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Sony VPL-HW65ES | Projector | £2800

"A truly enticing watch"

FOR Immersive picture quality; fine detail; strong contrast**AGAINST** No 4K; limited connectivity; not futureproofed

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 (£400) A talented Blu-ray player at a great price



With Ultra HD 4K TV screens becoming more affordable for the home, is there a place for a £3000 projector that 'only' does Full HD resolution? With the VPL-HW65ES, Sony appears to be convinced that there is.

Having wowed us with its stunning 4K and HDR-toting VPL-HW520ES projector a few months ago, Sony proves it doesn't have to push the boundaries of picture technology to give home cinema fans a great big-screen experience. It does just fine with a 'normal' 1920 x 1080 picture.

An unearthly feel

Unlike the pixel-popping 4K HDR projector, the Sony VPL-HW65ES doesn't grab you by the eyeballs straight from the off. It coaxes you in gently, until you are completely immersed in the wonderful picture quality. 4K may have the extra pixels (and HDR opens up a world of subtleties), but the VPL-HW65ES's Full HD resolution has no problem digging up fine detail.

You can pick out the textures of clothing that the townsfolk of *ParaNorman* are wearing, right down to ratty sneakers and the fluff on a well-worn jumper. Even in the stop-motion animated world there's a convincing feel to trees, houses and streets, while the green tinge around the ghosts gives an appropriately unearthly feel.

Colours are natural, yet also rich. A less capable projector would struggle with distinguishing the various hues of brown and grey in *The Imitation Game*, but the Sony displays the various wooden textures, and black and grey suits with ease. Skin-tones and textures look believable, too - there's plenty of subtlety on show here.

The picture has a quality you associate with watching film reels in the cinema: the kind of depth and detail that doesn't shout out at you, colours and sharpness of the picture believable, all the while drawing you into the film. *Constantine's* gothic noir palette looks appropriately moody thanks to the Sony's prowess with both dark and bright scenes. Rays of sunshine permeate the shadows without diminishing the intensity of inky deep corners.

The VPL-HW65ES uses Sony's proprietary SXRD system, which is a type of LCOS (liquid crystal on silicon - a combination of DLP and LCD technology) display technology to ensure you get a strong contrast (a claimed 120,000:1 in the Sony's dynamic setting) while outputting a bright

The Sony has a sturdy, curved design that won't stick out in your living room



picture at 1800 lumens, without working your eyes too hard. That ability to deliver strong contrast with such ease and subtlety makes the Sony a truly enticing watch.

If we have a criticism, it's that the picture's sharpness falters briefly when it plunges into a dark scene. The outlines of characters and objects look just a tad unstable, but snap back to focus when the scene brightens up. Luckily, it's not enough of a drop to distract us from our movie.

Lease of life

The Sony won't only do justice to your Blu-ray disc collection, it will also give your DVDs a fresh lease of life. There's the inevitable drop in subtlety, but it's still an enjoyable watch thanks to the Sony's natural colours and interplay of light and shadows. While testing, we found that we couldn't play DVDs natively through the HDMI inputs (the only source inputs available). A workaround for this is letting your Blu-ray player handle all the upscaling.

You would think that a big projector like the VPL-HW65ES would need hours to set up. In reality, adjusting the zoom, focus and lens shift to get a crisp, centred image takes just a handful of minutes. It would be even quicker if it had an automated lens shift system as on the VPL-HW520ES, but the manual process works just fine. Armed with a THX Optimizer disc, we breeze through the straightforward picture settings too.

Connections are limited to two HDMI inputs. There are LAN, remote and trigger ports for a home automated system, but no legacy inputs for those who don't have HD sources or want more options.

Although other manufacturers are starting to phase it out, the Sony features



The included remote control is neatly laid out and responsive

active 3D. You will have to shell out around £50 apiece for 3D glasses though, as none are supplied.

The projector itself is sturdy and hefty. Its curved shaped and minimal design means it never looks bulky, so it shouldn't stick out in your living room. It's available in black or white finishes, and the included remote is neatly laid out and responsive.

A great sub-£3k projector

If you're in the market for a great sub-£3000 projector for your home, the Sony VPL-HW65ES is worth considering. In fact, this projector is now the same price as one of our 2015 Award-winners - the VPL-HW55ES - making it an even better proposition. But in the current technology climate it matters that this projector doesn't do 4K. The stunning 4K and HDR-capable Sony VPL-HW520ES is the clear choice here - but it does come with an £8800 price tag.

If you're not concerned about future-proofing just yet (and it will be a few years before 4K Blu-ray is truly mainstream), we're confident you'll be more than happy with the Sony VPL-HW65ES.

KEY FEATURES



Full HD resolution



Active 3D (glasses not included)



2 x HDMI inputs

WHAT HI-FI? says

Rating ★★★★★

PICTURE ★★★★★

FEATURES ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VERDICT An excellent proposition for film buffs who want a compelling, cinematic picture for their Blu-ray collection