

DVD Recorder Revisited

Alan Wilburn

Pre-amble

In 2004 I bought a Panasonic DVD Recorder with Hard Disc and wrote a review in LwT covering the main points of the machine.

The machine worked perfectly well for about 14 months and I found I had an emergency admission to hospital so I set the timers so programmes would be recorded for a couple of weeks. Eight weeks later I returned home and found that the DVD was not working, it wouldn't respond to any commands even after it was powered down to get rid of any volatile memory.

I had a 5 year service contract so I called Comet in, the engineer could not get it started so it went away to the workshop. When it returned it recorded and played back OK on the HD but would not transfer programmes to disc. Comet claimed it was incompatible discs but, after a number of visits and trips to the workshop and showing the technician 60+ discs of previous good recordings, they reluctantly admitted there was a problem especially after the technician spent a couple of hours checking the settings and tried unsuccessfully to record to his own new disc in my home.

They decided (3 months on) that it was the operating system and they sent for a new OS disc from Panasonic. When this was loaded and gave the error message 'this disc is incompatible with this machine' they at last decided to replace the machine.

Part of this article is to show you should persevere to get equipment repaired completely. When it was VCRs they always blamed the tapes now it is the discs. My original machine was no longer in production, even though it was the latest when I bought it, so I looked around and got a replacement allowing me the opportunity of writing this article. Both were top of the range when bought. So what has changed?



The Panasonic DMR-EH60DEB

General

The remote control is plucky (not very robust) and key pushes are not as precise as before. The operating system is improved, it does not keep going into 'self checks' and functions well all the time. It now accepts DVD-RW discs and memory cards. It has the capability to record FreeView programmes without a special box. It still will not play the vision that is on some audio CD's no matter how I alter settings on the DVD and TV.

Hard Drive

The drive is now 200Gb which gives the following times:

XP (High Quality) 44 hours

SP (Normal Play) 89hours

LP 177 hours

EP 355hours.

This looks very good but do remember you can loose a lot of programmes if the HD gives up the ghost. When mine was faulty I could not save anything, eventually the data was transferred over but the catalogue would not write to disc. I find Long Play to be perfectly adequate for normal viewing; EP gives poor sound.

Discs

The machine will record onto DVD RAM, DVD-R and DVD-RW discs with a choice of 1 hour XP, 2 hours SP, 4 hours LP or 8 hours EP per side. You can record to any of these discs instead of using the HD if you wish, remembering the DVD-R is a WORM (Write Once Read Many) disc. The RW disc needs formatting on the machine to make it usable. I have used 16X speed discs so far without problems but it is always sensible to try discs before buying 50 cakes etc.

Dubbing (Copying)

You can copy data from the HD to disc at the set speeds or using a high speed transfer, if this option has been selected for the initial recording.

On my previous machine it took a maximum of 16 minutes to transfer a disc of data at high speed. On the new machine it takes about 3 minutes to analyze the data to be transferred and it tells you how long it will take to transfer.

A full disc of data can take between 20 and 55 minutes.

If you wish to use the disc on another machine it has to be finalized ie changed to DVD-V format but you can still reuse RAM and WR after re-formatting.

Whilst the copying is taking place you can either record to the HD or watch a programme.

FreeView

This updates itself via on screen queries when it detects a new programme on power up, so it keeps up to date.

When selected, a timetable appears in either portrait or landscape format and can be scrolled up/down and side/side over all available programmes in a seven day time period.

Selecting a programme marks it on the timetable and enters the details including the name of programme into the timer page. You can select a number of 'filters' so it can display only films or sport or news or drama etc or show all available programmes.

Memory Card

There is a slot that takes SD memory cards from 8 Mb to 1 Gb in size and these can be used to display JPEG's.

Pictures can be rotated and you can zoom in/out on pictures smaller than 640 x 480.

There is a slide show option with timed display and files of pictures can be edited. You can copy all the pictures on a card to HD or DVD if you wish.

Conclusion

There have been a number of positive improvements on the new machine and it is available in a version with a built in VCR to help copy between tape and disc.

I would not buy it for the improvements as I was perfectly happy with the original machine when working correctly.

These days machines are changing at such a rate it would cost a fortune to keep up to date with the 'all singing and dancing' latest machine. Both my machines were top of the range when bought, the second about 17 months later than the first and £100 cheaper.

I have had a delay in writing this article because of iffy health and there are already new top of the range machines about!