

ON TEST: SANYO PVL-Z2

LCD projector

£1,550



SPECIFICATION



Movie star

Thanks to huge advances in LCD technology and growing annoyance with budget DLP projectors' 'rainbow effect', LCD projection is well and truly back on the home cinema map. And so the time seems exactly right for one of the projectors that kicked off the whole LCD renaissance, Sanyo's PLV-Z1, to get a sequel: the PLV-Z2.

If looks were everything, the Z2 would be king. Its vaguely triangular shaping is a delight, its silver and black colour scheme is slick, and the fancy drop down cover that hides the lens and fascia when the projector is not in use is just plain gorgeous.

Even the Z2's rump is appealing, thanks to the inclusion among the sockets of component video RCAs and a DVI interface for PC or RGB video use (an optional RGB Scart to DVI adaptor is available). An HDMI jack might have been nice, but we're not inclined to argue

the toss too strenuously with a £1,600 projector.

The Z2 is a doddle to set-up. It boasts some unusual flexibility in the form of manual vertical and horizontal image shifting – very handy for odd-shaped rooms. There's also a very respectable throw distance/image size ratio and a decent optical zoom that lets you, for instance, enjoy a 100in image with as much as 4m or as little as 3m between the projector and screen.

As well as all flavours of progressive scan, the Z2 can take high-definition pictures, should you be lucky enough to have them. And courtesy of a good 1,280 x 720 native 16:9 LCD panel system, it can do more justice to such pictures than the majority of its rivals.

Also impressive is a very respectable brightness rating of 800 ANSI Lumens and a frankly remarkable (for LCD) quoted contrast ratio of 1,300:1. This is comfortably the highest figure we've seen quoted for a budget LCD projector.

PERFORMANCE

Amazingly, it even seems to be true, as dark scenes on the Z2 really do benefit from the finest black level response we've seen on an LCD projector since Sony's VPL-HW12 months ago – and that cost upwards of five grand! And as usual, where there's good contrast, there's also tons of depth, background detail and vitality on the Z2.

This great contrast performance has been achieved without

compromising brightness, too.

The 800 ANSI Lumens delivers a positively radiant picture that leaps off the screen. The picture looks fabulously sharp and detailed, too, with the ability to render the subtlest of textures.

At first, the Z2's colour tone didn't impress, though. It looked over-ripe and PC-biased. But switching the Colour Temp option to High sorted this out a treat, leaving skin tones looking believable and the white balance spot on.

The projector's onboard progressive scan system works well, too, removing jagged edges and reducing the impact of blanking lines on non-progressive sources.

We also love the fact that practically no contrast-ruining light escapes from the projector's body and just how quietly the projector runs.

The only off-putting thing about the Z2, in fact, is the occasional slight appearance of the LCD panel structure in the picture in subtle horizontal lines, particularly noticeable over skin or, very occasionally, the so-called 'chicken wire' crosshatch pattern.

But to be fair, the Z2 hides these problems very well for its price. And before you think 'sod it, I'll go DLP instead', don't forget that budget DLP projectors have different problems of their own.

As you may have realised by now, we're big fans of the Z2. Very big fans. In fact, if there's currently a better way to spend £1,600, we can't think of it ■ John Archer

FEATURES

LCD projector with native widescreen panel; 1,280 x 720 res; 480i, 480p, 575i, 575p, 720p, 1035i, 1080i support; NTSC, NTSC 4.43, PAL, PAL-M, PAL-N, SECAM support; multiple presets, with four user memories; gamma control; prog scan control; 31-200in image size from 1.2m-6.1m throw distance; manual lens shift; keystone adjustment; manual or auto PC adjust; digital zoom

SOCKETS

Component video RCAs; DVI (optional RGB Scart adaptor available); composite video input; S-video input; service port

DIMENSIONS

359(w) x 97(h) x 274(d)mm

WEIGHT

4.1kg

CONTACT

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www.sanyo.co.uk

TEST DATA

Colour: excellent tone and accurate containment

Geometry: perfect

Frequency response: excellent – clarity beyond 5.8MHz

ALSO CONSIDER...

PANASONIC PT-AE200E

Cheaper and slightly less prone to panel structure – but inferior on contrast and colour

Reviewed: Oct '03

SCREENPLAY 4800

Probably the best budget DLP option, keeping DLP's rainbow effect and noise over motion fairly well controlled

Reviewed: Dec '03

WHAT'S GOOD

Great looks; connections; price and contrast

WHAT'S BAD

Slight crosshatch effect sometimes

PICTURE ⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐

FEATURES ⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐

EASE OF USE ⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐

VALUE ⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐

VERDICT

Budget LCD has a new champion



Ease of use is ensured with this friendly remote