



Marantz also makes some of the best programmable remotes in the business. The VP-12S2's sad, pathetic little excuse for a zapper isn't one of them.

MARANTZ VP-12S2 DLP PROJECTOR

>£7,000 THE BIG 'UN IS BACK. MARANTZ'S FRESHLY UPDATED HIGH-END PROJECTOR THROWS DOWN THE GAUNTLET TO THE DLP BRIGADE

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Marantz may not be a name you'd immediately associate with projectors, but its involvement with displays actually goes back many years. It's just that it hasn't enjoyed major-league success with them.

Until last year, that is. That's when the company dropped a bombshell by launching a blisteringly good high-end DLP projector called the VP-12S1. Easily good enough to mix it in the company of premier-league models from Sharp and SIM2, the VP-12S1 has now been updated to series two status, with some major improvements to reawaken our interest.

Outwardly, there's no change: still the same classy Nextel-finished, dual-walled casing, still the same gasp of surprise when you lift it (this thing weighs a hefty 11.86kg) and still the same duff, unilluminated remote control that wouldn't look out of place accompanying a £60 DVD player from Argos. Nope, if you want to find the interesting stuff, you need to look further under the skin.

Let's tackle the biggie first. The good but now outclassed HD1 chipset from the S1 has been jettisoned in favour

KEY FEATURES

- > 16:9 HD2 DLP-based projector
- > 1,280 x 720 (DGA) resolution
- > Brightness: 700 ANSI lumens
- > 2,500:1 contrast ratio
- > Minolta short-throw lens
- > Manual 1.2x zoom and focus
- > 31dB noise level
- > Switchable Faroudja DCI: de-interlacing
- > Lens up/down shift
- > Electronic horizontal/vertical keystone correction
- > Short throw distance (80-inch 16:9 screen projected from 2.6 metres)
- > 2,000-hour lamp life
- > Connections: 1 x DVI-D, 1 x component, 1 x S-Video, 1 x composite video, 1 x analogue RGB (PC), 1 x RS-232 serial connector, 2 x system control ports, 2 x 12V triggers for controlling a motorised screen/masking
- > Dimensions: 404.5 x 132 x 471mm
- > Weight: 11.86kg

of a Mustang. Not the equine or V8-powered sort, but DLP's latest top-ranking chipset, the HD2 Mustang. Designed to make the most of high-definition signals, this offers a maximum resolution of 720 (progressive) or 1,080 (interlaced) lines, as well as 12-degree-tilt micromirrors (compared to the S1's ten degrees) and a deep-black chip substrate that enable it to deliver a claimed contrast ratio of 2,500:1.

That's not bad going when you consider that the VP-12S1 managed just 1,100:1. Light output remains the same, at 700 ANSI lumens, which means that watching while the sun's shining continues to be a no-no (not that you should ever do that with a front projector). The six-segment colour wheel spins at the same 300Hz (six-speed) as that of the S1.

INTERNAL EXAMINATION

Rearwards, you've still got more than adequate connectivity, with one example each of component, S-Video, composite and RGB inputs, along with custom-installation-friendly 12V triggers and RS-232 ports. What's new here, however, is the HDCP-compliant DVI-

D input, designed to enable high-quality digital video signals to pass from high-definition and PC sources to the projector.

As far as new internals are concerned, that seems to be pretty much it, but there are more new discoveries to be made when you fire up the on-screen display. Here you'll find a sub-menu called Fine, where you can now tweak the horizontal and vertical detail, as well as edge and gain for both luminance and chrominance.

Toggle down the same menu and you'll find further options that enable you to switch off DCI processing, Frame Rate Conversion and the Cross Colour Suppressor facility (only useful with composite/S-Video signals). There's even a mode that now enables noise-free pausing of VCR video signals.

The OSD itself remains as simple and as straightforward as ever, with excellent signal info provided. But there is one annoyance. Bizarrely, gamma adjustment requires you to download a program and adjust the projector's settings via a PC link... which is, well, rather needless.

Using the low lamp setting is recommended if the black level is important to you (and it most definitely should be), even if it doesn't seem to make much perceptible difference to noise levels: the VP-12S2 is very quiet, though the NEC HT1000 is quieter still.

None of that matters once you fire it up, though. The changes Marantz has made have done more than keep this majestic projector among the top flight of DLP-based devices. Black-level performance is as good as we've seen from any DLP projector. Okay, it's not yet a match for a good CRT, but boy is it close. *Hollow Man* (in 576p from a modded Harman Kardon DVD 25 player) demonstrates fantastic greyscale accuracy too, with browns, blacks, blues and greys being very precisely differentiated.

The colour depth impresses as well, with silky-smooth resolution giving films a cinematic patina that lesser projectors can only dream of. Incidentally, there's no significant 'rainbow effect' - it's becoming clear that six-speed/six-segment colour wheels (used in Sharp projectors, as well as the VP-12S2) seem to pretty much eradicate this.

Kulwinder Singh Rai

T3 VERDICT

PERFORMANCE
VALUE
OVERALL



If we didn't know how much this top-ranking projector cost, we'd probably give it a price tag of £8,000-£9,000, based on build quality and performance. At £7,000, it's a high-end bargain.

ALSO CONSIDER

SIM2 HT300PLUS

SIM2 updated the HT300Plus shortly after Sharp and Marantz laid claim to the high-end DLP throne. Designed with an Italian eye for flair, the £9,000 model uses the same HD2 chip as the VP-12S2. The contrast is lower at 1,800:1, but it's worth giving it a personal audition.

SHARP XV-Z9000E

The £8,800 XV-Z9000E features the older HD1 DLP chipset that was used by the Marantz VP-12S2's predecessor. It's still a damn fine projector, but this latest Marantz model outpoints it, so for ultimate quality, it might be best to wait for its forthcoming replacement.