

TOP 10 CD DRIVES AND FLAT-PANEL DISPLAYS

CD drives		Last month's position	First reviewed	Price (ex VAT)	Warranty	Interface type	Read/write/rewrite speed	Data buffer size	Average access time (milliseconds)	Dimensions (width x depth x height)
Details										
1	Philips 20x10x40x 0800 896 324 www.pdstuff.philips.com	NEW	Jan 02	£119	1-year	EIDE	40x/20x/10x	2MB	100ms	146x200x40mm
2	Plextor PlexWriter 24/10/40A 01932 828 828 www.plextor.com	1	Nov 01	£129	1-year	EIDE	40x/24x/10x	4MB	140ms	146x202x42mm
3	Teac CD-W516EK 020 8906 9111 www.teac.de	3	Aug 01	£131	1-year	EIDE	40x/16x/10x	2MB	85ms	146x192x42mm
4	Cyberdrive 16x12x40x 01256 707 070 www.cyberdrive.com	NEW	Jan 02	£80	1-year	EIDE	40x/16x/12x	2MB	100ms	148x206x42mm
5	Plextor PX-S88TU 01932 828 828 www.plextor.com	NEW	Jan 02	£219	1-year	USB 2.0	24x/8x/8x	2MB	140ms	141x171x22mm

Flat-panel displays		Last month's position	First reviewed	Price (ex VAT)	Warranty	Screen size	Maximum resolution@ refresh rate	Pixel pitch	Dimensions (width x depth x height)	Weight	Digital connector	USB ports
Details												
1	NEC MultiSync LCD1830 0845 121 9200 www.nec-monitors.com	NEW	Jan 02	£729	3-year	18.1in	1,280x1,024 @75Hz	0.28mm	435x215x449mm	8.5kg	N	N
2	Taxan CrystalVision 780 01344 484 646 www.taxan.co.uk	1	Oct 01	£749	3-year	17.4in	1,280x1,024 @75Hz	0.27mm	450x245x455mm	10.4kg	N	4
3	Hitachi CML170 01628 643 315 www.hitachi.co.uk	2	Oct 01	£649	3-year	17in	1,280x1,024 @75Hz	0.26mm	424x178x436mm	6.5kg	N	N
4	Sony SDM-M61 0870 542 4424 www.sony-cp.com	3	Nov 01	£599	3-year	16in	1,280x1,024 @60Hz	0.25mm	400x180x357mm	5.4kg	Y	N
5	Diamond Technology 1510P 01628 788 500 www.diamondtechnology.co.uk	4	Dec 01	£330	3-year	15.1in	1,024x768 @75Hz	0.3mm	393x393x190mm	4.2kg	N	N

TOP 10 CD DRIVES

1 Philips 20x10x40x

This month, Philips has toppled Plextor from pole position, with a new drive that confounded us with its superior performance. Philips' drive may have a slower write rate of 20-speed compared to that of Plextor's 24-speed drive, but it beats it hands down in the performance stakes. The 20x10x40x took just three minutes 25 seconds to write our mixed test files to a CD-R – the fastest time we've seen by a long way. This performance didn't diminish when we tested it with CD-RWs. The 20x10x40x took just over five minutes to transfer the same files to a CD-RW. It's compatible with every CD format under the sun and comes with buffer underrun technology. Philips has also bundled an abridged version of Nero and InCD. This is a complete package for anyone who wants to burn their own CDs. And it's only £119 to boot.



TOP 10 FLAT-PANEL DISPLAYS

1 NEC MultiSync LCD1830

The fall in 15in flat-panel prices may be great news for anyone looking to throw out their old CRT monitor for a slimline LCD panel, but it's also had a positive effect on the larger screens as well. The LCD1830's 18.1in screen actually boasts a picture equivalent to a 19.5in CRT. Hardware specifications are impressive, and include a 160 degree viewing angle, a 0.28mm dot pitch and a 300:1 contrast ratio. Text definition is needle sharp and the gorgeous colour palette is a visual treat. The disappointing case construction is more a minor flaw than a reason not to buy the LCD1830. While its £729 asking price rivals those of the top 17.4in models, this vibrant and versatile screen would stand-out at twice the price.



TOP 10 CD DRIVES

2 Plextor PlexWriter 24/10/40A

The PlexWriter 24/10/40A is unseated from the top spot this month by Philips' new drive. This was one of the first CD drives with 24-speed writing, so we were keen to test if this translated into improved performance in our tests. The drive didn't disappoint, taking just four minutes 22 seconds to write 336MB of mixed files to a CD-R. However, Plextor admits some media may not be suitable for 24-speed writing and lists the ones it supports on its website. The 24/10/40A is bundled with an abridged version of the versatile Nero 5.5 and InCD packet writing software for the drive. All this comes with a price tag of just £129.



3 Teac CD-W516EK

Teac's CD-W516EK drive made a good impression on us but, with the quality of competition in our chart, it only made the number three spot. The CD-W516EK lives up to its promise, taking just four minutes 15 seconds to write the mixed test files to a CD-R. Teac has provided excellent software support, bundling Nero's Burning ROM 5.5. While the CD-W516EK has a buffer of only 2MB, it does include WriteProof technology, Teac's own version of BurnProof, which prevents recording problems.



4 Cyberdrive 16x12x40x

Cyberdrive is a relatively new company from Taiwan that hasn't yet established its reputation in this country. But this drive can hold its own, delivering good performance and value for money. It managed to write our 336MB test files to a CD-R in four minutes 18 seconds and the same files to a CD-RW in four minutes 26 seconds. However, the one thing that troubled us was the lack of buffer underrun support, which could lead to wasted media.



5 Plextor PX-S88TU

This is the first drive from Plextor to feature the new USB 2.0 connection. We weren't expecting fireworks from this portable 24-/eight-/eight-speed drive, but the new interface meant the drive exceeded our expectations. Though expensive, this is one of the fastest portable drives we've seen. The drive sports a classy design, but we had our doubts about its ability to cope with rough treatment.



TOP 10 FLAT-PANEL DISPLAYS

2 Taxan CrystalVision 780

Monitor stalwart Taxan has produced an outstanding 17.4in flat-panel for under £750. The Taxan includes a second RGB port, but no DVI (digital video interface). Hardware features (a pixel pitch of 0.27mm, a maximum resolution of 1,280x1,024 with a refresh rate of 75Hz) are good, but it's the Taxan's image quality that truly impresses. The CrystalVision's dark and rich colour palette offers levels of realism and atmosphere that aren't found on the other models. The Taxan wins the Recommended award with its superlative image quality, expansive 17.4in screen size and excellent price tag.



3 Hitachi CML170

The attractive midnight blue Hitachi CML170 makes an instant impression. The slimmed-down 6.5kg frame – the lightest of the 17in models – is partly due to the lack of advanced hardware features. The absence of a digital connector is a slight disappointment. Much better is the colourful menu system and the extensive setup options which allow you to fine-tune the screen almost to perfection. Graphically, the Hitachi CML170 is excellent but text definition isn't as good.



4 Sony SDM-M61

As with all Sony products, the M61 looks the part with a slender neck and tiny base. The scrollable menu system is sleek and the intuitive three-button navigation gives easy access to the ample range of functions, including smoothing, zoom and backlight. The screen is versatile and includes a DVI (digital video interface) socket. The Sony may lack the resonance and intensity of our top-rated flat-panels, but its refined and colourful images are pleasing to the eye.



5 Diamond Technology 1510P

With its extensive range and variety of options, Diamond Technology could be one to watch. The Diamond is up to scratch technically, with 1,024x768 resolution support and a wide viewing angle that looks more impressive than its 120 degrees would suggest. Image quality is fine and even if the colour palette is perhaps a little bright for some tastes, the overall effect is pleasing. Though not the most exciting flat-panel around, the 1510P has the convenience of a slimline flat-panel and a decent price tag.

