

SOUND & VISION

from "DVD Distinctions" spotlight test report in the September 2004 **S&V**. Copyright © 2004 by Hachette Filipacchi Media U.S., Inc. All rights reserved.

in the lab

	PANASONIC DVD-F87S	RCA DRC510N	TOSHIBA SD-V392	V INC. BRAVO D2
VIDEO PERFORMANCE (measured with test patterns from various DVDs using composite-video output)				
Maximum-white level error	±0 IRE	+5 IRE	-8 IRE	-12 IRE
Setup level	+7.5/0 IRE (switchable)	+7.5/0 IRE (switchable)	+7.5/0 IRE (switchable)	+5 IRE (fixed)
Horizontal luminance frequency response (re level at 1 MHz)				
at 3/4 MHz	+0.66/+0.83 dB	±0/-0.26 dB	-1.3/-1.7 dB	-0.54/-0.63 dB
at 5/6 MHz	+1.1/+0.83 dB	±0/-0.45 dB	-2.0/-2.6 dB	-1.4/-1.9 dB
at 6.75 MHz (DVD limit)	+0.34 dB	-1.0 dB	-2.7 dB	-2.2 dB
Onscreen horizontal resolution	540 lines	540 lines	540 lines	540 lines
In-player letterboxing	fair	poor	good	good

On the whole, all four players did well in our video lab tests. The various errors for maximum white and black level can be compensated for by adjusting your monitor's brightness and contrast controls with test patterns (it may do this automatically). The downward-sloping horizontal luminance response of the Toshiba measured at its composite output — responsible for a slight softness on test patterns — disappeared almost entirely through its component output. The VCR section gave typical VHS resolution, or less than half that of DVDs. The in-player letterboxing grades are relevant only if you watch letterboxed ("enhanced for widescreen") movies on a 4:3 set.

The progressive-scan performance of all the players was satisfactory playing material that originated as 24-frame-per-second film and was encoded as 2:3 pulldown signals. As usual, progressive-scan playback of material originating on interlaced video was less smooth, with V Inc.'s

looking the grittiest. Both of our RCA samples had puzzling smearing problems — most easily visible with images containing text, like film credits — when switched to progressive mode.

Stereo audio performance was, at best, okay. The usual problem was noise. The RCA's noise level, at -65 dB, was an audible 11 to 12 dB worse than the others', which hovered around -74 dB. But except for DVD-Audio playback on the Panasonic, you can avoid this problem by using each player's digital audio output. Playing 24-bit DVD-A discs, the Panasonic was only a couple of decibels quieter than a perfect CD player. Bass management was handled well, with consistent settings for different stereo and multichannel media.

All four units played both fixed- and variable-bit-rate MP3 and WMA files recorded on CDs (WMA playback is an undocumented feature of the V Inc.), but none could play MP3 or WMA files recorded on DVDs.

— David Ranada