SIM2 HT300E ◆ £6,000 (Approx) ◆ 01825 750850 ◆ www.sim2.co.uk

DarkChip3 takes DLP to new heights

Sim2's first DLP projector to use Texas Instruments' DarkChip3 finally arrives. John Archer discovers that it doesn't disappoint

As well as being one of the fastest growing areas of home cinema, front projection is also one of the fastest changing. The main reason for this is Texas Instruments' almost frenzied drive to improve on its DLP technology. Every time TI launches an improved DLP chipset, manufacturers scramble to unleash the first projector with a revised light engine.

Which leads me neatly to Sim2's HT300E: the first PJ in the UK to use TI's spanking new high-contrast 'HD2+ DC3' (DC bit stands for Dark Chip) DLP device.

So what advantages can we hope to see from DarkChip3? First, it hints at another move forward in colour and contrast, thanks to smaller mirror hinges on the DMD device and a new light absorbent coating so we should hopefully also see smoother motion. Exciting, I'm sure you'll agree.

Coz you're gorgeous

The HT300E follows the standard Sim2 curvy design aesthetic. It comes in three different colours: Royal Burgundy, Shiny Silver, and Gun-metal grey.

As you'd hope with a top spec PJ, it also carries all the connections required by the Cutting Edge club. There's an HDMI input for digital HD feeds, component video jacks, a 12V control trigger for, say, automatically activating a screen, and a 15-pin D-Sub PC jack – plus the usual lesser quality S-video and composite video fallbacks. You don't get DVI, but there's a digital audio loop for routing through sound brought in from the HDMI jack.

Setting the HT300E up is easy in some ways, tricky in others. Positioning the unit in your room is helped by both digital and optical keystone adjustments, but then optimising the picture is rather hindered by over-technical onscreen menus and the need to set up your input preferences first.

The HT300E uses a long-throw lens. You'll need at least 4m between the projector and your screen to enjoy a 100in image. So if your proposed home cinema room is too small to swing a cat, the HT300E isn't the unit for you...

The most interesting – if initially bewildering – feature of the HT300E's is the new Live Colour Management system. Designed for fine-tuning the colour balance and temperature it appears at first completely bewildering.

RATINGS

Highs: Picture quality; design; image flexibility; HD Ready
Lows: Unintuitive; rainbow effect

Brightness	★★★★½
Clarity	★★★★★
Features	★★★★½
OVERALL	★★★★★

After a little experimentation it turns out to be one of the most flexible yet easy to co-ordinate colour palette adjustments around, and really can improve the way different sources look quite dramatically.

The HT300E's specs impress. The native ratio is an HD-friendly 1280 x 720. Then there's Faroudja's FLI2310 DCDi processing for reducing scaling artefacts and jagged edges; a 6-segment colour wheel with colour corrected filters; and a new 'phono-absorbent' cabinet that claims to keep the running noise to a bare minimum.

SPECIFICATIONS

ITEM	SUPPORT	DETAILS
HD Ready	○	Has all the necessary requirements
Progressive scan	○	Compatible with 480p and 576p
Composite	○	1 phono input
S-video	○	1 input
Component video	○	One set provided
HDMI/DVI	○	HDMI with HDCP, DVI for PC
PC input	○	1 standard D-sub 15-pin
Resolution		1280 x 720
Brightness		Not available
Contrast		More than 3,500:1 (claimed)
Dimensions		350(w) x 173(h) x 318(d)mm
Weight		5.8kg

Also featuring
12V trigger jack; digital audio output; Live Colour Management; Video/graphics sharpness modes; multiple colour temp and gamma correction presets' overscan; vertical and horizontal keystone adjustment (optical and electrical); test patterns to aid setup; 6-segment colour wheel with corrective colour filters; TI's HD2+ Darkchip3 chipset; Faroudja DCDi processing; long throw lens (min 4m for 100in image); phono-absorbent cabinet design; Fast Track Pixel system; 'Link' version available with external connections box and fibre optic connection for extremely long cable runs

LAB REPORT

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Colour	✓			
Black level	✓			
Contrast	✓			
Resolution	✓			

HCC PRACTICAL TIP

The digital video connection offered by the Sim2 HT300E deserves some attention in order to make the most of its abilities. To ensure that you're not overtly plagued by the artefacting piped from some sources, tweak the HT300E's pictures accordingly:
Contrast: between 50 and 60.
Brightness: Between 40 and 45.
Sharpness: No higher than 5, but probably four is your best bet.

HOME CINEMA Choice Best Buy GUARANTEE

'You momentarily forget that you're in your own living room than being down at your local multiplex'

You never had it so good

I found the new DC3 device hugely impressive. Contrast is exceptional. Black levels show practically no trace of the greying over or green/blue undertones I'm so used to seeing on (even many high-end) DLP machines, nor any hint of DLP's common green dot noise. Peak whites enjoy a terrifically video-friendly tone and pitch, without looking forced or 'shiny'. And every tiny brightness gradation in between is delivered with complete authority.

This latter fact also helps the HT300E produce an exceptionally three dimensional picture that delivers fully on that key home cinema requirement of pulling you into the world of movies.

Similar levels of subtlety are visible, too, in its colour performance. So while you've got bright, full-on hues looking superbly vibrant at one end of the scale, you've also got impeccable solidity and tonal authenticity at the very darkest, most muted end – with seemingly infinite gradation in between. The DC3 chipset in conjunction with Sim2's clearly superior scaling and driver technologies also helps the picture look very detailed, with no obvious motion or picture resizing artefacts.

Crucially, the HT300E also looks superb with HDMI-feeds. You might think this is a given, but actually I've seen a number of TVs and projectors struggle to suppress the digital MPEG artefacting that the digital connections seems to reveal. Helpfully, it provides the tools and image flexibility to suppress them; follow the guidelines outlined in our *Practical Tip*, and you'll be fine.

It's worth noting that the latest firmware for the HT300 includes a fix for Denon DVD players viewed via HDMI. This appeared as a green image when the RGB output on the Denon was set.

There is, I guess, still room for improvement. I spotted traces – albeit less overt than usual – of DLP's rainbow effect and fizzing noise over horizontal motion, plus faint traces of jitter in bright NTSC 1080i feeds and minor jaggedness over one or two complex and fine edges. But I must stress that I'm struggling to nitpick.

Conclusion

There's no doubt that Sim2's HT300E provides strong competition for Marantz S4 at the higher end of the single chip DLP projection market especially now that the HT300E has recently dropped in price to £6,000. If you want to see blisteringly good video projection, get a demo fast. We await other DarkChip 3 designs with anticipation! ■

Is it a Porsche? No it's a Sim2 projector and it also comes in Burgundy and grey...

...not so pretty but it does the job

Sockets include an HDMI input, component video jacks and a 12V control trigger