

ON TEST



# Panasonic TH-50PHW6

What's eight inches between friends? Panasonic aims to prove the extra size makes all the difference with its 50in version of the TH-42PHW6

## THE FLAT FACTS

- 50IN 16:9 PLASMA TV
- £5,600
- RESOLUTION 1,366 X 768
- DIMENSIONS  
W: 1,210  
H: 724  
D: 98 (mm)
- SPEAKERS: NO
- TV TUNER: NO
- SCARTS: 1 (RGB)

**A**lthough seasoned professionals, the excitement in the office of receiving a 50in plasma still makes us all glow with excitement, especially when it's from a company with a track record like Panasonic's. Its mighty TH42PHW6 dominated even the largest of living spaces and impressed with a clear picture and high build quality. Thank goodness, then, that the improvements on this model aren't just in size.

The high-definition compatible resolution of 1366 x 768 (compared with the previous 852 x 480) had us delighted on paper, let alone before we saw it in action, while the picture fidelity was glorious to behold. Design-wise, the frame is a matter of taste, but if your tendencies lean more towards minimalist, you're in for a real treat. We quite liked the one-inch silver frame that surrounded the screen – it was a sleek finish with the basic buttons and badges emblazoned at the bottom-left of the screen. The sleek finish didn't intrude, simply drawing attention to the beautiful screen.

Around the back, however, things are a little less well specified. The limited connections include a 15-pin



The remote control isn't flashy, but everything is easily accessible

PC slot and an RS-232 control jack, and there are no speakers included in the package. This may seem a fair omission considering the sound system that deserves to accompany a display of this calibre, but no component connection? Have we missed something?

Well, no – Panasonic just seems to have adopted the upgrade route usually preferred by manufacturers such as Loewe. Under the securely screwed covers you'll find three connection bays, one of which is for the Scart terminal thankfully included in the box. Now, £450 may seem a lot for Panny's TU-PT600B tuner/receiver box, but it's certainly the best option to feed the plasma display with the best picture. It actually offers more AV inputs than the screen can deliver, but can be

connected to the TH-50PHW6 via one cable to keep things nice and tidy.

## Performance

Whilst options for connection may be a touch limited, the same couldn't be said for picture features. In addition to the usual sharpness, contrast and brightness adjustments and presets, there's rather unique flexible black extension circuitry, individual adjustment of the white balances for high and low red and blue saturations, and both manual and automatic gamma adjustments.

Meanwhile, a natty picture-in-picture mode also allows you to view two of the feeds you give the TV, which is useful for checking the footie on TV if the DVD you happen to be watching is a little dull.

Speakers are available as an option, and offer a pseudo surround mode and a few different presets if you decide to go down that route.



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**FEATURES**

1366 x 768 native resolution; progressive scan; picture in picture; contrast automatic tracking; pseudo surround mode; black extension; picture and sound presets; auto gamma control; input level adjust; overall white balance adjusts, plus individual WB adjust for red and blue; 3D comb filter for NTSC; on/off timers; pic position/size adjust; multiple aspect ratio support; three screensavers (white bar scroll, wobbling, peak limit)

**CONNECTIONS:**

Just 15-pin VGA, RS-232 and single RGB-capable Scart included in basic screen

**CONTACT:**

08705 357357, [www.panasonic.co.uk](http://www.panasonic.co.uk)

**TEST DATA:**

Colour: Excellent  
 Geometry: Excellent  
 Frequency Response: Excellent  
 Contrast: Excellent

**COMPATIBILITY:**

DVD (NTSC) 480i	YES
DVD & DVB (PAL) 576i	YES
NTSC/PAL progressive 480p/576p	YES
High Definition 720p	YES
High Definition 1080i	YES

**RATINGS**

**FOR**  
 Picture fidelity, price, high definition compatibility

**AGAINST**  
 Lack of connectivity out-of-the-box, some high-def source artefacts

- PICTURE .....★★★★★
- SOUND .....N/A
- LOOKS .....★★★★☆
- FEATURES .....★★★★☆
- EASE OF USE .....★★★★★
- VALUE .....★★★★★

**VERDICT ★★★★★**

Pure performance, just consider the upgrade required to unlock its true potential

**“It’s with high definition feeds that this Panasonic comes into its own”**

So much for what’s available, how does the TV fare as a display? Thankfully, the results are brilliant, all but for a small caveat. With the resolution upscaled to fit the display, we found results from standard inputs less impressive than the same feeds to its smaller brother. Scaling standard definition broadcasts and DVDs to larger sizes emphasises the artefacts or blemishes even from the finest quality sources. Mapping RGB feeds to such a high resolution is unfortunately a fault Panasonic can do nothing about until we start receiving HDTV in this country. Detail boosting circuitry may well improve this, but the picture still looks superb.

It’s with the high definition feeds (thanks to our in-house tech labs) that the Panasonic truly

came into its own. Particularly of note is the contrast ratio – it’s hard to remember when blacks have looked blacker, while rendition of colours and a total lack of noise are pulled off with similar effortlessness. With *Kill Bill* fed into the set via a PAL Progressive feed, Uma Thurman’s yellow-suited swordswoman cut through the yakuza with beautiful clarity – with animated action being handled as well as the live action stunts. Therefore, to create a perfect system, we recommend buying a separate scaler to enhance image quality from Freeview and Sky.

In conclusion, of the set as a whole we were impressed to the point of embarrassment for how the competition is going to keep up with this Panasonic plasma. **WP**