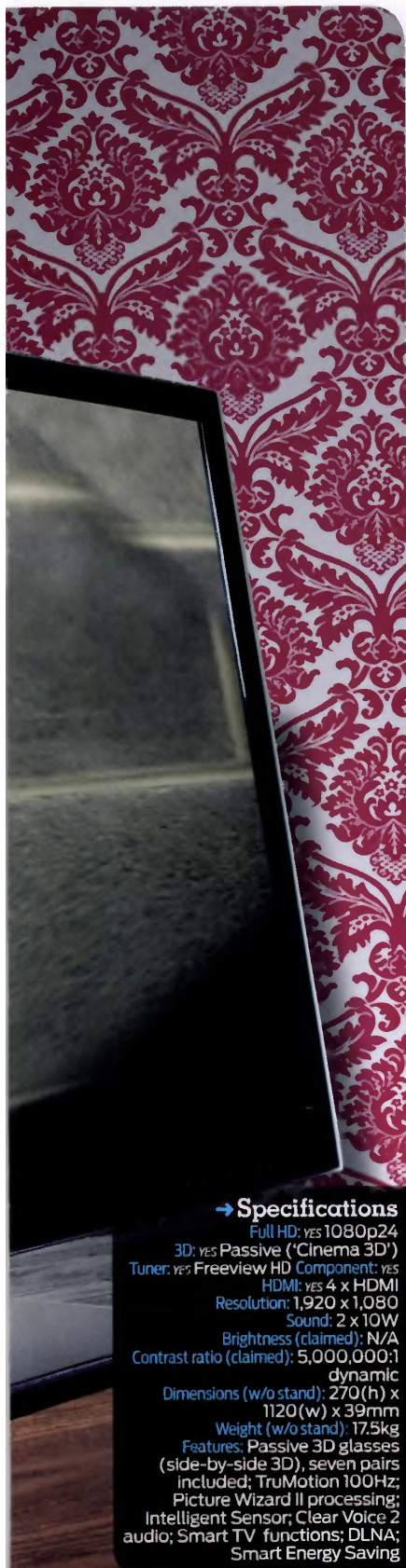




HOME CINEMA CHOICE JUNE 2011





Passive resistance

With the LW550 series, LG continues its quest to promote passive 3D. **Chris Jenkins** asks if this LED Smart set is the way to go

AV/CV

Product:
LED-backlit 3D Smart TV with passive tech glasses

Positioning:
LED model range includes LW550T, LW450U and LW650T models

Peers:
Samsung PS50 C680;
Panasonic TX-P42GT20B;
Sony KDL-40HX803

→ Specifications

Full HD: YES 1080p24
3D: YES Passive ('Cinema 3D')
Tuner: YES Freeview HD Component: YES
HDMI: YES 4 x HDMI
Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness (claimed): N/A
Contrast ratio (claimed): 5,000,000:1
dynamic
Dimensions (w/o stand): 270(h) x 1120(w) x 39mm
Weight (w/o stand): 17.5kg
Features: Passive 3D glasses (side-by-side 3D), seven pairs included; TruMotion 100Hz; Picture Wizard II processing; Intelligent Sensor; Clear Voice 2 audio; Smart TV functions; DLNA; Smart Energy Saving

Reduced resolution:

Although not full HD, the LG's side-by-side 3D is eminently watchable

Until now, most of the marketing activity for 3D has been based around active systems, which require expensive (c. £100 per pair) LCD-shutter glasses which need charging, and can have issues with synchronisation to the 3D frame-switching signal.

But another way to enjoy 3D is Passive 3D, which has the advantage that the polarised glasses it uses are almost disposably cheap. They don't need charging, are lighter and hence more comfortable than active glasses, and don't have sync issues.

Passive 3D TVs theoretically cost more to manufacture than active, and the 3D they produce is not full HD, but half resolution. This hasn't stopped Sky adopting side-by-side frame passive 3D (and specifically LG's sets) as its system of choice.

Smart move

In common with practically every decent-sized TV announced since last year, LG's 550T is a 'smart' set with internet functions, so it aspires to being the centre of a home entertainment 'hub' with access to services such as YouTube, Facebook and BBC iPlayer. To that end, it has wireless AV link functions. It also features advanced 100Hz TruMotion picture processing, built-in Freeview HD, and DivX HD Plus compatibility.

One final gimmick is the optional Magic Motion remote control, which operates like the 'Wimote' when you wave it at the screen.

The set comes with not one, but seven pairs of 3D polarized glasses. They have the design flair of a Kinder egg gift, but you have to admit that if

you want to get all your mates over for a 3D party, this is the way to do it.

This set offers 1920 x 1080 resolution, and the LED backlighting system has a feature called Spot Control, claimed to adjust dimming levels and improve image quality.

Design is sleek but rather bland, and the remote control is cluttered with buttons commensurate with the TV's many functions.

It has a new and frankly dazzling GUI, with all sorts of graphics, icons, windows, boxes and backgrounds that initially appear baffling, but soon make sense. Rear socketry is comprehensive, and includes a USB port for a wireless dongle.

Donning the frankly laughable glasses, I sat down with our standard test 3D BD discs, including *Step Up 3D* and *Monsters Vs Aliens*.

LG's main claim for this range is that it offers flicker-free 3D without crosstalk. Well, I found that crosstalk was no more or less noticeable on this set than on many others. On the other hand, this LG does have an effective viewing angle wider than that of active 3D.

The other question of course is whether side-by-side passive 3D is noticeably less good than full 1080p 3D. The answer is that half-resolution 3D looks perfectly fine; there isn't a noticeable loss of detail. You might notice it if you compared it side-by-side with Full HD 3D, but when is that likely to happen...?

The relative shortage of Blu-ray 3D material means it's sensible for LG to have included 2D-3D conversion. This includes a 3D View Point feature, which enables you to set the depth of 3D effect you require. As with all such >



Captivating contrasts: Darkened scenes pose little problem for the TV's local dimming function

systems, LG's 2D-3D engine is a bit hit-and-miss. Given clearly defined HD movie material, the effect can work well, but with poor Freeview TV the results will be inconsistent.

Easily LED

The LG's built-in Freeview HD tuner delivers clear, steady pictures, and the LED Plus system (edge LED with local dimming) does well handling a wide range of sources from SD to BD. The Tru Motion 100Hz mode is effective in reducing motion blur, without producing side-effects in the way of blocking artefacts.

LG's Smart TV platform builds on its Netcast Entertainment Access offering, but is far more comprehensive, and comparable to Samsung's SmartHub functions. For a start, there's a full-blown web browser, as well as dedicated access to services including BBC iPlayer, Acetrax and VIEWSTER premium movie streaming, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Accedo games, Vtuner radio, Google Maps, Picasa photos, and the ever-popular AccuWeather, for when you just can't be bothered to look out of the window.

There's also access to an LG Apps Store, which enables you to install new applications and personalise your on-screen 'dashboard'.

Because they aren't activated until the sets hit retail, some of these functions, such as the web browser and Search, weren't yet active on our review sample. We had more joy with the Smart Share networking function, which located a NAS drive on our network, and streamed formats including H264 video, MP3 music and JPG images to the TV.

The optional Magic Motion remote control operates like a computer mouse, but in the air. Because Smart TVs inevitably require a degree of text entry, the Magic Motion remote enables you to point-and-click to select and control applications. You can even 'drag' and 'flick' preferences and avoid using complex multi-key commands.

Alternatively, there are free LG TV Remote apps for smartphones on the Android marketplace and Apple App Store.

One feature we loved is the option to turn the screen off while leaving the speakers active, useful for such functions as internet radio streaming. This, together with other energy-saving functions, makes the LG a sound buy for the green customer.

One slight let-down is the audio side. Inevitably, a set this slim makes compromises with the speaker specification, and this has resulted in a thin and harsh output with little warmth or bass response.

Overall we found ourselves pleasantly surprised by the LG. In terms of style, it doesn't break any boundaries, and audio is unexceptional; but the 3D functions work well, the glasses, though naff in design, are comfortable and cheap, and as a 2D performer it makes every effort to produce a colourful, stable, engrossing image.

The 'smart' functions (when they all work) will put this LG at the centre of the home entertainment hub, and the ability to connect to other media sources should make it pretty much future-proof ●

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen: In 'Standard' mode, with energy saving off, the LG used 95W with our white 100IRE test screen

Test footage: There's a slight increase with movie material at full volume

TV Contrast: Ratio Colour temp: Kelvin



Picture: An excellent measurement, achieved with the LG's energy-saving feature switched off. Activated, and the 'light sensor decimates brightness when the room is dark, which impacts the measured contrast ratio

Presets: No presets as such – you get a slider that goes from cool to warm. In 'standard' mode, the 6,500K white-point was achieved with slider in its 'warmest' position (ie end stop). On top of this, you get two ISF 'expert' modes. Excellent stuff



HCC VERDICT

LG 47LW550T
£1,200 Approx

Highs: Comes with multi pairs of glasses; half-res images are good; wide viewing angle

Lows: Inconsistent 2D-to-3D conversion; poor audio

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

