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Humax Freesat+ FOXSAT-HDR recorder

Can this challenge Sky+ HD?



REVIEWER

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MANUFACTURER

[Humax](#)

PRICE AS REVIEWED

£299

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Full review

31 December 2008 - The launch of Humax's Foxsat-HDR was probably one of the most anticipated events of the year, with more HD screens appearing in living rooms across the country, people are desperate to get access to broadcast HD content. If you don't want to subscribe to a package from Sky or Virgin, then currently your "free" option is Freesat.

Humax have had their hand in PVRs for some time and have had a popular following with both their previous Freesat tuner and Freeview+ boxes. The Freesat+ FOXSAT-HDR brings both these strengths together into the one package. You'll have to remember, of course, that to receive Freesat you'll need a satellite dish installing on your house. If you already have one, such as from an existing Sky+ installation, then you don't need anything extra, you can plug straight in.

The FOXSAT-HDR looks similar to other Humax boxes, but has a slicker design with a nice glossy front with a blue tint to it, revealing only a central [LCD display](#). This LCD display, characteristic of Humax boxes, will tell you what channel you are tuned into, as well as giving you details such as what you are playing back. Smaller icons indicate output resolution, recording and so on.

Around the back of the box you get an impressive array of connections, including two LNB in connections and one LNB out (which we didn't test, but can be connected to another Freesat tuner, or used as a loopthrough into the second tuner). You also get analogue audio, video, two Scart connections and optical audio, but the essential connection is the HDMI socket. You'll also find an intriguing Ethernet and USB socket on the back. The Ethernet is marked "for future use" and we hope that it does find a use, rather than vanishing as it has on some Humax Freeview+ boxes.

The classy front flap also drops down to give you some manual control buttons, a second USB slot and a CI slot. Most of the control will be through the supplied remote which is reasonable in quality and we can't help but feel the design has been lifted from Pioneer's remotes, but lacking the weight and the brushed aluminium finish. Nevertheless, it is responsive and can be programmed to control your other devices – TV, DVD, Audio – as you see fit, with a good supply of manufacturer codes in the supplied User's Manual.

Connection is a breeze, especially if slotting into an existing Freesat or Sky setup. Simply attach the LNB cables, and hook up to the TV with the supplied HDMI cable and you are ready to roll. A quick set-up procedure will guide you along, scanning for Freesat channels. To regionalise your programming you are asked to enter your postcode, but it is not fussy if it is the correct location for you or not – we setup our test unit in the South West with programming for South East, for

example. You can also scan for other channels in STB mode as well.

The Freesat EPG is standard, so if you've used the previous FOXSAT receiver you'll be straight into things. That said, it is very simple and intuitive and easy to get around. You will also find that the recording experience from Humax PVRs follows through here so things are simple. You get the whole host of features you'd expect, such as series linking, where multiple recordings get dumped into neat folders for ease of viewing in your Media List when you come to watch them.

So as a PVR you get to do all the cool things with live TV – pause and rewind within limits, so if you need to answer the phone you can simply pause. If you need to go out to the shops, you might just choose to start recording instead. You also get to change various settings allowing you plenty of control over your recording options. With a reasonably large 320GB of memory, Humax cite 80 hours of HD content or 200 hours of SD content, but the likelihood is that you'll have a bit of both, with a tendency to hang on to the HD content for longer, because, hey, it's high definition.

That high-definition content is glorious too. With an output of 1080i (so long as your screen supports it) you'll find added depth and clarity to your television. The downside, of course, is that Freesat is quite early in its HD adoption cycle, so there isn't that much on offer. The FOXSAT-HDR gives you a menu section dedicated to HD channels in the anticipation that there will be something appearing in the future. Until that day you'll have to contend with BBC HD as a fixed channel and ITV HD as a red button option. The box will, however, offer you the option of recording the HD version if it finds it available alongside the SD version, which is cool.

Standard definition contents we had no qualms about either, comparable in quality to most Freeview services. The box does come with the "upscaling" promise, but what this really means is that you don't lose any quality because you can use the HDMI. As with Freeview, quality also differs between providers with the quality seeming to deteriorate as you setup through numbers. BBC is generally very good, ITV seems to get progressively worse as you move up through ITV2+1 and so on. But the SD channel quality is nothing to complain about, until it's contrasted with the great HD content, which will simply leave you wanting more.

But the clever Humax box wants to be so much more than just a satellite TV decoder box. It is also vying for the position of media hub. Using the USB slots you can introduce your own content and copy it over to the hard drive or play straight off a USB drive. You can access this content through the Media List, breaking down into Video, Radio, Music and Photo. This might appease those worrying about the cost of the FOXSAT-HDR, as these functions can be useful. It also means you can move content off the Humax box for archiving, but there is copy protection in place, so you can't just offload everything.

Unfortunately it is not quite as intuitive as the rest of the device, and file support is basic. Despite

the four-way control on the remote, you'll have to browse through different content categories using the colours buttons, and also manually switch drives to find that content, otherwise it won't show up. Pressing the Opt+ button opens up the control options, letting you copy and organise content, as well as play it back. So you can throw in your holiday snaps and have a fullscreen slideshow running, or playback music during a party, again with file names displayed on the LCD screen.

Whilst a nice feature, it does lack the refinement that you'll find in other devices, such as the PS3 or Xbox 360 when deployed in the same mode, with a general lack of options. It is prime however for a software update to make this more usable and combined with that Ethernet connection, has the potential to be much better. We'll have to wait and see on that one.

Verdict

The FOXSAT-HDR delivers the quality content and experience that users of Humax PVRs have come to expect. Things just work with satisfying ease. But the thing you really have to suck up here is the price. At £299, you'll have to multiply out how many months of Sky+ HD action you could get for your money, bearing in mind that Sky will offer you a host of channels you'll not find on Freesat.

With recession looming, perhaps you fancy spending your redundancy pay on Freesat, bearing in mind that you'll have no ongoing costs. In those terms then the FOXSAT-HDR makes perfect sense, giving you access to the current paltry HD offering, but more importantly giving you the promise of more in the future. With this box under your HD TV, you are poised to exploit new channels as they become available.

With the cost issue to one side, we loved the FOXSAT-HDR and it comes highly recommended.