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Humax Foxtat-HDR review



Price range: £293.57

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What is it: 320GB, freesat, high-definition PVR

What we think: Solid performer that's straightforward to use, has a lot of style and, best of all, no monthly fee

OUR RATING

9.0

spectacular

Humax Foxtat-HDR Review

Reviewed by: [Ian Morris](#)

Reviewed on: 3 February 2009

For years now, if you wanted to get your TV from a satellite, you'd either be condemned to a niche of free-to-air, European-based channels, or paying for Sky. That just doesn't suit everyone, so, when [freesat](#) announced that it would create a free platform for people who couldn't get over-the-air terrestrial broadcasts, there was much celebration and cheering.

For a one-off fee of around £300, you can be up and running, getting access to great high-definition content with the [Humax](#) Foxsat-HDR. If you already have a satellite dish, you might not need to pay any more. But, for people who don't, another £70 will have a dish mounted on the side of your house by a trained expert.

Design

In photos, the Foxsat-HDR looks very blue, which might put some people off. Take it from us, though, that the Foxsat-HDR is actually a very slick and well-designed machine. The front panel does have a blue finish, but it's much more subdued than it appears in most photos.

On the front of the machine is a display that tells you what channel you're watching, or, for recorded shows, the name of the programme. Beneath this display is a two-colour LED, which glows blue when the Foxsat-HDR is on and red when it's on standby.

The front panel also hides some controls, a USB socket and a slot for a conditional access module. We didn't really need to use the controls on the front of the machine, but, if your remote gets swallowed by a goat, you might find yourself grateful for them. The CAM socket is, sadly, useless in this country, because Sky flatly refuses to allow anyone to access its services via third-party hardware.

At the back of the machine, you'll find a pair of Scart outputs, an HDMI socket and composite video out. There is also an optical audio jack, to connect the Foxsat-HDR to your AV receiver. You'll also find a second USB socket and an Ethernet jack. We always get quite excited about network connectivity on freesat, because, in theory, it could be used to access TV shows via BBC iPlayer. Fingers crossed the BBC gets around to doing something like that soon.



Controls are housed behind the front panel

The supplied remote control is decent enough. It's quite light, but it's a much more appealing style than the one that comes with Humax's Freeview recorders. The buttons are, for the most part, well labelled. There were times when we found ourselves slightly confused by the controls, but that was just teething trouble as we got to know the machine.

Features

The most important feature of the Humax is its built-in storage. It comes with a decent 320GB hard drive, which should see you set for 200 hours of standard-definition or 80 hours of high-definition recordings.

We're pretty happy to say that, unlike Sky+, which drinks up to 18W when it's on standby, the Foxsat-HDR uses less than 1W, which means you'll save both money and the environment. The Foxsat-HDR is also able to switch itself into standby mode when it isn't used for a long period, another power saver.

Humax often adds value to its products by putting in features that no-one else bothers with. The Foxsat-HDR has a very cool feature that allows you to back up video recordings from its hard drive to a USB storage device. Sadly, that's only possible with SD recordings, as HD ones are copy-protected. We can't blame that on Humax really, as it's likely that it would be refused freesat certification without this mechanism.

As you'd expect, the Foxsat-HDR has two tuners. We tested it with a single LNB input, because that's all we had available from our satellite dish. Only connecting one LNB doesn't really cause any problems -- it only restricted the number of channels we could record at once, which is fine. There is also a slight bug with certain firmware versions that prevents over-the-air updates from working on single LNB set-ups. That bug is, however, fixed in all the new firmware versions.

Performance

Setting up the Foxsat-HDR is incredibly simple. When you turn it on initially, it asks if you would like to auto tune all freesat channels. It doesn't take very long for it to hunt down all the available channels, and, within a few minutes, you're up and running. You'll probably, at this stage, want to go and find BBC HD, because it has a permanently running demo loop that's great for convincing you that your new purchase was worth the money.

In terms of picture quality, we can't fault the Foxsat-HDR. HD material from a good source looked exceptional. Of course, it's the original source that defines how good the image quality will be. BBC HD is nothing short of brilliant, and 90 per cent of the shows it airs are of a very high technical quality. We did note that, on ITV HD, some football matches looked fairly poor quality. This is something that we'd expect to improve with time, but don't expect every show that calls itself HD to be perfect.

SD pictures also looked good. The HDR will upscale programmes to 1080i if you choose to allow it. The advantage of using it in this mode is that it can generate menus in HD, which makes everything look much prettier and improves the usability too.

You'll also get access to Dolby Digital audio, as long as you've got something that can decode surround sound. Most HD programmes come with 5.1-channel surround sound, which is simply brilliant for movies and sport.

In terms of storage, the 320GB hard drive is ample for SD recordings. When you start to record shows in HD, however, it's not very long before you find yourself running out of space. With moderate use, we stuffed our hard drive to nearly full in under a month.

Conclusion

There's absolutely nothing about the Humax Foxsat-HDR that would put us off recommending it. There are a few minor complaints, but the majority of them are to do with broadcasters and copyright rules, not the hardware. If you're seeking a freesat personal video recorder, your options are quite limited at the moment, but the Foxsat-HDR is likely to remain the best machine on the market for some time to come.

Edited by Charles Kloet