

OPENSAT XT-9500 HD

Designed for High Definition

I'm one of those people who prefers function over aesthetics – beauty is only skin-deep after all. There's no point in something looking good if it doesn't do the job. But I have to admit, as soon as the box was opened, I was seduced by the minimalist good looks of the OPENSAT XT-9500 HD. This classy black receiver from distributors ABC BIZNIZ of Slovakia boasts HD reception and good connection options at an attractive price, could we have both style and substance in a single package?

The front panel contains an on/standby button, and the vertical set of buttons control channel and volume. These light up in red when the unit is powered up, and they're quite bright too – almost too bright when watching TV in a dark room. A crisp text display shows the name and number of the channel being received, or the clock in standby. In standby mode, the button lights are still on, joined by the matching red glow of the on/standby button.

Under the flap on the front panel we find two CI slots for

pay-TV modules and even a Smart card reader. Also under the flap is a USB socket, used to upgrade the receiver's firmware from a USB stick.

Initial setup

There's plenty of options to choose from when it comes to hook-up time. Two Scart sockets are available for TV and VCR. Helpfully for recording purposes, the VCR Scart always outputs in standard definition, so even HD channels can be easily recorded to DVD or videotape if required. The TV Scart



can be set to use component video, so if your TV can handle such signals and only has a Scart connection available, you can still get HD resolution. HDMI, the standard connection for HD is also present along with component video RCA jacks. A composite video output is also available, but there's no place in the modern world for our old friend the UHF antenna loop.

I am somewhat unusual in having an old-tech CRT TV which can handle HD signals via a component input. After just a few minutes of head-scratching, I was viewing BBC HD from ASTRA 2.

Whilst the type of connection in use can be switched between RGB, Composite, or Component in the menus, a dedicated button on the remote sets the screen resolution. Available resolutions range from 480p

up to 1080i. This gives an extra use for the permanently standard definition VCR Scart, and this cured my initial confusion. You can use this as a backup when finding the correct resolution for your TV.

If you end up with a scrambled picture in a resolution your TV does not support as I did, you can switch over to the VCR Scart and still see the menu. Once I'd got it up to 1080i, I had a perfect HD picture and could say goodbye to the temporary VCR Scart route.

The picture quality of HD is, as you'd expect, superb. My usual everyday TV viewing setup consists of standard definition broadcasts via a Sky+ receiver, and I am usually quite proud of the picture quality from an RGB Scart connection with good quality cables. The quality increase though

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Available online starting from 28 November 2008

between this and HD delivered via component is amazing, and makes the usual picture look quite fuzzy by comparison. So much for RGB then!

Sadly, we're still in the early days of HD so there are few FTA channels to choose from. We can still get the benefits though, as standard definition broadcasts are upscaled when viewing through component video or HDMI. This results in a notice-

able increase in picture quality and sharpness over the standard Scart, but of course it's not close to the clarity of a true HD broadcast.

Audio output is available via the traditional RCA connectors, or a S/PDIF digital optical output.

The receiver's menus are clear, simple, and logically laid out. Choice of language is very



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OPENSAT XT-9500 HD
Style and substance in a single package



good, with 18 languages available. Most major European languages are covered plus Arabic and Persian, and those in Eastern Europe will be pleased to see Czech, Slovak, Slovenian and Hungarian included alongside the more usual choices.

The installation menu is the first port of call when setting up for the first time. A comprehensive list of 51 satellites is pre-programmed into the receiver, and these can be edited, deleted or added to as required. The corresponding transponder lists appear to be equally comprehensive and up-to-date.

DiSEqC 1.2 and USALS are included to give easy control of a DiSEqC motor for multi-satellite users. DiSEqC switches are

also supported and all necessary LNB parameters are editable, so most setups will be easily catered for.

Channel scanning is well-thought out. All transponders can be scanned, or just a single one. Network scanning is also available which is very useful on large satellites like ASTRA and HOTBIRD. A nice addition is a PID filter function, allowing scanning of only TV or radio channels. The satellite and transponder menus work together, aiding any editing required. The transponder list menu also contains a PID editing function, invaluable for those rare but important times where PIDs need to be entered manually.

Searching an entire satellite

is quite fast – an entire network scan of ASTRA 2 takes 16 minutes to scan 83 transponders. After the scan is complete, the list of found channels can be edited before they are committed to the receiver's memory. There's no blind scan function, but as this is a receiver designed to be used to watch standard TV rather than search for unusual channels, it doesn't really feel like it is missing.

With the channels safely in memory, we get to the further editing of the list to suit our individual preferences. This is never much of a pleasurable experience, but the XT-9500 does a good job here of making it easier than most.

All the editing, sorting and filtering functions we need are available, and are easy and intuitive to use. Eight favourites lists can be set up, and adding to these is easy too. A second window appears next to the channel list ready for channels to be copied into it. This can then be switched to, allowing arranging and editing in the same way as the main list.

Everyday use

Once we have our lists set up, finally we can sit back and watch some TV, and everyday viewing is helped by some good design here too. The main channel list can be sorted or filtered alpha-

betically, or by FTA/encryption status – and even filtered by just one encryption system if more than one is in use – perhaps useful if using more than one CAM.

The best feature relating to channel lists though is perhaps the most obvious, yet so often forgotten when receivers are designed. The receiver remembers which favourites list is in use, or what type of filter you have applied, until you decide to choose a new one. This alone makes the receiver so much nicer to use on a regular basis than so many others I've used in the past.

One possible criticism however is that the channels keep their original numbers even when a favourites list or filter is being used. There are advantages in this, as long as you can remember the numbers.

I personally might have found it easier to have the channels numbered 1,2,3 based on whatever list I'd chosen, rather than their original numbers – especially after I'd manually moved them around. But it's still easier to navigate than many other receivers.

I was initially a little disappointed there was no "view the last channel" button, which is always good for those of us



who try to keep up with two channels at once. But OPEN-SAT have included a little surprise along these lines, one that's not even mentioned in the manual. The "back" button is usually used to exit a menu to the previous level. But pressing it when no menu is displayed produces a list of the last eight channels viewed to select from. Not quite the one-touch zapping solution we've seen before, but it is still a nice feature to include.

It's good to also see teletext fully supported. Here in the UK, it's rapidly losing out as its inferior digital counterpart

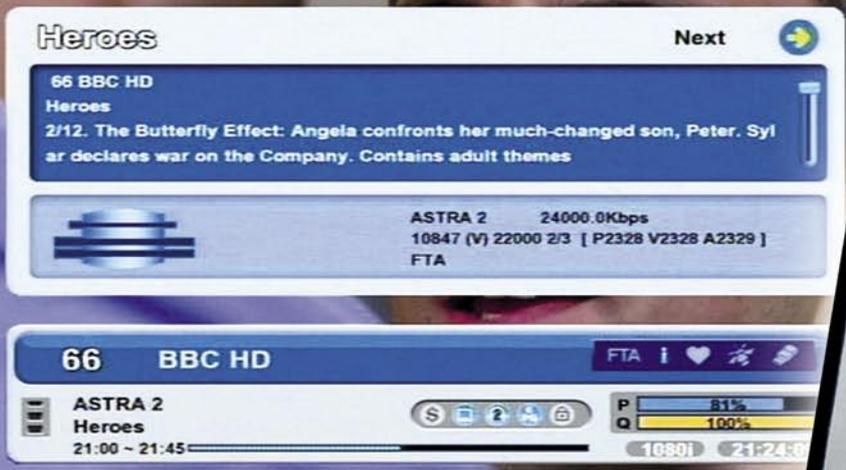
takes over. When our analogue transmissions end, so will traditional analogue text. But while it lasts, the XT-9500HD gives us a choice of both ways of receiving teletext – either through the receiver's inbuilt decoder, or on the TV itself via VBI insertion.

The XT-9500HD's EPG is also clear and easy to use, bearing in mind the limitations of the usual now/next data transmitted. Buttons are available to scroll forward and back by 24 hours, so perhaps in some places it can find further programme information, although I couldn't find anywhere where

this was available during our tests. The EPG links to the receiver's event timer, where sleep and wake-up options are available in addition to the usual function of changing to the required channel at the preset time.

Summary

Whilst there are no gimmicks or extras added such as games that get forgotten quickly, this receiver does what it needs to easily and well. The menus are logical, the on-screen displays are clear and helpful.



The remote is well laid-out and matches the receiver's beautiful black and silver looks. There are few downsides to the receiver. Perhaps a dimmer function, or one to turn off the front panel lights altogether could be good for viewers who like to view in the dark without distractions.

One thing I did quickly notice is how hot the case becomes, even in standby mode. I suppose that's the price we have

to pay for the extra horsepower needed to get pictures in HD quality onto our screen. A new software should help to solve this problem.

It's just a pity that there is not so much FTA HD material out there to watch at the moment. That will no doubt change in the near future, and when it does I'd certainly be very happy to have the XT-9500 as a permanent fixture in my living room.

Expert Opinion



Great looks and design
Intuitive menus, easy setup and editing
Well implemented favourites lists and channel list filtering



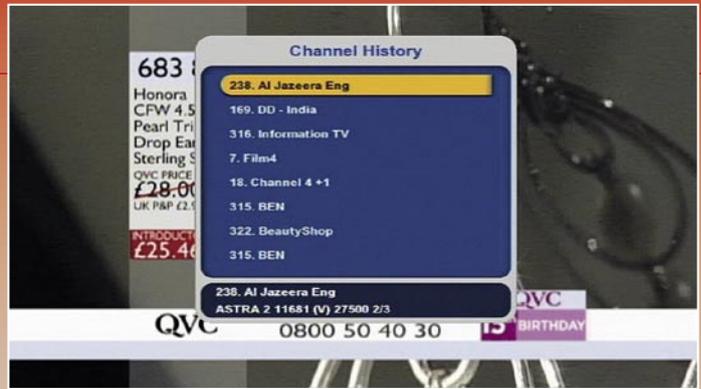
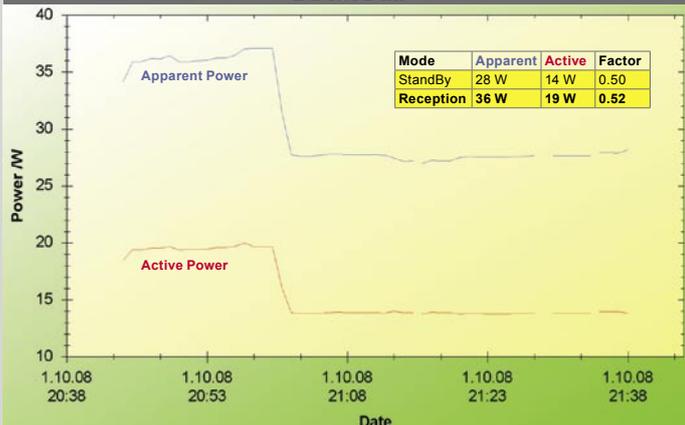
Andy Middleton
 TELE-satellite
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TECHNIC DATA

Distributor	ABC BIZNIS, Krušovská 4646, 955 01 Topoľčany, Slovakia
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Websites	www.abcbiznis.sk, www.opensat.sk
Model	XT-9500 HD
Function	Digital HDTV receiver for DVB-S and DVB-S2
Satellites / CI + Card	51+ / 2 Common Interfaces + 1 Smart Card Reader
Modes	MPEG-2 MP@ML, MPEG-4 Part 10/H.264
SCPC compatible	yes
DiSEqC / USALS	1.2 / yes
Scart connectors	2 / USB2.0 Connector for Software Upgrades
Symbol rates	1000-45000
Audio outputs	2 (L&R)
Video outputs	1x composite, Component, HDMI
Video Resolutions	480p, 480i, 576p, 576i, 720p, 1080i
Digital audio output	yes, S/PDIF
RS-232 / EPG	yes / yes
C/Ku-band compatible	yes
Power supply	100-250V AC, 50/60Hz

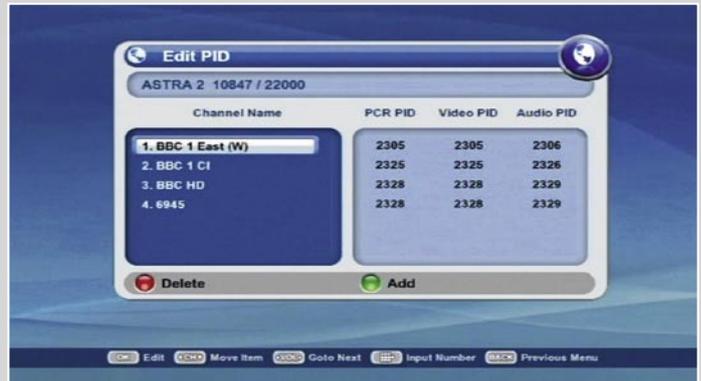
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