

Opensat 9900 HDPVR

The Really Fast Receiver



The sleek black Opensat 9900 HDPVR distributed by Slovakia's ABC Bizniz comes with all the usual outputs expected from a high definition receiver. HDMI and component video are accompanied by two Scarts, and the old faithful fallback of composite video is also available. Audio is covered by an S/PDIF output, backed up with the standard left and right stereo RCAs. Picture quality through HDMI and component are as excellent as you'd expect from high definition and when an HD resolution is chosen, standard resolution broadcasts are upscaled.

The single tuner has a loop-through output so another receiver can be connected. There's also an RS232 connection and an Ethernet port. The single USB port is located on the side of the receiver, near the front. This is a good halfway house between a hard to reach port on the back if you're connecting and reconnecting often or an obtrusive cable sticking out of the front if you have a permanently connected hard



drive. A port at both the front and back would have been perfect to cover both of these scenarios, but this would of course add to the production cost. There are also two common interface slots and one for a smartcard.

Switching on the receiver gives the first pleasant surprises. There's no wait for software to boot up, no pretty logo to sit through for those impatient seconds that last forever when you know the show you want to see is already starting. As soon as the power button is pressed, we're up and running and this speed is echoed throughout the whole machine. There's no delay from pressing a button to the action hap-

pening on-screen. Switching between channels and navigation of the menus is nice and quick. It's a real pleasure not to have to wait at all.

Complementing the speed of the menus is their modern look and feel. Their crisp silver and yellow colour scheme with clear sharp black text is a world away from the old days of blocky slow menus we've seen too much of over the years. A lot of thought has clearly gone into their design and ease of use for which Opensat should be congratulated. So many times a good receiver is spoiled by a poorly designed, confusing or slow interface. This one keeps everything fast, simple and clear - top marks.

Setting up the antenna is as simple as it can be thanks to DiSEqC and USALS. All we'd expect from this kind of setup is available, from

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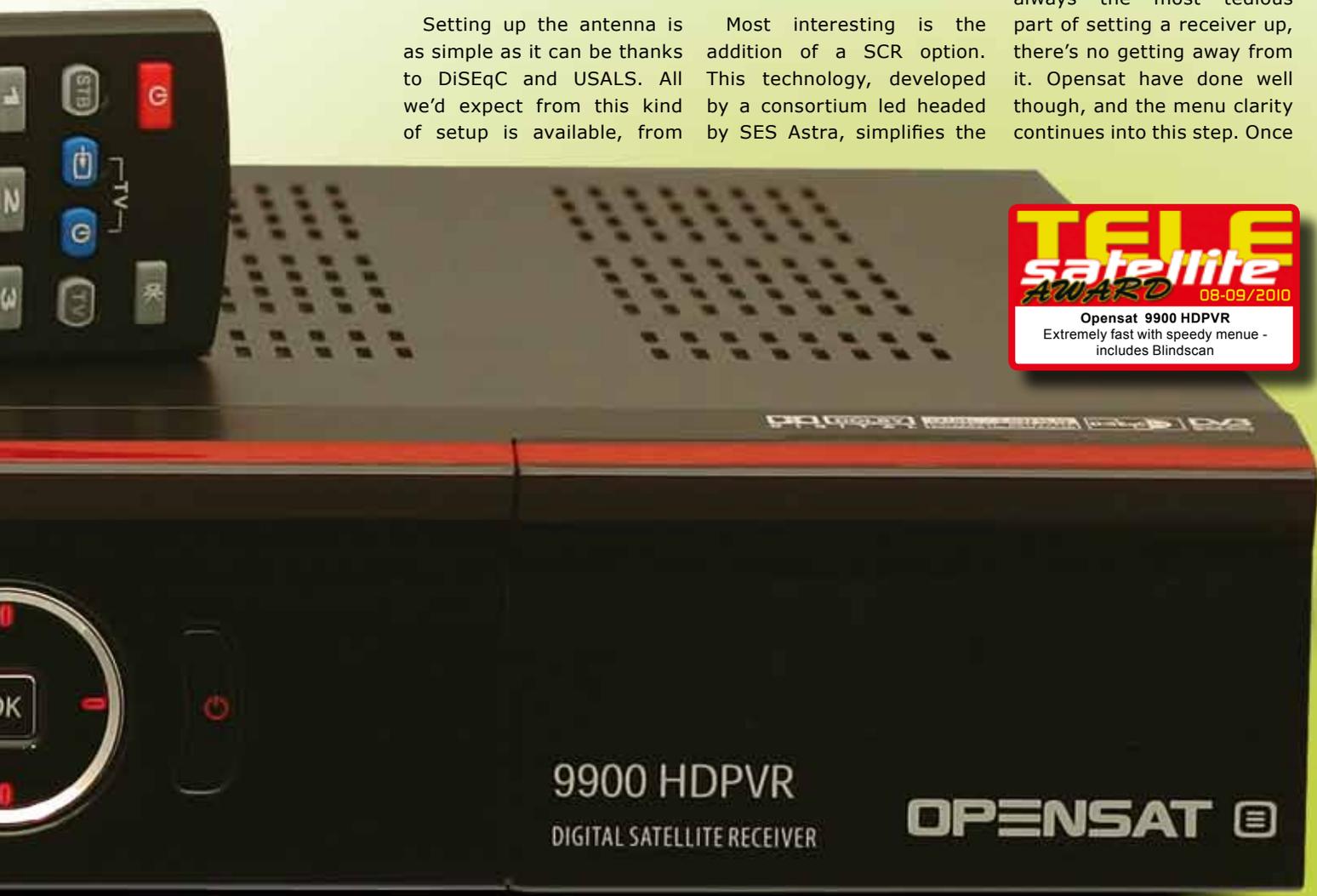
Available online starting from 30 July 2010

selection of DiSEqC ports for multiple LNBs through to a fully motorised system with the positions calculated from the user's latitude and longitude. Just about every other setup possibility is covered. A host of preset options are available for LNB types and if yours is somehow not included, all the required frequencies needed can be added manually.

Most interesting is the addition of a SCR option. This technology, developed by a consortium led headed by SES Astra, simplifies the

delivery of satellite signals to multiple receivers by feeding them from a single cable utilising clever splitters. This greatly simplifies cabling for those who want to watch TV in multiple rooms. How I wish this technology was available years ago when I pulled the house apart to wire up my own system.

Scanning for channels is always the most tedious part of setting a receiver up, there's no getting away from it. Opensat have done well though, and the menu clarity continues into this step. Once



TELE satellite AWARD 08-09/2010

Opensat 9900 HDPVR
Extremely fast with speedy menu - includes Blindscan



Programme info



Channel find function



Motor settings



EPG



Recordings list

the satellites we want to scan are set, the Multisat search will search each one in turn – either for all channels or just free-to-air.

As always, the channels found in the multisat scan, or the standard single satellite

scan, depend on the transponders that are pre-programmed into the receiver, have been added though using the network search option or input manually.

For the viewer who needs to get everything though, a blind search is also avail-

able. This has some welcome options that are sometimes forgotten – such as being able to set the frequency range to be scanned along with the desired polarity and frequency step. These are always appreciated by those of us who like to go after feeds that are grouped in specific areas of a satellite’s frequency range. On the flip-side, in the blind search we sadly can’t choose to save only FTA channels. A final fast search option exists for viewers of the Canal Digitaal, TW or TelesAT packages on Astra 1, where only channels from the selected provider are scanned.

Once the channels are in memory, a comprehensive editing section allows them to be sorted, renamed, deleted, moved or added to one of the

favourites lists. The manipulation of the favourites lists is the quickest I can ever remember using, it is so fast it is almost a pleasure instead of a chore – I never thought the day would come when I would hear myself saying that. Up to 200 channels can be added to each of the eight favourites lists, which can be renamed as required.

Everyday use

Navigating the large number of channels in the receiver after scanning continues the fast and logical feel of the setup menus. The main navigation buttons on the remote are large and well-spaced. A nice option is a dedicated “find” button. Where was CNN amongst the thousand channels in the list? Don’t worry about



Xvid playback |



EPG |

trawling through page after page of channels, however fast it may be ... just hit the find button and enter the first characters of the channel name and the list will filter itself before your eyes. It's like the auto-completion on a Google search. I love it.

Two other helpful buttons give quick access to important functions. "AV+" brings

up a small menu to change the audio mode, aspect ratio and letterboxing. "Opt" meanwhile gives options to individually change the audio track, subtitles and volume for each channel. This is great for boosting the channels that broadcast very quietly, and is just as useful when used in reverse to reduce the volume of those annoying channels who transmit eve-

rything with audio pumped up so loud you're in danger of blowing your windows out just by innocently tuning into them.

More innovative buttons exist – the HD button gives us a channel list of only the HD channels, and this can also be used as a filtering button when inside the channel list. The more obscurely named "M-F" button gives access to multi-feed channels. There's also a recall button, but not just the usual recall button – this is recall on steroids, giving us a menu listing the 10 last viewed channels to choose from.

Recording and timeshifting

Out of the box, this receiver was in danger of seeming a little basic but has already proved itself thanks to the intuitive menu system and speed. But remember the "PVR" in the name – with the addition of a USB device, it becomes a good PVR too.

Having recently treated myself to a 1.5 terabyte external hard drive (I am still staggered I can go out and buy such huge amounts of storage space), I excitedly hooked it up. The promise of having days or weeks worth of space was amazing. Unfortunately, all I got was a message saying it was already full! Believe me, even I have trouble filling that much

space. Perhaps like me the receiver was perplexed with what to do with such a big blank canvas to work on. Or maybe the drive was incompatible in some way. It is hard to know and probably not the fault of the receiver.

Thankfully my old faithful 40GB USB drive worked perfectly. In fact, even a USB memory stick will do the job. I tried it with an everyday 4GB memory stick, and it worked with only occasional jumps at the start of recording or playback, even with the high amounts of data needed for high definition. For those who don't need to use the recording functions often, or perhaps would only use time-shifting, an inexpensive memory stick could be all that is needed to utilise this part of the receiver.

The recording functions are best accessed via the EPG. Here again, some good design has been used, navigation is easy and intuitive. Two views can be chosen – the traditional grid, or a list of all programmes on a single channel. This comes into its own in places like ASTRA 1, where a full set of EPG information is available. It's such a pity that even now in the age of the PVR that so many channels still only transmit the data for the current and next programmes.

Pressing the record button



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adds the show into the receiver's timer, which is best thought of as being just like the timer found on an old VCR, remember those?

This is one place where we do find some limitations. There are only seven slots available, and we can only record one channel at a time, even if we choose two channels from the same transponder – although we are allowed to watch a different channel from the same transponder while a recording is in progress.

The timer entries can be edited to run daily or weekly which helps a little, but just seven available timer slots are simply inadequate for life in today's multi-channel world.

If you're able to live within these limits, the recording system does work well. When a recording is in progress, the channel list is trimmed down to only those that can be viewed without interrupting the recording; if you try to view a channel or access a menu that isn't available due to the recording, an unobtrusive box appears in the corner of the screen to remind you of how long is left

until the recording finishes.

Recordings are accessed from the play button which is located amongst a group of 20 smaller buttons at the bottom end of the remote. These are a little small and take some getting used to, it is quite easy at the start to get mixed up between play, pause, record, fast forward, slow motion and others. Like all controls though, it gets easier with practice.

Recordings are stored as the programme name with the time appended, with the date in the next column. This is just about OK to identify the show you wanted to replay, but I miss being able to press a button to get the programme information that would have been transmitted with the EPG data. This seems to be something overlooked by many PVRs these days. Isn't it possible to save this data with the recording so it can be accessed later?

In addition to recording and playback from satellite, the receiver can access pictures and MP3 files from the USB device. These follow the rest of the receiver in being easy to navigate and use. But that's not all. The

innovation I like most is the excellent implementation of DivX, Xvid, AVI, MPG and MP4 video files.

Not just the preserve of movie piracy on the internet, DivX and Xvid are good tools for compressing video into smaller files. I've built up quite an archive of material over the last few years, painstakingly transferred first from their source onto rewritable DVD, then finally converted into Xvid and archived permanently onto disk. I've always wanted to find something to make this process simpler, and to take out the quality loss from having to transport the recording via disk to the computer. Yes, I did try a PC card receiver, but didn't really get on with it too well, but that's another story.

Extra trickery

Often, the PVR will store its data in some kind of format that makes easy conversion difficult or even impossible. But the 9900 stores its files in a standard format, .trp. This can't be viewed on a computer right away by most popular media players, but whizzing it through a freeware conversion program called TSremux makes

it into a standard .ts transport stream file. Now it can be edited with your favourite editor, and turned into an AVI. You'll have to take my word for it, but the Xvid playback screenshot from Germany's ZDF Info was recorded from ASTRA 1 on the 9900, quickly converted into an Xvid AVI and played back again on the 9900 from a memory stick. Fantastic!!

There are no editing functions on the receiver, unless you want to go through the conversion route on a computer, which would be much too arduous to just cut out commercials or trim the start and end of a recording.

Time-shifting is also present – this can be turned on permanently in the setup menus, or accessed as required by pressing the pause button. One minor annoyance, again something that is strangely present in many PVRs these days, is that you have to choose either to record permanently or timeshift.

Once you're timeshifting and decide that the programme is worth keeping, you can't hit record to save it permanently. If you do



try this, the timeshift will be stopped, and a permanent recording starts at that point. It'd be much nicer if the already timeshifted material could be saved as the start of the recording, and then it continues from there.

An additional useful touch is both the receiver's software and channel data can be quickly backed up and restored from the USB device. Just like a computer, a backup can save you from a lot of stress if an upgrade or channel scan goes wrong. After all, who hasn't at one time scanned HOTBIRD while pointing at ASTRA and ending up with a crazy channel list from where the frequencies are the same? OK, maybe it's just me! But be warned, one day it will happen to you too,

and then you'll remember that backup!

Conclusion

This receiver is quite a surprise. The initial worries of having only one tuner and no hard drive are balanced by easy menu navigation and the ability to convert and edit the recordings on a computer.

The addition of innovations like AVI playback and SCR support are genuinely helpful for those who use them. There are obvious limitations when only one tuner is available. If you can live within these limits, you'd probably be very pleased with this receiver.

Expert Opinion

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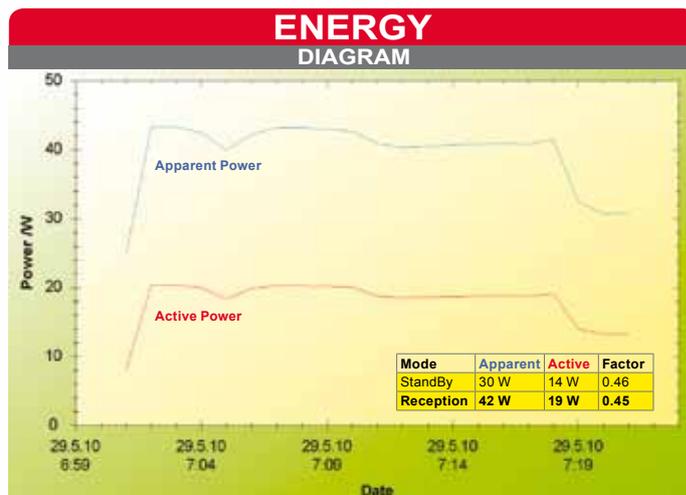
**Clear, good looking, intuitive menus and EPG
DivX / Xvid playback
Recordings made in a convertible format
SCR support**

-

**No inbuilt hard drive – but this means you
can choose one to suit your needs and budget
Only one tuner
Only 7 timer entries available
No editing of recordings**



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TECHNICAL DATA	
Distributor	ABC BIZNIS s.r.o., Krušovská 4646, 955 01 Topoľčany, Slovakia
Tel/Fax	+421 38 5313508
www	www.opensat.info
Model	9900HDPVR
Satellites	70
SCPC compatible	Yes
USALS	Yes
DiSEqC	1.0/1.1/1.2/1.3
Scart connectors	2
Symbol rates	DVB: 1000-45000
MPEG2 modes	MPEG-2, MPEG-4, H.264
Audio outputs	2 (left & right)
Video outputs	Composite, Component, HDMI
Resolutions	1080i, 720p, 480p/576p, 480/576i
UHF output	No
0/12 volt output	No
Digital audio output	S/PDIF
EPG	Yes
C/Ku-band compatible	Yes
Power supply	100-240V AC

