

Smart upgrade

Manhattan's slick UHD-ready Freeview Play streamer is a cord cutter's delight, says **Steve May**



With no HDD, the T3 is brilliantly quiet in operation

THE MANHATTAN T3 is a 4K-enabled Freeview Play TV box for the streaming era. What sets it apart from Freeview set-top boxes of yore is that there's no hard drive onboard. This isn't a PVR in the millennial sense; it doesn't want to record.

Designed for viewers who value ease-of-use and convenience, it instead offers a full fist of Freeview Play catch-up TV services including the BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub, All4, UKTV Play and Demand 5, plus CBS CatchUp, Horror Bites, the BBC's news and sport apps and YouTube.

Setup and tuning emulates that found on a Freeview Play TV. Linear TV channels are accessed via the familiar Freeview Play guide, while its roll-back seven-day EPG provides

an intuitive way to browse shows you may have missed. The Freeview channel bouquet currently comprises 85 channels, all subscription-free, of which 15 are available in hi-def.

Finished in gloss black, this curvy British-designed box has a remarkably

small footprint, about as wide as the IR (learning) remote control it comes with. It looks rather dishy. There's no front-panel display – just a status light – but it doesn't really need one.

Rear connections comprise terrestrial aerial loop-through, a single HDMI output (HDCP 2.2-enabled), digital optical audio output and USB (for software updates, but sadly not media playback).

In addition to Wi-Fi, there's Ethernet if you want to hardwire a network connection.

4K output

Leave the T3 on Auto and it'll display the highest resolution that your TV is capable of, up to 2160p. Freeview content is upscaled. Remember to ensure your chosen HDMI TV port is enabled for full-spec UHD Deep Colour (initially I didn't) or the 4K output could be limited to 25Hz, which results in stutter and judder.

The specification also embraces HDR10 and HLG HDR. You won't find these on standard Freeview transmissions, but crucially the BBC iPlayer app is compatible with 4K HDR trials.

The box also delivers 4K from YouTube. Helpfully, a Matched Frame Rate mode enables it to display various frame rates from the streaming video service, including 24-,

SPECIFICATIONS

HDD: No **TUNER:** Yes. Single Freeview Play tuner **CONNECTIONS:** HDMI output; optical digital audio output; Ethernet; aerial input and loopthrough; USB (service) **DIMENSIONS:** 210(w) x 46(h) x 188(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 368g

FEATURES: Integrated Wi-Fi; Freeview Play TV catch-up apps (BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub, All4, Demand 5, UKTV Play, CBS CatchUp, Horror Bites, BBC News, BBC Sport); YouTube 4K; HDCP 2.2-enabled HDMI 2.0; Watchlist functionality; Smart Search functionality; Dolby Digital Plus

30- and 60 frames per second. This avoids any unwanted stuttering caused by a hard conversion to 50Hz.

Usability is excellent. The box is quick to navigate and quick to respond, thanks to a quad-core processor. A dedicated Freeview Play button on the zapper opens up a dashboard for easy access to live TV, catch-up channels and OTT. The EPG may be standard fare, but the Smart Search function is rapid, offering instant intuitive results (although there's no voice support).

One additional trick, which we've not seen on Freeview Play TVs, is the option to build a content Watchlist aggregated from on-demand players, via the Featured menu. This is surprisingly helpful.

Picture performance is as you would expect. Low-res standard-definition Freeview channels are a challenge on larger screens, HD is crisp and 4K content streamed from YouTube quite spectacular. Audio output is Dolby Digital Plus.

One perhaps unsung benefit of having no hard drive in the box itself is that it's blissfully silent in operation. If you've grown used to the relentless chugging and churning of your PVR HDD, this will come as a blessed relief.

Terrific value

If you enjoy a fast, robust network connection the need for a hard drive recorder is not what it once was, and this streaming media box is an excellent alternative. The combo of live Freeview channels and on-demand works well. It would, of course, be nice to add Netflix and Amazon Prime video to the mix, but Manhattan is teasing with the promise of feature and service updates in the future, so we're keeping our fingers crossed. As it stands though, the T3 is terrific value ■

HCC VERDICT



Manhattan T3 Freeview Play 4K
→ £80 → Manhattan-tv.com

WE SAY: If you think PVRs are passé, then this 4K-ready Freeview Play receiver/VOD streamer is a great alternative. Low-cost, top-notch.