



Simple but effective remote from Panasonic

Panasonic

TH-50PHW6, £5,900

Few plasma screens have tickled our fancy quite as much as Panasonic's (now almost classic) TH-42PHW6.

In fact, we were so impressed we wanted more. So you'll forgive our excitement about getting our hands on the TH-50PHW6 – the 42PHW6's 50in big brother.

If you saw the TH-50PHW6's exterior and didn't know how good its smaller brother is, you might well wonder what all the fuss is about. It looks pretty bland; just the customary thin silver frame around a distinctly normal-looking screen. (Panasonic's new Viera range – see review of the TH-42PE30B in our August issue – is much sexier.)

Connections initially seem similarly underwhelming – just a standard PC input and an RS-232C control jack! But there's

reason to Panasonic's apparent connections madness, for the brand has taken the bold decision to make the screen's connections customisable! Three 'bays' are provided beneath the screen, where you can slot in a variety of connection boards. Most obvious is the Scart board, but component, composite video and S-Video options are also available.

The TH-50PHW6's features list is adequately long and contains plenty of movie-friendly tweaks, including a near-obsessive amount to do with contrast. But this is one obsession we condone, since it plays a *major* role in the screen's considerable picture talents...

Creature of the night

In fact, we've never seen a more profound black level response on a super-sized plasma. Night-time sequences in *Cold Mountain* – like the scene when Inman discovers Reverend Veasey about to murder a slave – have a depth of field, vividness of contrast and sheer verve that had our mouths hanging open in admiration. The black level is further enhanced by exceptional suppression of plasma's common grey pixel noise.

Colours, meanwhile, are solid and vibrant, but also profoundly natural in appearance – the latter

talent helping the screen to show the telling differences in Ada's 'city girl' complexion and that of a true man of the land like Inman.

Corny stuff

Fine detail levels are also fairly impressive – at least in progressive scan mode. Take for instance the *Cold Mountain* scene where Inman flees into a sweetcorn field to escape some horsemen looking for deserters. In progressive mode, every stalk of corn looks clean as a whistle and sharp as a pin. The Hitachi and Pioneer screens in this test arguably look slightly sharper with this scene in prog scan mode, but it's a very fine distinction.

With no speakers supplied with our sample (they're optional, but usually included in the screen price), we can get straight down to our feelings about the Panasonic TH-50PHW6. As you've probably figured, they're overwhelmingly positive. However, the strength of a couple of new rivals means that this screen is not quite so uniquely talented as its predecessor, the TH-42PHW6, once appeared, and it could do with being a few hundred quid cheaper. But it's still a hugely attractive proposition if you're just after sheer no-frills, hard-core picture prowess. ■

TEST SCENE

COLD MOUNTAIN



The night-time scene where Ruby's father is shot is a perfect example of how no screen can deliver a better black level than the TH-50PHW6

RATINGS

Style	★★★☆☆
Ease of use	★★★★☆
Features	★★★★☆
Picture	★★★★★
Sound	N/A
Value	★★★☆☆
Overall	★★★★☆

WHC VERDICT

What was once a world-beating picture performance still looks brilliant, and if you can find the Panasonic discounted online it's a very tempting proposition

WHC **80%**

AT A GLANCE

FEATURES	CONNECTIONS
Real Black Drive	PC in
Quasi 100Hz system	RS-232C jack
Super Real Gamma	Optional 'boards':
Prog scan	Scart
Picture-in-picture	Component video
	DVI
	Composite video
	PC
	Tuner box

PRICE

Approximately £4,900 – £5,900

CONTACT INFO

www.panasonic.co.uk 0870 357357