

Best Plasma Ever

Pioneer 50-Inch Plasma TV | By Scott Wilkinson

When Pioneer first demonstrated its new plasma technology at CES 2007, everyone who saw it was astonished by its incredibly deep blacks and rich colors. Dubbed Kuro—Japanese for “black”—these new panels take plasma to a whole new level never seen before. Among the first models to become available is the PRO-1150HD, which is part of company’s upscale Elite line, and I can say without reservation that it’s the best plasma I’ve seen.



FEATURES The PRO-1150HD is rife with features, some of which are limited to the Elite line. For example, Home Media Gallery lets you connect the set to your home network and access Windows PlaysForSure music or video files on any connected computer that conforms to DLNA (Digital Living Network Alliance) standards. The TV can also display photos and other files from any storage device connected to its USB port.

Unfortunately, the remote is a step backward from the wonderfully simple and straightforward handset that came with the

PRO-FHD1 (reviewed in Issue 73). It feels a bit cluttered, and it’s a universal type that can control up to three components other than the TV. At least there are dedicated input buttons, which makes it easy to switch from watching satellite or cable TV to DVD. However, I had to aim the remote more carefully than most

INSIDER TIP

Paying a professional to calibrate this set is a worthwhile investment.

others, which was a little frustrating.

The menu system is not among my favorites, either. You have to drill down two levels to get to the main picture controls, and the advanced controls are four levels deep. Not only that, some of the control labels and settings are cryptic. For example, you can set the incorrectly named Color Space control to 1 or 2, but what do these numbers mean? (For the record, 1 means “vivid, vibrant color reproduction,” and 2 means “standard.” Why not just name these settings accordingly?)

PERFORMANCE As befits such a high-end TV, I figure many buyers will have it professionally calibrated—which typically costs a few hundred dollars—so that’s what I did before settling in to evaluate the set. (Details about this and other technical matters are available online.) With the TV tweaked to near perfection, I cued up a movie—and my jaw hit the floor. It was the most beautiful picture I’ve ever seen on a plasma TV. *Pirates of the Caribbean* on Blu-ray was smooth as silk and breathtaking in its detail—each brick in the battlements around Port Royal was crystal clear, and facial textures were positively three-dimensional.



For adjustment notes and technical data: AVguide.com

That depth was enhanced by the picture’s astounding contrast—the difference between the brightest and darkest parts of the picture—made possible by the set’s impossibly deep blacks. The letterbox bars were completely invisible, and night scenes immediately swallowed me up. Details in the dungeon scenes were more clearly rendered than most TVs can manage. I could easily make out the dog with the keys hiding in the shadows as well as faces of pirates on the deck of the *Black Pearl* at night—details that would be lost in solid dark patches on many lesser TVs. Such deep, rich blacks also helped colors pop, while still looking natural. Green foliage was right on the money, as were skin tones and the reds of the British uniforms. Rarely have I seen more lifelike color.

Turning to Chapter 8 of *Mission: Impossible III* on HD DVD, the slow pan across a long

staircase produced some wavy lines, which I attribute to scaling (resizing the 1920x1080 image to the Pioneer’s 1365x768 resolution). As with *Pirates*, shadow detail in the Vatican’s catacombs was excellent, with a lot more visible texture in the walls than I’m used to seeing.

Turning to *The Fifth Element* on DVD, deep space looked truly infinite, and even the simple white text on black in the opening credits was more impressive than usual. I could almost feel the texture of the stone temple walls and the hubbub of the busy cityscape as Leeloo jumps into Korben’s cab. Colors were completely natural, from the variegated browns and tans of the desert to the green hula skirts of the Hawaiian greeters at Phloston Paradise to the lapis lazuli paneling in Korben’s hotel suite.

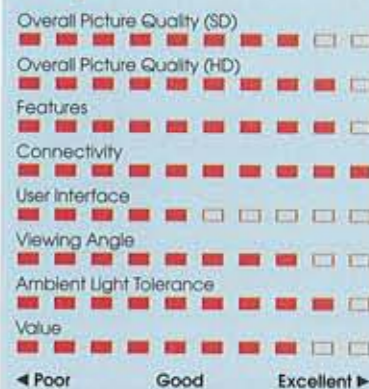
HDTV as delivered by Dish Network was a joy to behold. A nighttime NASCAR race on ESPN HD was especially beautiful—long shots of the racetrack were breathtaking against the dark sky, and the brightly colored cars were detailed enough to read the promotional stickers on each one as it whizzed past the camera.

Regular (standard-def) TV was not as crisp as HD, of course, but it was sharper than most TVs can pull off. Watching baseball on a local L.A. station, I noticed a little shimmering on jersey lettering and some mild jaggies as the camera panned across the top of a safety wall, but the picture was reasonably clean overall, and the grass and skin tones were spot on.

BOTTOM LINE I’m sure I could come up with more superlatives to extol this TV, but you get the picture by now. Without question, the Pioneer Elite PRO-1150-

HD is the best plasma TV I’ve ever seen. If you want to save \$1000, you can get the non-Elite PDP-5080HD, which offers similar performance but lacks Home Media Gallery and a few other features. Either way, the Pioneer’s new Kuro plasmas are sure to knock your socks off. >>

Ratings



Notes: User interface would be rated higher if the remote and menu were better; HD picture quality would be 10 if the resolution was 1920x1080

The Last Word

- Unbelievable blacks
- Lifelike color
- Exquisite detail
- Displays 1080p/24 at 72Hz

- Cluttered remote
- Clumsy menu system

Specifications

- Screen size: 50"
- Pixel resolution: 1365x768
- 1:1 mode: Yes
- Accepts 1080p: Yes (60, 24)
- Displays 1080p/24 at 72Hz
- Video inputs: 4 HDMI (1.3), 1 VGA, 2 component, 1 S-video, 2 composite, 1 RF
- Other connections: USB, CableCARD, RS-232, Ethernet
- Dimensions (WxHxD): 56.2" x 30.9" x 9.0" (w/speakers & stand), 48.2" x 28.2" x 4.5" (w/o speakers & stand)
- Weight: 88.8 lb (w/speakers & stand), 76.7 lb (w/o speakers & stand)
- Warranty: 2 years parts & labor
- Price: \$4500

Manufacturer Info

(800) 421-1404
pioneer-electronics.com