

THEMESCE H56 DLP projector £3,500

DLP DELIGHT

Themescene (aka Optoma) proves that stunning DLP pictures needn't cost the earth with the blindingly good £3,500 H56. Marco Bilello has the pleasure of auditioning it



Themescene is the home cinema arm of UK-based DLP specialist Optoma, one of the few projector companies that manufactures and develops DLP components. This hands-on approach has already delivered the impressive H50 (January '03 issue).

The Themescene H56 benefits from a host of technological improvements including a faster colour wheel and redesigned mirror structure. The omens look good, as this has boosted contrast to an impressive 2,000:1.

The H56 is also a real cutie. This diminutive model is blessed with smooth contours, while the lens is discreetly recessed into the front.

A DVI input enables digital images to be piped from PCs and compatible DVD players such as Tag McLaren's DVD32FLR (see p42). With the supplied DVI to component video lead this can also be used to accept prog scan feeds.

The 15-pin VGA input displays analogue images from a PC. With the supplied adaptor it can also accept interlaced component video signals. S-video and composite video jacks are present, while there's also an RS232 serial port and a 12V trigger.

The onscreen menu is a paragon of design, providing easy access to the host of picture tweaks on offer. Features are prodigious. The 180Hz six-segment, four-speed colour wheel boasts an advanced colour coating, designed to improve colour reproduction and refresh images more smoothly. Like Sharp's XV-Z10000 (see p86) the mirrors tilt

at 12° instead of 10°, delivering 20 per cent higher brightness and a superior contrast.

The DLP chips are manufactured using the Dark Metal 3 process, which improves black levels and helps to deliver the astonishing 2,000:1 contrast ratio. The gaps between mirrors have been reduced to minimise light leakage, while a dark absorbing material is applied around the mirrors to prevent further reflection.

The H56 is optimised for widescreen viewing of PAL TV and DVD signals and features a native mode that ensures 576-line resolution is matched pixel by pixel. And, as there's no need for scaling or extra processing, there's less image degradation. The projector also uses Silicon Image's Si504 progressive chip, which offers line doubling with 3:2 and 2:2 pulldown detection.

There's also a raft of picture tweaks available enabling the alteration of colour, brightness, contrast, tint, sharpness and gamma, while there are two user settings. More advanced adjustments can be made to the brightness and contrast of separate red, green and blue levels. Other outstanding extras include a 10-step white peaking option and three temperature modes.

PERFORMANCE

The H56 delivers some of the best DLP pictures we've seen. Using the DVI prog scan feed the colour range is phenomenal. The lush green grass of the rolling fields in *Fellowship of*

the Ring is saturated to bursting point. In the past, DLP projectors have struggled to recapture reds faithfully. But the H56 reproduces even the most vivid red with remarkable depth.

The common DLP failing of rainbow effect is pretty much non-existent, making the largely noiseless images spectacularly clean and smooth.

The black level is extremely impressive, with fine greyscale reproduction and supreme definition in the movie's dark opening scene. The contrast is brilliant, too, as the bright magical light display unleashed by Gandalf sparkles against the dark night sky.

The only real blemish is that while the picture is very smooth, it's also a little soft. Even cranking the sharpness to its highest setting fails to remedy this. You will also need a big room for this projector due to its limited throw and relatively inflexible zoom and focus arrangement.

Overall, Themescene's H56 is a storming projector. The raft of technological improvements really do bear fruit, delivering an astonishing performance. Without the annoying rainbow effect the picture is cinematically smooth and detailed.

In fact, there's hardly anything negative to say about this projector. Compared with Sharp's XV-Z10000, which sells for a whopping £6,000 more, the minor picture quibbles are easy to live with. This is one of the best DLP projectors money can buy ■

SPECIFICATIONS

FEATURES

Six-segment, four-speed 180Hz colour wheel; native 1,024 x 768 XGA resolution (1,024 x 567 WSVGA compressed); PAL/Secam/NTSC support; 576p, 480p, 480i, 720i, 720p, 1080i compatibility; 2,000:1 contrast ratio; 1,000 ANSI lumens; 1.2x manual zoom; keystone correction; 16:9/4:3 aspect ratios; cinema, normal, vivid preset modes with memory banks; 2 user settings; contrast, brightness, colour, tint, sharpness, gamma adjustment; contrast and brightness adjustment of red, green and blue levels; three colour temperature modes; 10-step white peaking; film, video, graphics, PC image modes; 32dB fan noise

SOCKETS

DVI/progressive scan component video/VGA input; 15-pin VGA/interlaced and progressive component video input; S-video input; composite video input; RS232 input; 12V trigger

DIMENSIONS

277(w) x 225(d) x 85(h)mm

WEIGHT

2.9kg

CONTACT

Optoma ☎ 01923 691800
www.themescene.tv

TEST DATA

Colour: excellent. Virtually no bleed from sharp edges
Geometry: perfect. No curvature at all
Frequency response: excellent. Clear all the way to 5.8MHz

VERDICT

WHAT'S GOOD

Picture quality; features; native PAL resolution

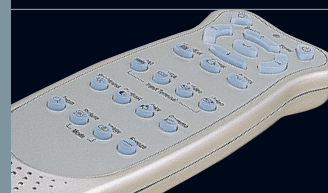
WHAT'S BAD

Image throw

OVERALL

Top-class DLP projector that sets the standard in its price bracket

PICTURE ★★★★★
FEATURES ★★★★★
EASE OF USE ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★
OVERALL ★★★★★



Small, backlit and easy to use