

Dealer's Choice

filling an empty nest

REMEMBER THE PARENTS of the kid who was leaving home? They're the subjects of our third scenario. To celebrate getting their son — and their old 27-inch TV — out of the house, they decided to install the best home theater they could buy for about \$7,500. If anyone could give them the right advice, it would be Columbia Audio/Video of Highland Park and Arlington Heights, Illinois, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year.

When Norm and Irv Rozak founded the business in 1948, it sold records and appliances as well as the headphones that Irv manufactured. They jumped into hi-fi pretty quickly, staging the first

for a good part of Columbia's business. Its know-how filters down into the company's custom-installation division, which works hand-in-hand with its main 10,000-square-foot retail store in Highland Park.

Norm Rozak remains active in running his company but has given considerable responsibilities in its operation to his daughter Linda, who relishes the business. She started our conversation by saying, "Educating the consumer is our mission. We feel strongly about supporting consumers, going out into their homes, evaluating their living environment and assessing their living habits. It gives us a better idea of what we're working with." Without such interaction, she said, "you might put together a system that includes a projection TV and then discover that it has to be installed in a room with miles of windows."

Linda Rozak referred us to one of Columbia's system designers, Michael Bernhard, to assemble our \$7,500 system. He waxed enthusiastic about the Sony KV-35XBR monitor, saying, "TV is, of course, really important to the whole deal, and I think that the Sony 35-inch XBR is the best 35-inch TV made for consumers. It's a great TV — best picture, best sound out there." He continued, "It's always nice to match the TV and the VCR, so I chose a Sony hi-fi VCR. The remote matches, and it's easy to operate."

Bernhard also chose a Sony DVD player. "The Sony DVP-S3000 is a really great player for the money," he said, "and it's important to have a DVD player in this day and age if you're going to be starting off your home theater. There's no question that it's the direction to go."

When it came to audio electronics, Bernhard explained that Columbia carries many brands and that the best values change from season to season. For this system he chose the Denon AVR-3200 receiver. "It's a really good value, it sounds good, and it's pretty easy to work, too." He further explained, "Part

of my job is training customers to use equipment, and I've been successful with the Denon products. This is one of Denon's lowest-priced Dolby Digital receivers, but it's got a pretty good bang with five 100-watt channels." The receiver also has a five-channel ambience-synthesis music mode, he noted. "It's fairly amazing that you can get ambience synthesis that sounds this good for this kind of money."

\$7,800 HOME THEATER

COLUMBIA AUDIO/VIDEO

Highland Park/Arlington Heights, IL

Sony DVP-S3000 DVD player: \$699

Sony SL-V675HF hi-fi VCR: \$279

Denon AVR 3200 Dolby Digital receiver: \$999

Monitor Audio 700PMC speakers: \$1,000/pr

Monitor Audio CC300 center speaker: \$499

Monitor Audio MA FX 1 surround speakers: \$800/pr

Monitor Audio MAS 1 subwoofer: \$999

Sony KV-35XBR 35-inch TV: \$2,499

hi-fi show in the Chicago area. Since Norm Rozak was a technician, it's not surprising that the specialty of the fledgling company was its service department.

Just as Columbia was ahead of the curve in hi-fi, it preceded most audio stores into video, opening a professional video division in 1979. The professional division diversified into a variety of pro electronics, and it now accounts





As for the speakers, Bernhard was as passionate about his choices as his fellow dealers were about theirs. "I really love the Monitor Audio speakers," he exclaimed. "I do a lot of work with them. The Model 700PMC and CC300 speakers are bookshelf-sized, and the MA FX 1 surrounds are dipoles. You can really make them disappear, and they sound great." He went on to call the Monitor Audio MAS 1 passive sub-

woofer, with dual 10-inch drivers, "actually better with music than with home theater. It's really tight and fast."

"Budget permitting," Bernhard said, "I would recommend audiophile cables. Nearly every system I do uses Straight Wire cable. I didn't specify any for this system because the cabinet and room layout are unknowns and have to be considered before the right cables can be recommended. Straight Wire cable

was in my house before I was working in the audio industry, and it's going to stay there."

Bernhard takes pride in his ability not only to advise and install the equipment he sells, but also to work with subcontractors such as electricians, cabinetmakers, and architects to make sure that it all goes smoothly, usually at no additional charge. "I oversee every phase of installation," he explained. □

CON AIR IMAGES (BUENA VISTA); SALAMANDER DESIGNS SYNERGY SYSTEM SHELVING

★ Flying Colors Sony KV-35XBR48



We had heard the rumors about Sony's new XBR direct-view televisions. We had heard that the new line would include a 35-incher that would set new standards for video performance. In an exclusive look at the new set, we found that Sony's first 35-inch direct-view model to carry the vaunted XBR designation delivered the goods. The \$2,500 35-inch KV-35XBR48 (along with the KV-35XBR88; shown at left with integral stand) is one of the few consumer sets to hit critical color-temperature and light-output standards right out of the box. Combine this with component-video inputs and you get a monitor that can offer the most faithful presentation of even the new benchmark in video quality, DVD. This Sony is "as good as any direct-view set I've tested," according to Lance Braithwaite. No other TV offers the XBR48's combination of features and stunning, out-of-the-box performance. Sourced by component-video outputs from a DVD player "it seemed like I was looking through a window, rather than at a TV. The color purity . . . was not unlike the delicacy that's characteristic of film," gushed Braithwaite. High praise indeed from our most experienced (and thoroughly jaded) reviewer. (October 1997)



★ Back in Black Pioneer Elite VSX-07TX

Pioneer surely took its time getting into the THX stable, but it was worth the wait. The company's first THX-certified component is big, impressively finished in glossy "Urushi" black, and very capable. The VSX-07TX (\$1,450) arrived fully loaded, packing Dolby Pro Logic and Dolby Digital decoding on top of its THX enhancements. Rated to deliver 100 watts to each of five channels, this solid looking piece has the power to back up its looks.

Pioneer, in conjunction with Fujitsu, developed its own chipset for the VSX-07TX that serves as a one-chip solution for Dolby Digital and Pro Logic processing. The results? "As far as Dolby- and THX-mode performance are concerned, I

really have very little to say—which is very good," reviewer Daniel Kumin wrote. "The VSX-07TX sounded terrific in every permutation of Dolby Pro Logic and Dolby Digital, with or without THX processing active."

An A/V receiver is a combination of many components, and not only must it perform many functions well, it must also integrate its capabilities to form a greater whole. The VSX-07TX carries many thoughtful extras, and more importantly, they're useful and easy to access. This big Pioneer Elite receiver isn't prohibitively expensive, but it is one classy looking piece, and a flagship that really is a "first rate performer." (October 1997)

DIRECT-VIEW TELEVISION

Sony KV-35XBR48

Lawrence B. Johnson

Sony's first, and long-anticipated, 35-inch television takes the prize in big-screen direct-view engineering, and then some: This television is a prize.

My own critical description falters (though I'm going to offer it anyway) before the succinct observation of my colleague and consultant John Gannon, of the Imaging Science Foundation (ISF). Said Gannon, after spending a few hours adjusting the new Sony to ISF technical standards, "Now we know what it costs to produce a first-class 35-inch television picture."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Whatever this one costs," he said.

The price Sony has affixed to the KV-35XBR48 is several hundred dollars less than one might expect. Other high-end 35-inch televisions command upward of \$3000, and certainly Sony's XBR series has

never been bargain-basement goods. In that light, a suggested retail price of \$2499 for this television really is a bargain; moreover, you can be sure the actual purchase price will be somewhat less.

The object of all this bubbling enthusiasm is a cinematic monitor that looks quite impressive even before you turn it on. The KV-35XBR48 is a picture of elegant styling. Bucking the trend to curved lines and rounded edges, the new Sony's charcoal-gray cabinet presents a high-tech sculptural aspect of flat, rectangular surfaces relieved by curvilinear accents.

One might wish, however, that Sony had not slapped its silvery metal control strip in the very center of the cabinet's top plate. Not only does that insert violate the design, but reading the control panel from above, with the television

placed on a table, is none too easy for folks of, let's say, the golden median height of 5' 7" (which just happens to be my height).

Another external issue that bears noting, before we get into the television's technical design and performance, is the cautious, self-conscious, even slightly devious tone with which Sony unveiled its splendid achievement to the press last summer. Their comments spoke volumes about the anxiety that has beset the entire television

industry as it faces the transition from analog to digital broadcasting.

Sony said its new XBR televisions were aimed at "consumers who want to enjoy the best of digital home entertainment today."

The new XBRs, proclaimed the announcement, "display the full digital video impact of today's DVD movies and music concerts, digital satellite broadcasts, and other digital video sources, including camcorders." But, of course, *none* of those sources really is digital by the time the signal reaches the television. What the television sees is an analog signal, even if the original signal carrier was digital.



SPECIFICATIONS

KV-35XBR48 direct-view television

Screen size: 35" diagonal

Aspect ratio: 4:3

Inputs: 3 sets A/V, 2 S-video, 1 component video, 2 RF

Outputs: 2 sets A/V, 1 set audio

Dimensions: 27.75" x 36.75" x 25.5" (HxWxD)

Weight: 199 lbs.

Price: \$2499

Manufacturer

Sony Electronics Inc.
1 Sony Drive
Park Ridge, NJ 07656
tel. (201) 930-1000
fax (201) 930-7891
www.sony.com

Sony's cloudy message suggests to the consumer, already bewildered by talk of "digital" television, that it's safe to buy this television without fear of seeing the investment invalidated by the advent of digital broadcasting. I happen to agree with Sony in principle, though I disapprove of their ambiguous pitch.

But then comes the clincher, in which the company's desperation is made plain: "We believe consumers will buy these latest Trinitron XBR televisions because they deliver an outstanding home entertainment experience today. They also provide consumers with the ability to enjoy the next generation of digital video television."

What a pass the television industry has come to when it must couch its best accomplishment in wheedling innuendo. On the other side of that coin, what in the world are consumers to think, listening to a salesman mouth that dubious party line? As Hamlet said of his mom, "The lady doth protest too much her digital pertinence, methinks." Or words to that effect. In any case, something is overripe in the state of television marketing.

But not so with this particular television. It's perfect for picking.

Picture perfect

Fresh out of the box, the Sony looked like many other televisions. Contrast was set far too high and color temperature was ice-blue in all three settings: Low, Medium, and High. By indirect way of acknowledging this skewing of color temperature, Sony has provided something it calls "Color Correction." What is being "corrected" is the eerily blue-blooded look that human flesh acquires when the color temperature is set so high. The means of correction is to push the red hue. But, of course, once the color temperature has been reduced to a level more evocative of the natural world, the extra infusion of red is no longer required; happily, it can be turned off.

Thus, really corrected, the picture on Sony's television resets the standard for 35-inch monitors. Here was one gorgeous, emotionally compelling image—or rather, an endless stream of such images. My first day with the KV-35XBR48 I sat through a triple feature of favorite reference movies on DVD, films I love in every visual detail and



transfers of revealing quality: *The Mask* (New Line), *Blade Runner* (Warner), and *Terminator 2 (Live)*. I watched them all end-to-end out of pure sensory delight. And as a multidimensional measure of all-around performance, these three discs reflected the Sony's championship form.

With *The Mask's* comic-book palette, the KV-35XBR48 showed its ability to produce color of dazzling intensity without oversaturation. The nightclub scene, in which the cartoonishly rendered Jim Carrey character ogles and drools over the sultry Cameron Diaz, came to pulsating life here—in finely inflected detail, in vibrant hues of yellow and gold, and in beautifully rendered flesh tones.

The pervasive darkness of *Blade Runner*, an excellent test of a television's shadow detail, likewise testified to the Sony's technical achievement. The film's outdoor scenes of endless rain, like the film's hazy, claustrophobic interiors, can look simply dim and bleary. But the Sony projected what lies behind those surfaces: a deeply etched and powerful expressionism. And the effect made a larger point about television as a cinematic medium—that the ultimate value of fine picture resolution is heightened expressivity.

Which brings me to *T2*, a kinetic painting

in chiaroscuro. Its potency, its thrill and terror, are crucially dependent on the quality of the viewing medium. The DVD release is a thing of visual beauty, and Sony's television afforded a view deep within the film's layers of darkness and luminosity.

At this point, inquiring minds (including those of other manufacturers) must be asking, "What's the secret of Sony's success?" What's *in* this television, anyway? The answer seems to lie very deep within the details, because nothing really unusual leaps off the list of ingredients.

Besides a well-designed digital comb filter, the most notable electronic devices start with a wideband video amplifier that Sony credits with "producing a markedly improved video signal with reduced noise interference and better color reproduction." Similarly, a magnetic quadra pole—a coil wrapped around the outside of the picture tube's neck—is said to "reduce spot distortion while improving corner-to-corner focusing." And Sony points to its Superbrix electron gun, touted for producing a beam spot "30% smaller than regular electron guns," to achieve finer detail.

On a riskier note, Sony also boasts of "the

industry's only vertically flat screen." Is that flat as in "apparently" or "virtually" flat, or flat as in absolutely, categorically, and measurably flat? I thought the television industry had abandoned claims of straight-up flatness some years ago. It's good enough for me that Sony's 35-inch screen displays consistent character through a wide viewing arc.

The KV-35XBR48 provides three color-temperature options, all of which came factory-set at a surprisingly blue pitch (see "Calibration" sidebar). The set's dual-tuner picture-in-picture is complemented by a nine-image display of favorite channels, and a "channel index" mode that allows you to scan up to 13 channels at a glance.

Yet all of this is but a listing of parts. The

whole is greater by far. I'm inclined to echo John Gannon's flat-out admiration: "Sony just seems to know how to do televisions."

That know-how extends to remote-control design. This one fits well in the hand, and its "joystick" operation should make a particularly good fit with computer-friendly consumers. Even the KV-35XBR48's eight-speaker sound system (called Octavia) sounds better than most television arrays.

Last, and arguably least, the television's cluster of A/V connections includes component video inputs. I can't say I perceived any significant difference in picture quality between S-video and component hookup. The component hoopla looks like market-buzz to me.

Conclusions

Sony does television right—again. The company's first 35-inch set not only measures up to all one has come to expect from Trinitron engineering; it sets a new standard for picture quality in this size category.

While it's regrettable to find Sony muddying the digital television issue in an effort to instill confidence in prospective buyers, the plain truth from my chair is that the KV-35XBR48 needs no such tortured justification.

Even when viewed in the pre-dawn light of digital broadcasting, it's still a spectacular television. I have only one question: How did Sony manage to bring this beauty into the world for \$2499?

CALIBRATION

Although it would prove, in the end, to be a very impressive 35-inch television, Sony's KV-35XBR48 needed deep-level picture correction as desperately as any other set manufactured to compete for consumers' instant notice. It was blue, through and through.

Initial gray-scale measurements by John Gannon of the Imaging Science Foundation, made with the contrast cranked up at its original factory setting, were—not to put too fine a point on it—"mostly off the scale."

ISF's color-temperature scale tops out at 16,500 kelvins (K), more than two and a half times the NTSC standard of 6500K. But in Gannon's out-of-the-box measurements, the Sony plotted a line that hovered in the range of 16,200 to 16,600, and "peaked above that line at half a dozen points," Gannon said.

When Gannon reduced the contrast to bring the over-driven picture tube under control, temperature readings still soared from 15,500 degrees at the dim end of the scale to 16,500 at the bright end.

It is to compensate for the effect of that blue cast on human flesh tones that Sony provides a "Color Correction" circuit. It's like slapping a Band-Aid on a self-inflicted wound. With the contrast turned all the way down, however, the television measured close to 6450K from one end of the scale to the other. Fortunately, the red push of the "Color Correction" circuit could be switched off; and of course, with the picture now purged of that overbearing blue, that fix was no longer necessary.

Gannon set up the proper NTSC color temperature using the middle of the Sony's three presets. Adjusting any one of the three scales produces an automatic alteration of the other two.

"I hoped to get a usable low setting for black-and-white programs and a slightly blue high to add some impact for sports," Gannon said. The low scale, which averaged about 5250 degrees, came pretty close to Gannon's personal preference of 5400 degrees for black-and-white; but the "sports" temperature of about 7400 degrees fell significantly below his ideal of 9300 degrees.

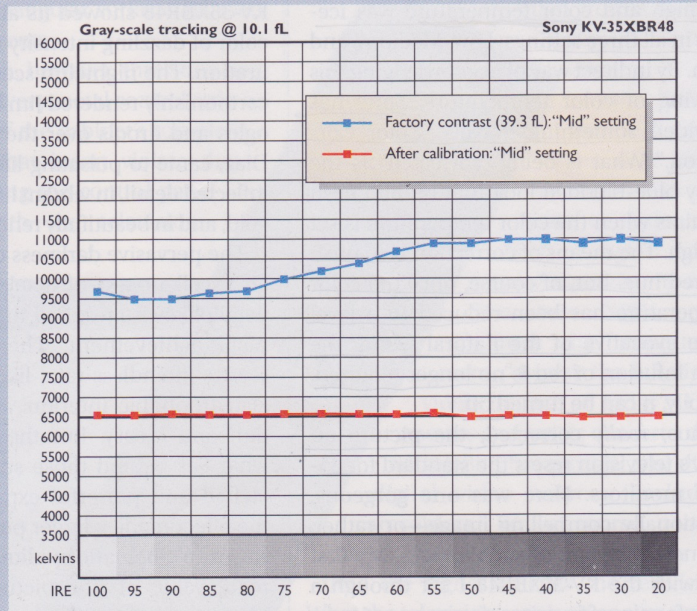
Those variants are more observations than criticisms, however. The key issue was the NTSC standard, and that was managed very well, though the resulting light output was a rather dim 10.1 footlamberts (fL).

"It's really not bright enough," Gannon said, "and that's frankly odd, given all the things this television does so well." (Before any adjustments had been made, with the contrast factory-set at maximum, light output was a torchlike 39.3 fL.)

Black-level retention also suffered in the factory setup. Gannon noted that the black "floor" moved whenever the brightness of a scene changed, always with the evident purpose of making whites look really bright. But when the contrast was reduced to zero, black level became quite stable.

Picture geometry was fairly good at first sight. Gannon attributed a slightly squashed circle on the *Video Essentials* test DVD to careless quality control. The problem was easily corrected.

The television's factory-set convergence, he said, was "among the very best I've seen on any tube set."—LBJ





Flying Colors

**Sony's first 35-inch XBR
does its ancestors proud**

By Lancelot Braithwaite

**TEST
923**

I'VE BEEN AROUND THE BLOCK A FEW times—in the video neighborhood, that is. The experience has left me a bit jaded, and by this point, I'm pretty set in my ways. After years of testing and evaluating direct-view TVs, I've come to expect less than picture-perfect performance from sets larger than 32 inches—whatever manufacturers might claim to the contrary. However, the recent crop of larger direct views has made me reconsider my position. I'm not getting soft, mind you, but recent 35-inchers from Toshiba and now, Sony's new 35-inch XBR (the first-ever 35-incher to carry the exalted XBR moniker, Sony's top-of-the-line designation) have persuaded me to take another look.

Fed by DVD sources through a component-video input, this new Sony produces stunning pictures. Yes, Virginia, a good 35-inch direct-view TV is not only possible, it's here. The table-top KV-35XBR48 (\$2,499) reviewed here and the KV-35XBR88 (\$2,799), a console model, both feature component-video inputs, a lavish collection of ad-

ditional inputs and outputs, and a wide range of menu options, all of which combine to make them a striking way to display any video source. (The sole difference between the sets is the XBR88's integrated stand, which sports an automatic glass door to the component-storage compartment and multiple convenience outlets.) There's also a new 32-inch model (the KV-32XBR48, \$1,799) with similar features, including those wonderful component-video inputs. Despite wanting to test all three new XBRs (and hold my own *Star Trek* marathon), I had to limit myself to the 35XBR48.

The XBR48 has a warm dark gray-colored finish with 3-inch bezels on its bottom and sides, and a 2-inch top bezel that houses the set's top-mounted controls. The unit's sides and back are a mixture of planes and sweeping curves that camouflage its 27.9 x 36.9 x 24.75-inch (h/w/d) body. It weighs a hefty 198.5 pounds, so unpacking it is definitely not a one-person job.

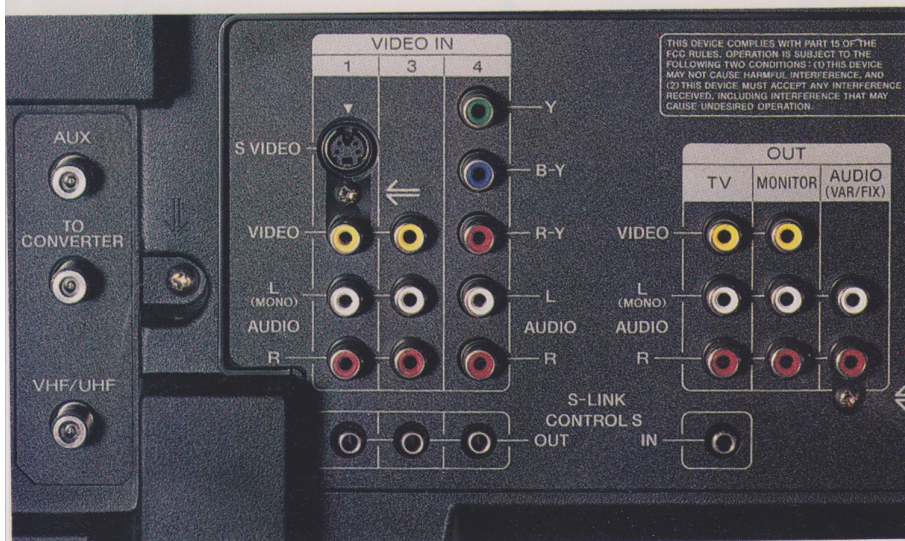
Placing the on-set controls on the top panel was a good design choice. It makes them easily accessible

PHOTO: TONY CORDOZA



Trinitron XBR

SONY



The XBR48 offers a nice selection of connections, including component video

and unobtrusive at the same time, and they don't detract from the clean lines of the set. There are only seven buttons in that grouping: POWER, CHANNEL UP, CHANNEL DOWN, VOLUME UP, VOLUME DOWN, TV/VIDEO, and SET-UP. The volume and channel buttons act as cursors in the set-up mode. The sleek design look is also aided by hiding the front-panel Video-2 inputs (composite and S-Video) and stereo audio connectors behind a door near the bottom of the right side. Higher up on each side of the bezel are the front-firing tweeters. Larger woofers are positioned in ported DACs (dynamic acoustic chambers) at each side. The speakers are powered by a 15-watt x 2 amplifier and are supported by auto SRS circuitry that endeavors to create a 3D sonic image using conventional stereo speakers.

Complementing its curvaceous profile, the rear of the set sports a jack panel that would be any video buff's dream. The RF part is standard: two inputs—one with a loop-through to feed a cable box. But it's the line level connections that really set this TV apart. There are connectors for the three remaining video inputs and they're all equipped for stereo audio. The Video 1 column offers composite and S-Video connections (you'll recall that Video 2 is on the front panel). The Video 3 column offers composite video only, and the Video 4 column carries the three connectors for component video: Y (Luminance), B-Y (Blue minus luminance) and R-Y (Red minus luminance). Since there's no universal way to name

component inputs, Sony sub-labels B-Y as CB and Y-R as CR, in case your other equipment uses those designations. (Regular VIDEO readers know that the component-video signal chain provides the most pristine images. However, to take advantage of component video, you need a DVD player with the proper outputs and a display device with the proper inputs. Failing the inclusion of component video, S-Video provides the next best connection.)

The owner's manual helpfully supplies easy-to-follow diagrams for almost every conceivable connection scenario. Of course, because I'm never satisfied, the omission of an S-Video input for Video 3 and the lack of an S-

of an outboard audio system via the XBR48's volume buttons.

Like all Sony TVs, the XBR48 sports a Trinitron tube that uses a single lens for more realistic color. Performance is aided by magnetic quadra pole technology that's designed to ensure dot uniformity from edge to edge (the dots remain circles rather than turning into tear drops at the screen's corners). It uses a 3D digital comb filter for better sharpness rendition and detail from composite video and S-Video sources. The set also boasts velocity scan modulation to sharpen edges, and a wideband video amplifier to supply the CRT with as much detail-bearing high-frequency information as possible.

Other features include Trinitone color-temperature adjustment which offers a choice of HIGH, MEDIUM, and NTSC STD (Standard). These adjustments cater to viewer tastes and let users factor ambient lighting into the color-temperature equation. Of course, regular VIDEO readers know that we recommend the NTSC standard setting and carefully controlled ambient light.

Convenience features include dual-tuner, twin-view (side by side), and inset PIP, advanced "Channel Magic" selection that shows a preselected favorite channel in the center of the screen surrounded by other favorites, channel indexing, a customized menu with seven presets, source labeling, video skip of unused sources, S-Link for easy system integration with other Sony components, and lots more. It's fairly bristling with features.

Yes Virginia, a great 35-inch direct-view TV is not only possible, it's here; this new Sony produces stunning pictures

Video output must be noted.

Sony also has a clever system that lets you label active inputs and skip inactive ones, so there's no need to switch past inputs that aren't connected to anything.

There are three sets of line outputs: TV carries the program selected by the tuner; Monitor carries the program selected by the TV/video selector; variable Audio Out can control the volume

For a set with so many options, the remote control is, thankfully, simpler to use than you might expect. Part of that simplicity stems from concealing special applications beneath a flap near the remote's front. The exposed buttons are logically grouped with a set of buttons for power, followed by function buttons for VTR/DVD, DBS/CABLE, TV, system OFF, SLEEP, DISPLAY, TV/VIDEO, and an-

tenna. There's also a numeric keypad, and buttons for PIP options. The non-button part of the remote is dominated by a joystick that moves the on-screen cursor. Under the flap you'll find another colony of buttons, including those for tape transport, DVD title and menu, and PIP operations.

As is my customary *modus operandi*, I started by setting the user-adjustable controls using a preliminary pressing of VIDEO columnist Joe Kane's *Video Essentials* test disc on DVD. I chose the Movie setting from the Mode menu and NTSC STANDARD from the Trinitone menu.

I set the XBR48's two-position color correction control to "off" (the "on" position emphasizes reds and blues; the "off" position emphasizes greens).

As is the case on most sets, velocity-scan modulation cannot be disabled or I would have set that to "off" as well. (VSM speeds up or slows down the scanning beam at image transitions to artificially emphasize vertical edges. Videophiles generally prefer their im-

ages *au natural*.)

Out of the box, I set the other picture controls thusly: contrast was set one click below the mid-point on the XBR48's on-screen bar graph; brightness was set three notches below the middle; color and hue (tint) were correct at the mid-point. As is usually the case, sharpness was ramped up way too high. Depending on the program material, you need to set sharpness somewhere between "off" and about a quarter of the way up.

For the most part, these tweaks were relatively minor, proving that Sony has done its homework when it comes to out-of-the-box settings.

Prior to calibration, I measured the HIGH color-temperature setting at 11,000 degrees Kelvin (K) on its high output window and over 16,000 K on its low output window with a light output of 46.6 footLamberts (fL). These numbers are way too high if you expect anything resembling accurate rendition of colors.

At the MEDIUM setting, the XBR48

BY THE NUMBERS

Measurements by Berger-Braithwaite Labs

Horizontal resolution: > 550 lines

Picture S/N ratios: luminance S/N, 57.3 dB;

video S/N, 56.5 dB;

chroma AM S/N, 63.7 dB;

chroma PM S/N, 63.3 dB

Color temperature (before calibration):

HIGH, 11,000 K (high output window);

>16,000 K (low output window);

MEDIUM, 9,550 K (high output window);

>16,000 K (low output window);

NTSC STD, 6,450 K (high output window);

5,760 K (low output window)

Color temperature (after calibration):

NTSC STD, 6,500 K (high output window);

6,380 K (low output window)

Screen brightness (NTSC STD MODE):

before adjustment, 37.5 fL;

after adjustment, 30.5 fL

produced 42.1 fL of light output with a color-temperature of 9,550 K on its high output window. It measured over 16,000 K on the low output window, which is still way too high for accurate color rendition.

Only two or three times in the past have I come across a set that doesn't need plenty of professional calibration out of the box. In its NTSC STD mode, Sony's XBR48 attains that distinction. I measured 6,450 degrees K on the high output window and 5,760 K on the low output window with a light output of 35.7 fL. I did recalibrate the low output window closer to 6,500 K (6,380 K) and reduce the set's light output to 30.5 fL, but I can comfortably say that most eyes wouldn't notice such a small out-of-the-box discrepancy.

After user set-up, which is clearly detailed in the manual, the XBR48 can be operated almost exclusively via the remote control. Combined with lucid on-screen displays, the remote's operation makes it easy to access all the flexibility this set offers. The joystick acts as both the selector and the enter button for menu options. You never lift your finger from the joystick; you simply press it in when you've navigated to the spot you want. Of course, there will be a few users who prefer the old navigational controls, but I believe most people will prefer the new joystick version. The only drawback of this multibrand remote is that some operations require using both the buttons under the flap and ones on the flap's surface.

Given my original skepticism against 32-plus inch direct views, I was warned by my fellow editors to keep an open

THE SHORT FORM

SONY KV-35XBR48

Component type: 35-inch direct-view TV

Price: \$2,499

Target: Upscale TV aficionados

Minimum requirements*: Hi-Fi VCR, A/V receiver, main, center, and surround speakers

KEY FEATURES

- 35-inch direct-view table-top set
- Sleek design with controls on the top panel
- Front-firing tweeters; woofers in ported acoustic chambers
- Component and S-Video inputs and a lavish collection of other inputs and outputs
- Trinitron tube with single lens
- Magnetic quadra pole technology
- 3D digital comb filter
- Velocity scan modulation
- Wideband video amplifier
- Dual-tuner PIP that offers twin-view and inset boxes
- Channel Magic selection
- Wireless remote control with joystick

SUMMARY

- Set-up was simple
- Set needed little tweaking
- Remote offered a plethora of options, but was surprisingly simple to use
- On-screen displays were easy to understand
- Color accuracy was excellent; horizontal resolution measured better than 550 lines
- Produced nicely-detailed, non-cartoon-like images and a bright, sharp picture
- Performed well with a number of DVD titles and exhibited particularly impressive detail in dimly-lit scenes
- Textural detail was excellent
- Onboard audio system was reasonable
- A worthy contender if you're in the market for a large screen TV

Circle 116 on reader service card

Sony, 1 Sony Dr., Park Ridge, NJ 07656; 800.222.7669

<http://sel.sony.com/index.html>

**To maximize its potential*

mind. So, they asked hesitantly, what did I find? A drum roll, please. The XBR48 came through with shining colors (literally and figuratively). Horizontal resolution measured better than 550 lines and color accuracy was excellent.

Program sources used for evaluation included the composite, S-Video, and component-video outputs of Sony's DVP-S7000 DVD movie player [see "Wild Thing," April 1997]. I also watched some flicks using the JVC XV-1000BK DVD player [reviewed on page 46].

I put the XBR48 through its paces with a movie marathon of DVD titles—all of which I've become extremely familiar with over the past few months: *Eraser*, *Space Jam*, *Jumanji*, and *Twister*. I was particularly impressed by the detail exhibited in the dark scenes from *Eraser*. It seemed like I was looking through a window, rather than at a TV. The color purity in *Space Jam* was not unlike the delicacy that's characteristic of film. And the outdoor scenes at the start of *Jumanji* looked pleasingly natural, except for the digital tiling artifacts that appeared on the clapboard house as the

Though it controls lots of TV functions, the remote is easy to use



kids whizzed by on their bicycles. Of course, these artifacts have showed up on every player/display combination we've ever tested. *Twister's* computer animation looked as hokey as ever.

Test," December 1996]. I also compared the XBR48 (via my notes and my visual memory) to Sony's flagship KV-32XBR100 32-inch direct-view set [see "VIDEOTest," December 1995], which

In dark scenes, the XBR48 made it seem like I was looking through a window, rather than at a television set

One of my newer DVD evaluation titles is Clint Eastwood's *In the Line of Fire*; this disc may well turn into my reference favorite. The most impressive things about this disc are the quality of the transfer, the subtleties apparent in fabric textures, and the lifelike representation of flesh, as seen in close-ups of Eastwood's face. I also looked at *Grumpy Old Men* on laserdisc and DVD; as expected, the DVD version outperformed the LD, largely due to its lack of noise (luminance S/N measured 57.3 dB). The DVD's superiority was evident in images of wood grain and snow, where more realistic textures were seen in soft lighting. In *Stargate*, kudos go to its rendition of sand, detail in shadowed areas, and the smoothness of the morphing special effects. In *The Fugitive*, the leaves were so realistic I thought I'd have to rake my living room after the movie was over. All of these subtle challenges spoke not only of DVD's capabilities, but also of the set, which reproduced these images with wonderful clarity, low noise, and oodles of detail.

While the onboard audio was decent, VIDEO always recommends that you connect an outboard surround system to take advantage of today's great movie soundtracks. Besides, most people who spend this kind of money for a TV are willing to invest a few dollars in at least a modest multi-channel system.

When you're evaluating top-notch display devices, comparisons are inevitable. So I pitted the XBR48 against Toshiba's excellent 16:9 TW40F80 rear-projection set, which also offers component-video inputs [see "VIDEO-

is still in Sony's line.

I wish that I had the luxury of a film projector and a good print to help me decide which TV looked most like film. (Of course, that begs another question: Is film realistic enough?)

Apart from more prominent scan lines (note that projection systems tend to blur scan lines, resulting in a generally "softer" image), the XBR48's images seemed to have cleaner and less cartoon-like edges than the Toshiba—as long as the sharpness control was held near zero. The Toshiba produced less severe edging, but as soon as I increased the sharpness, I began to notice the telltale cartoonish edges that drive me to distraction.

THE KV-35XBR48 IS ONE OF THE FIRST two 35-inch sets Sony considers good enough to bear the top-of-the-line XBR designation—and it's with good reason. It may lack a few of the bells and whistles of the KV-32XBR100, its high-end predecessor, but its performance is absolutely top-notch. Of course, the impact of three extra inches of diagonal screen size can't be underestimated. Nor can the wonderful bonus of component-video inputs. It also produces a brighter and sharper picture than its rear-projection cousins. So we're left with one nagging question concerning overall image detail: Did this set look artificial? In a word, no. Did it look as good as any direct-view set I've tested? In a word, yes. Therefore, it is with whole-hearted confidence that I say the XBR48 would be an extremely worthy contender if you're in the market for a large screen set and don't mind handling the stiff suggested retail price. There, I said it. And I'm happy I did. ■