

# Feast your eyes

With 32-inch flat-screen TVs, LCD is the only game in town, writes John Archer

**BEST FOR: QUALITY LOVERS  
PHILIPS 32PFL9603D  
£800**

You won't find a 32in TV that works harder to create convincing moving pictures than this Philips set. LCD technology was designed for the (then) static images of a computer and the screens require processing trickery to counteract motion blur and insipid blacks. Philips's new Perfect Pixel HD technology achieves this with aplomb.

Other brands claim similar processing but this model sets a new benchmark for LCDs in terms of reducing fuzziness and keeping colours vibrant. The set also boasts Philips's Ambilight feature (which projects coloured light onto the wall behind the set to add ambience) and powerful sound. The drawbacks are the price and a few fiddly settings.

**Verdict:** Complex and pricey yet still a genuine class leader  
★★★★★ [www.philips.co.uk](http://www.philips.co.uk)



**BEST FOR: STYLE GURUS  
SAMSUNG LE 32A656 £575**

Samsung understands that high design is the route to people's wallets and this set stands out aesthetically. The semi-translucent bezel has a touch of red and has been put together without a single visible rivet. Picture quality was bettered only by the pricier Philips model, though both needed careful setup. The Samsung's vibrant colours and fast response time make it ideal for gamers. The only weakness was its weedy sound, but you can fix that by routing the audio to a hi-fi.

**Verdict:** Sumptuous set with classy pictures but needs a separate sound system.  
★★★★☆ [www.samsung.co.uk](http://www.samsung.co.uk)

**BEST FOR: VALUE HUNTERS  
TOSHIBA 32CV505DB £490**

This Toshiba is cheap but refreshingly far from nasty. It avoids two common budget shortcomings in that it has three HDMI sockets and likeable pictures. In darker scenes it produced a convincing black, rather than the milky grey of many budget LCD sets, and colours were fairly rich. That said, the TOSHIBA was the second-worst performer here. Its most notable drawbacks were blurring during fast-moving footage and flat audio.

**Verdict:** Despite its flaws, this is the best sub-£500 set around.  
★★★☆☆ [www.toshiba.co.uk](http://www.toshiba.co.uk)



**BEST FOR: ALL-ROUNDERS  
PANASONIC TX-32LZD85 £650**

This Panasonic does everything well rather than excelling in any area. It combines cute, if undramatic, styling with good, albeit not jaw-dropping, picture quality when compared with the best LCD sets. The sound is punchy, yet it was outgunned by the Philips and the Loewe. One distinctive virtue the Panasonic can trumpet is an SD memory-card slot, which means photography fans can quickly view shots on screen. This Panasonic was easy to set up and operate and its price is friendly too.

**Verdict:** Ideal compromise, but still a compromise.  
★★★★☆ [www.panasonic.co.uk](http://www.panasonic.co.uk)

**BEST FOR: CLUTTER BUSTERS  
HUMAX LP32-TDR1 £490**

With so many gadgets clamouring for space, anything that reduces that rat's nest of cables under your TV is a good thing. This Humax set is also a digital video recorder with a built-in 160GB hard drive that can capture up to 100 hours of TV shows. The LP32-TDR1 proved easy to set up, but recordings looked fuzzy compared with those from, say, a good Humax set-top recorder. The TV picture quality was only respectable and sound was feeble.

**Verdict:** Noble attempt at reducing cable clutter and ideal for a spare room yet underwhelming overall.  
★★★☆☆ [www.humaxdigital.com](http://www.humaxdigital.com)



**BEST FOR: GADGET FIENDS  
LOEWE CONNECT 32 FULL-HD+ £1,700**

If your computer is stuffed full of videos or photos you'd like to view on your TV, Loewe has the answer. This elegant German set connects wirelessly to a PC. This feature proved fiddly to get going but it worked well for music and photos, whereas video was more limited. The Loewe was top dog for sound. That said, despite its lavish price and designer pretensions, pictures were merely good rather than great, and it came fourth overall.

**Verdict:** Stylish and unique, but why not bag a better TV plus a wi-fi receiver box and trouser the change?  
★★★☆☆ [www.loewe-uk.com](http://www.loewe-uk.com)

## TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

**HDMI** The more of these HD-capable "digital Scart sockets", the better. The Humax has one, the Samsung four, all the others three

**Full HD** HD-ready is the HD standard, but some sets (not the Humax or Toshiba) have a higher resolution with 1,080 horizontal lines

**100Hz** Picture-processing system on some LCD TVs that helps to counteract motion blur. The Panasonic has it, while the Philips uses a similar technology

**USB** The Loewe, Philips and Samsung have a USB socket for showing pictures held on a USB memory stick. The Panasonic has an SD memory-card slot  
*Prices are the best found online*

### NEWSPAPERS SUPPORT RECYCLING



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Source: Pulp & Paper Information Centre

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**HISTORIC NEWSPAPERS**

### E-MAIL FROM AMERICA

Mark Harris  
IN SEATTLE — NEW TECH CITY

**E**ver noticed how cameras and MP3 players become obsolete almost before they need recharging? Imagine what it's like over here, then, in a country so dedicated to consumerism that the government occasionally sends its citizens rebate cheques to keep them spending freely.

Tech Forward ([www.techforward.com](http://www.techforward.com)) is a new Californian company that takes the guilt out of regular

upgrading and adds a green gloss. It guarantees to buy back working computers, sat navs, DVD players and televisions at any time within two years of purchase.

A MacBook Pro laptop, for instance, will earn \$450 (£240) after six months, falling to \$360 (£193) after two years. You have to buy an upgrade policy when you buy the item, and its cost is dependent on the item price. In the case of the MacBook Pro, you pay \$59 (£32).

All kit is resold or recycled, and the long-term aim is to reduce the number of old PCs that gather dust in basements — currently 75% of all PCs ever sold, according to the US National Safety Council.

Tech Forward is not the only company doing this. The retail behemoth Wal-Mart has a similar (but free) service that pays store gift cards rather than hard cash. Even Apple will give you 10% off a new iPod against an old one. Re-using and recycling is a good thing, but it's easy to be sceptical of schemes that are clearly designed to lock consumers

into a cycle of spending. The alternative — for working products at least — is an online auction site such as eBay, where well-cared-for gadgets will fetch as much as, if not more than, they do in the Tech Forward or Wal-Mart scheme.

Will Americans opt for this modest payout for a smoother upgrade to the next round of gadgetry? Let's just say that few companies have lost money by overestimating this nation's hunger for novelty and convenience.



### GADGETS OF THE WEEK

**DENON AH-NC732 NOISE-CANCELLING HEADPHONES**  
£250 [www.denon.co.uk](http://www.denon.co.uk)

**WHAT ARE THEY?** Regular commuters will appreciate just how much noise-cancelling headphones can cut down the background hubbub on a train. As an additional benefit, cutting out the noise means you can play music at lower volumes, which helps to prevent hearing damage. These classy Denons are more compact than most headphones of this type and they cleverly fold up to fit into the rigid case supplied. They are lightweight and surprisingly comfortable in view of the fact that they enclose the entire ear. Because the batteries are built in, you can wear them without any wire connected if you're not wanting to listen to music but you're keen to, say, relieve the tiresome engine drone in an aeroplane. Denon says the batteries provide 40 hours of noise-cancelling duty, after which the AH-NC732 cans still serve well as standard headphones.

**SHOULD YOU BUY THEM?** The Denons offer a fine balance between size and practicality. They're certainly not cheap, but in our brief tests they managed to deliver the goods in sonic terms. Should you wish to, you'll be able to treat yourself to a pair from next month.



**MOTOROLA ATILA MOBILE PHONE**  
[tbc.www.motorola.com/uk/](http://tbc.www.motorola.com/uk/)

**WHAT IS IT?** It seems as if every mobile-phone maker is grimly determined to have an iPhone-alike handset in its range, sporting a fancy touchscreen. Last week, details emerged about a forthcoming Motorola handset, currently codenamed Atila, that may out-iPhone the iPhone. In addition to having a 2.8in touchscreen, it will run Microsoft's Windows Mobile 6.1 software and deliver the newer HSDPA type of 3G data connection, as well as wi-fi.

No release date has yet been confirmed, and by the time the new phone hits the shops, Motorola's rivals could well have left it behind.

**SHOULD YOU BUY ONE?** Motorola certainly needs a big hit — could this be it? It's a big ask, for the Atila must conquer not only the iPhone but also a host of other sophisticated Windows Mobile touchphones such as the LG Secret and HTC Touch Diamond.

