

FACT FILE

- 80GB hard disk
- RGB Scart input
- Bi-directional i.Link
- DVD-RW recording
- MP3, WMA, JPEG playback
- 32-event PDC equipped timer



Pioneer DVR-520H | HDD/DVD recorder

£600

Following the success of its DVR-5100H HDD/DVD recorder last year, Pioneer has upped the ante with the most capacious HDD recorder to date, the 160GB DVR-720H. Reviewed last month, the deck got a great review and a Best Buy award. This month we have its smaller, but similarly specified, sibling, the 80GB DVR-520H, in front of us.

Despite having only half the hard-disk space of the DVR-720H, the DVR-520H is no slouch when it comes to packing recordings on to disk, offering up to 102hrs of storage at its lowest quality setting. That should be more than enough space, before archiving to DVD becomes a necessity.

Looks-wise, this combi deck is more than up to the standard to which we've become accustomed from Pioneer. The DVR-520H is just 59mm high and comes clad in an elegantly contoured silver chassis. With barely any space on the ultra-sleek front panel, controls are kept to a minimum. Previous Pioneer recorders featured a multi-function dial for carrying out most of the deck's operations but sadly this has been lost on both these new recorders.

The majority of functions must now be carried out via the bundled remote. Fortunately, Pioneer's has done a good job with it and despite being complex, buttons are laid out in a organised manner, ensuring exceptional ease of use.

Front panel connectivity includes S-video, composite and stereo audio inputs under a drop-down flap on the left, and Pioneer's trademark bi-directional i.Link input on the right. The latter proves a particularly useful addition for digital camcorder users, since footage can easily be transferred from camera to disk no loss of quality.

Connectivity on the rear of the deck, includes composite, S-video, stereo audio and optical digital audio outs, along with

the ace-in-the-hole – an RGB Scart input. Absent from previous Pioneer decks, this is a real boon and allows for high quality recordings from digital TV. The lack of component outputs is slightly disappointing but the RGB Scart softens the blow.

Operating the DVR-520H is a pleasure, the comprehensive onscreen menus making set-up easier than ever. As with previous generations of Pioneer recorders, you'll

"It's almost impossible to tell recordings apart from the original source"

find a wealth of picture presets to tweak the tuner and AV inputs. You can fiddle with colour level, noise reduction and detail on recordings as well as playback.

PERFORMANCE

With so much praise garnered before playback or recording was even attempted, expectations were understandably high for the DVR-520H. However, even we didn't expect a display of such competence.

When recording at the highest quality setting ('Fine' mode), pictures and sound are so impressive, that it's almost impossible to tell them apart from the original source. Recordings at this level, though, only allow you to fit 1hr of footage on to a 4.7GB disc.

When more recording time is needed, the SP, LP and EP modes can be used to squeeze more hours on to disc, with recording quality remaining high across all three modes. Even EP recordings far surpass VHS quality and provide the longest recording time – a whopping 6hrs.

Whichever mode you employ, however, you'll find that digital noise is kept to a bare minimum and other recording nasties, such as digital artefacting, are almost entirely absent. Even the lowest quality mode surpasses VHS in terms of colour vibrancy and the stereo audio system renders soundtracks with an impressive degree of character and dynamism.

Since the DVR-520H is a smaller hard-disk version of the DVR-720H, if detailed tech lab data and a broader overview of this deck's ability is required, then be sure to check out the full review in our August issue.

However, if all you want is the thumbs up and an affirmation that the Pioneer is a Best Buy then look no further. With a fantastic performance, great looks and an RGB Scart to boot, the DVR-520H is one of the best HDD/DVD recorders currently available ■ Alex Bentley

WHAT'S GOOD

Recordings; RGB Scart; hard-disk capacity

WHAT'S BAD

No component output

PICTURE (RECORDING) ★★★★★

PICTURE (PLAYBACK) ★★★★★

SOUND ★★★★★

FEATURES ★★★★★

EASE OF USE ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

ALSO CONSIDER...

PANASONIC DMR-E85

Component output and progressive scan add to a deck that's every bit the equal of the DVR-520H
Reviewed: Jul '04

SHARP DV-HR300H

A great recorder that gives a solid performance
Reviewed: May '04

OVERALL VERDICT

Another resounding success for Pioneer and the RGB Scart is the icing on the cake

★★★★★

FEATURES

80GB hard disk; Nicam tuner; 32-event/1-month timer with PDC/VideoPlus; easy timer; 4 record modes (1 to 6 hours) and 32 MN (manual) steps; 2-channel 256kbps Dolby Digital audio recording (linear PCM for 'Fine' mode); input video adjustments; auto audio record levels; bi-directional i.Link; disc history; recording protection; auto 10 or 15min chapter marking; high-speed copy; one-touch copy; disc back-up; OTR; optimised recording/dubbing playlist editing (HDD/DVD-RW VR only); satellite control; chasing playback (HDD/DVD-RW VR only); auto-install; Disc Navigator; 30-disc 'history'; playback video adjustments; commercial skip; slow-motion; still frame advance/reverse, resume, repeat, random; multi-brand TV remote; dimensions: 420(w) x 59(h) x 339(d)mm; weight: 4.2kg

SOCKETS

Rear: stereo audio out; composite out; S-video out; 2 Scarts (composite/S-video/RGB in/out, standby-loopthrough); aerial in/out; optical digital out; control in
Front: i.Link; composite input; S-video input; stereo audio input

CONTACT

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☐ Bags of buttons, logical layout