is to be expected at 46in, and unless you're watching something old and dodgy (*Only Fools and Horses* springs to mind), you may not even notice.

It's also fair to say that some other TVs in this class offer a better sound performance, but the Sony's is perfectly clear and detailed, and we reckon picture quality is most important.

Assuming you agree with us on that point, the KDL-46W4500 is absolutely the TV to get.

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TELEVISIONS BEST 46IN TV SONY KDL-46W4500

DVD RECORDERS & PVRs

BEST DVD RECORDER

Sony RDR-HXD890

THIS YEAR'S HOME cinema Awards have seen Sony step up to the plate in a big way. Not content with that, the company has offered-up the finest DVD/HDD recorders that we've seen this year. The Award-winner was just a matter of selecting your hard disk size

VERDICT

Top marks for build, style and ease of use, an excellent TV and DVD picture plus faithful recordings – that's how you make an Award-winner

“The tuner is so good, it puts our five-star reference TV in its place with ease”

– and the RDR-HXD890 is a quite exceptional performer.

As we would expect, set-up is simple thanks to a straightforward, easy-to-follow interface – if Sony was given a middle name, we might plump for

When it comes to both looks and performance, the RDR-HXD890 is a no-nonsense unit

‘intuitive’. The unit itself is smart enough in a matter-of-fact kind of way, while the remote is clear and efficient in use.

In terms of specification, the recorder ticks all our boxes. The HDD is a perfectly meaty 160GB HDD, while disc compatibility is extensive with DVD+/-R/RW and dual layer +/-R discs on the menu, and DVD-RAM discs are fine for playback, if not recording. MP3, JPEG and DivX files are all compatible, too.

Outstanding tuner performance

We connect via the best option HDMI output and tune in the integrated digital Freeview and analogue tuners.

To cut to the chase, the all-important tuner performance is simply excellent. Indeed, it's so good, it puts our reference five-star TV in its place with ease where off-air pictures are concerned.

Images are as clean as a freshly-polished whistle, edges are sharper than Paul Weller's suits, and colours look good enough to eat. Motion is handled smoothly too, as a rock solid rendition of BBC News' scrolling ticker tape proves.

Talking of faithful, the top three recording modes are excellent, delivering clean, noise-free copies of your favourite programmes. The icing on the cake is the DVD playback performance, which thanks to a fine 1080p upscaler produces a clean, natural, detailed picture with punchy, dynamic sound to boot.

Simply put, this DVD/HDD recorder does everything we'd want in unrivalled style – that'll be an Award winner then.



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BEST DVD RECORDER UNDER £300
SONY RDR-HXD890

BEST HOME CINEMA SYSTEM PLAYER UNDER £500

Sony DAV-F200

AT THIS PRICE point, quality 5.1 surround systems are few and far between. This makes a 2.1 set-up a great alternative. This is especially the case when it comes to something as capable as this.

As you'd expect from those talented design bods over at Sony, this system is

VERDICT

The Sony's affordable blend of style and substance makes it a multi-talented second-room system

“Considering the compact design, there's impressive bang for your buck”

extremely stylish. It's also very discreet. The wall-mountable main unit features a slot-loading DVD drive and is finished with the same 'Midnight Sky' effect as the bezel that surrounds the Sony KDL-40V4000 LCD found on page 51.

It connects to a slimline (21cm wide) subwoofer via a chunky umbilical cord. The left and right speakers have a tiny footprint which makes it easy to find them a home. The DVD receiver provides you with all the connections you'd expect at this price point, including HDMI and component video outputs, a USB

input for viewing photos from a digital camera and Sony's proprietary Digital Media Port. This allows you to connect all manner of multimedia devices from mobile phones to MP3 players.

Diminutive speakers, big sound

All 2.1 systems struggle to pull off a convincing pseudo surround effect, so it's no surprise that the Sony can't throw effects behind you. Considering the compact design of the system, though, you get impressive bang for your buck. The diminutive speakers fire out clean, crisp sound, and the subwoofer rocks your

room with an impressive display of brute force. When Iron Man goes super-sonic, the sub makes its presence felt with a jaw-dropping display of power.

The DAV-F200 upscales DVD images to 1080p and does a great job of minimising the snowy presence of on-screen noise, leaving a clear picture for you to enjoy. During the opening scene of *There Will Be Blood*, the Sony manages to dig up excellent detail under and above ground.

If there's a small room in your house crying out for a stylish, compact home cinema system, the DAV-F200 will do just nicely.



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