

PlasmaDisplay

PANASONIC TH-50PHW6 ♦ £5,600 (APPROX) 08705 357357 ♦ www.panasonic.co.uk

The best just got bigger



PANASONIC'S SERIES 6 50IN SCREEN IS A VERY BIG CHIP OFF A SERIOUSLY FINE BLOCK, RECKONS JOHN ARCHER

Lab Report	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Colour	✓			
Geometry	✓			
Frequency response	✓			
Contrast	✓			

Compatibility	
DVD (NTSC) 480i	●
DVD & DVB (PAL) 576i	●
NTSC/PAL progressive 480p/576p	●
High definition 720p	●
High definition 1080i	●

HCC Practical Tip

Here's the full list of optional extras – including those all-important extra connections boards – for the TH-50PHW6: Speakers (TY-SP50P6W); Pedestal or wall stand (usually included in screen price); horizontal or vertical wall-hanging brackets; ceiling unit; tuner/receiver box (TU-PT600B, around £450); Scart board (TY-42TM6T, around £150); composite and S-VHS board (TY-42TM6V for RCAs, TY-42TM6BB for BNCs, around £150); Tuner adaptor for PT600B box (TY-42TM6H, around £45); component video board (TY-42TM6ZC for RCAs, TY-42TM6AB for BNCs, around £90); DVI-D (TY-42TM6DB, around £150); additional PC slot (TY-42TM6PB, around £80)

The only thing 'wrong' with the recently released and awesome Panasonic TH-42PHW6 is that it's too small. I mean really; since when has 42in of screen been enough to keep *Home Cinema Choice* movie groupies happy?!

So you'll hopefully forgive us if we admit to more than a tingle of excitement at the arrival in our test labs of the TH-50PHW6, a screen still boasting all of Panasonic's Series 6 picture tricks that made the 42PHW6 such a winner, but with the added bonus of a lovely extra 8in of screen. Oh, and the wee small matter of a more high-definition friendly pixel count of 1366 x 768 (compared with the 42in screen's 852 x 480). Hubba!

Whether or not the 50PHW6's looks move you depends on whether you like your AV gear overtly stylish and in your face, or supremely minimal and subdued. The 50PHW6 falls squarely in the latter camp, basically comprising nothing more than an inch-wide silver frame around the screen. That's it if you wall mount it, though a passably stylish desktop pedestal is available if you prefer.

One of our few gripes with the 42PHW6 – connectivity – inevitably comes back to haunt us on the 50PHW6. In its from-the-box state, the only connections available are a 15-pin PC input and an RS-232 control jack. Ouch. So what gives?

COVER STORY

The key lies under the screw-on covers over three 'connection bays' alongside the PC jack. You can use each of these to add in a different terminal board, with options including Scart (a Scart board is, thankfully, included in the package),

component video, composite video and S-Video. Probably your best bet, if you can afford it, is to get Panny's £450 external TU-PT600B tuner/receiver box together with the £45 or so terminal board necessary to connect it to the screen. The TU-PT600B has more AV-style inputs on it than the screen can deliver, and can be tidily connected to the 50PHW6 by just a single cable.

Features on the 50PHW6 – aside from the truer HD compatibility – are fairly diverse. For pictures, as well as all the usual picture favourites, there's unusually 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. No speakers are included in the standard package (and we didn't review it with any), but the TV still offers a pseudo surround mode and a few presets if you decide to add speakers rather than using an entirely separate audio system.

The other main thing to speak of is a picture-in-picture facility that lets you look at any two of the inputs the TV has available.

Unable to contain myself any longer, I slipped in all the connection boards I could get my hands on and settled down

RATINGS

Highs: Picture fidelity, price
Lows: Fiddly (and potentially costly) connectivity

Picture	★★★★★
Sound	N/A
Features	★★★★½
Overall	★★★★★

expecting a feast of movie and TV perfection. And you know what? We almost got it, too...

BAH, HUMBUG

Miserable so-and-so that I am, let's start with the bad news, which is that we didn't find the 50PHW6 quite as convincing with standard-resolution sources as its smaller brother. To some degree this is perhaps inevitable; scaling our standard definition broadcasts and DVDs to larger sizes is inevitably going to emphasise any blemishes they may have at source. Perhaps the slight softness to the pictures has something to do with the screen having to map relatively low-definition RGB or tuner sources onto the 50PHW6's higher pixel count.

So much for the caveat – from here on in it's all good. While I would have

FEATURES

Specifications: 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 – but see Practical Tip for full list of options

Dimensions: 1210(w) x 724(h) x 98(d)mm; **Weight:** 40kg



'For a minute we thought we'd died and gone to home cinema heaven'

appreciated some more aggressive detail-boosting circuitry to improve the slight softness, the picture still looks absolutely superb.

Particularly winning is the astounding contrast ratio – plasma blacks have never looked blacker than on the 50PHW6 – superbly natural rendition of colours, supremely bright and vibrant presentation, and best of all almost total

lack of noise with all but composite sources. Grain, dot crawl, colour banding, and even green/grey pixel noise over dark areas are all but non-existent.

HEAVEN SENT

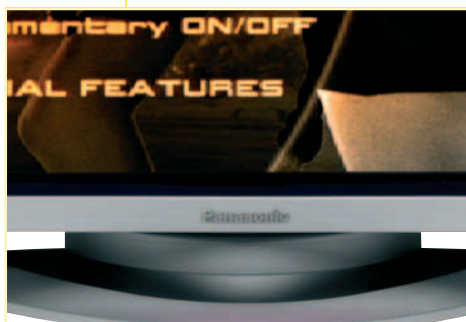
However, where the 50PHW6 really comes into its own – and in this regard it looks even better than the 42PHW6 – is with progressive and high definition

sources. The clarity, exceptional solidity and depth from a PAL Progressive viewing of *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship Of The Ring* was simply breathtaking. But even this paled into insignificance against a high-def feed from a 1080i feed provided by the WV Tech Labs. For a minute we thought we'd died and gone to home cinema heaven.

Unexpectedly, the strengths and weakness – genius with high-res sources, slight softness with standard-res sources – of the 50PHW6 are almost the exact opposite of those found on its 42PHW6 brother. But one thing both screens definitely have in common is that their weaknesses are almost pathetically

slight in the context of the greater good they deliver. Of course, having a higher definition panel available opens up a number of system possibilities. Significantly, by adding a separate scaler to your system, it should be possible to enhance image quality from Freeview and Sky Digital. An outboard scaler will almost certainly out perform the scaling built into the panel itself. You'll also be better placed to enjoy high-resolution digital images from a high-spec digital camera (an important consideration).

So we again find ourselves emerging from a Panasonic plasma screen test session wearing an almost embarrassingly satisfied look on our faces ■



Design is minimal – even the pedestal stand is understated



The remote is functional rather than flash



Basic connections are sparse, so investigate other system additions



No speakers are provided – these again are optional extras