

TF7000HDPVRt or DPS1...which one?



Topfield or Beyonwiz

Finally all the hype about digital TV looks like coming true, the commercial networks will be able to broadcast additional content via digital TV, but only in high definition. What this means is if you want to keep up with the digital era, you'll need to get a digital high definition set top box or PVR and most likely the latter if you really want to get the most out of it. So what do you choose?

The high definition market will soon be swamped with devices. Two will definitely stand out as major contenders because of their reputation and history, Topfield and Beyonwiz. The Topfield TF7000HDPVRt and Beyonwiz DPS1 models have been highly anticipated, especially by the Topfield fans, as the TF7000HDPVRt has been a long time coming. Because Topfield are well seasoned in the PVR segment, you would expect their latest model to at least be on par with the standard definition models they sell, but does it match up to its predecessors reputation? The last previous Topfield was the 6000PVRt which has a Wireless interface to support IceTv and network connection, and was probably the best standard definition model they released. Sadly the 7000 doesn't have a wireless interface so is at least a step backwards...for now. What about the Beyonwiz DPS1, who are Beyonwiz and why do they

and then go buy a DVD Recorder because they don't understand the concept of a PVR! Another disappointment with the 7000 is unlike the previous 5000 and 6000 series, it doesn't support add-on software (TAPS), a feature many Topfield users take great advantage of. The DPS1 doesn't offer this feature either, but I wasn't expecting it would considering how feature rich it is. If either unit were to support add-on software, I'd change the EPG

deserve the same consideration as the Topfield? When a group of ex-Topfield employees form to build a competitive product, it deserves a look! Beyonwiz have Topfield's reputation with a new company's hunger to succeed. To the consumer this is fantastic because they are the ones that will benefit from this competition.

I first saw both units side by side displaying on a HD 42" Plasma panel. I was instantly impressed with how smooth and defined the image looked from both units, and at their prices, you'd expect that too. I was lucky enough to be able to compare the image with a Topfield Masterpiece on the same panel, which really emphasised the clarity of high definition over standard definition.

Setting up the DPS1 took about 10 minutes. I had the drive formatted, services scanned, network connected and even the EPG populated by the built in IceTv service. I was ready to roll and I felt like I had forgotten something it was so quick. The 7000 was easy to get the drive formatted and services scanned, but getting the EPG on it took about 30 minutes of stuffing around trying to find a USB key that it would detect. I had to actually unplug it from the mains, connect the USB key and then switch it on for it to finally work. I did manage to get an external USB drive connected to the 7000, but copying / moving recordings either way was very unreliable and failed to complete. Clearly Topfield have some more work to do in the USB host interface area of the 7000. If you do buy one, find a USB key that works because you'll definitely need it for future firmware upgrades.

Both units have twin high definition tuners, USB 2.0 host interfaces, 200+ GB hard drives, HDMI outputs, can record two programs at once while you watch a recording and the list goes on. For the tech heads, they are both running versions of Linux, which is a change for Topfield who run QNX on their 5000 and 6000 series. They both

have nicely formatted menus that are straight forward to follow and this is where the similarities end.

The DPS1's features extend further as it can be networked via Ethernet or Wireless, allowing streaming of media files from computers on the network. It also has a DVD player, CF card reader and USB host ports on the back and front to connect additional media. The only thing missing is a web / ftp interface and I believe this will be added at a later date. Even better PIMP, a service from IceTv, will soon support the DPS1 too. PIMP lets you pick the programs you want recorded via the web, then it sends the timer information over the internet to your Media Device so it will record it, very cool!

The first gripe I had with the DPS1 was that the menu button combinations are a bit inconsistent i.e. sometimes you use 'exit' to quit a menu item, other times you use 'live'. If you are more familiar with a Topfield menu, it will take a little getting used to as the layout is very different. The second gripe was that if you play a DVD, it will stop all recordings. The last gripe was you have to enable your guest account on networked PCs to stream media to the DPS1; this is a security risk that could easily be resolved with future firmware upgrades, as should the other issues.

So where does all this leave the 7000? Unlike the DPS1 that appears to have been designed and built by a team who really did their market research, the 7000 seems to be relying on Topfield's reputation to sell rather than using cutting edge technology and user requested features. I hate to say it, but in its current state it's probably more suited to the 'moms and pops' who want to replace their VCR, rather than the tech savvy hunting for the ultimate device. Unfortunately the 'moms and pops' will look at the price, balk,

layout as they are both poor presentations compared to some of the available EPG add-ons for the Topfield models.

So how do you choose which one to buy?

If you just want a quality HD Twin Tuner PVR and don't want anything else, save some money and get the 7000 for around \$1200. However if you want something that is networked and will probably become

more connected with services like PIMP and maybe even VoD (video on demand), spend a bit more and get the Beyonwiz DPS1 at around \$1500. If neither appeal to you, maybe the next product from Beyonwiz will, the DP-H1, check their website for details.

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