



BLU-RAY PLAYERS  
**HARMAN KARDON BDP 10**

# In fine focus



It's taken Harman Kardon a while to release its first Blu-ray player. However, having spent the past six weeks or so in the company of the new BDP 10, it seems the wait's been well worth it: this HK is a killer of a machine.

But let me not get ahead of myself. The BDP 10 is a slim, nicely presented Blu-ray player that gets most of the ergonomic elements just right. The fascia is uncluttered, with sexy rounded edges, an unambiguous blue fluorescent display, and sleek, unobtrusive switchgear.

The disc transport is on the left, and operates smoothly enough, while the presence of a USB 2.0 port on the extreme right is the first indication that the BDP 10's talents may extend a little further than the norm.

The rear panel is more businesslike, with a number of additional surprises, although not all of them positive. As expected, the BDP 10 offers a HDMI output, as well as composite and component video options.

But on the audio side, the only analogue choice is provided by a stereo pair of RCAs: there is no 7.1 or 5.1 output set. However, provision has been made for both Toslink optical and coaxial RCA digital output feeds.

To allow access to Blu-ray Live features (offered on some Blu-ray discs, although I have yet to come across one) is an Ethernet port, which allows the Harman Kardon to download a variety of associated content onto flash memory inserted in the USB port. Neat in theory, but of little value right now – although, that may well change in the future.

As one would expect of a latest-generation Blu-ray deck, the BDP 10 is current with all the latest audio and video formats. It is compatible with so-called Deep or x.v.Colour, as well as high-definition 7.1 Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master, although these are available via HDMI and in the digital domain, only.

## Vital Stats

<b>Audio DAC</b> .....	192 kHz/24-bit
<b>Video DAC</b> .....	24 MHz/10-bit
<b>Frequency response</b> .....	2 Hz – 88 kHz, $\pm 0/-0,5$ dB (192kHz)
<b>Signal-to-noise ratio</b> .....	-100 dB ( $\pm 3$ dB), A-weighted
<b>Audio outputs</b> ....	Stereo analogue RCA
<b>Video outputs</b> ....	Composite, component
<b>Digital outputs</b> .....	HDMI 1.3a, coaxial digital, Toslink optical
<b>Dimensions (HxWxD)</b> .....	66x440x352 mm
<b>Weight</b> .....	3,7 kg
<b>PRICE</b> .....	R13 000

### VERDICT

User-friendly, full-house Blu-ray player richly delivers on picture and sound fronts. Great with DVD, too. USB and Ethernet extend functionality.

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Of course, the Harman Kardon will also cope with normal DVDs, as well as rewriteable DVDs and DivX discs, and can also play back Red Book CDs and CD-R/Ws. And it will accept data discs containing MP3 or WMA music files, as well as JPEG image files.

The BDP 10 will upscale DVDs to full 1080p via its HDMI output, pass through

1080/24p signals via HDMI only, and will also upscale to 1080i/720p via the component video output. A comprehensive remote control handset with backlighting is standard, and also offers access to a menu-driven user interface that makes set-up and adjustment of key functions a cinch.

The Harman Kardon was run in conjunction with a Marantz SR-6003 AV receiver and Hitachi P50XR01E plasma, with KEF's 3005 surround speaker system, configured for full 7.1, delivering the sound. HDMI was the signal transfer interface of choice, but component video was also tried.

From the very outset, the BDP 10 endeared itself with its ease of set-up and intuitive operation. Accessing basic and advanced functions was simple and effective, and I had the player running in no time at all.

Blu-ray is the kind of medium that can impress without enchanting. The picture quality can have an almost surreal, hyper-realistic quality that is more CGI than flesh and blood, and that can ultimately be fatiguing.

In the company of these ancillaries, however, the BDP 10 delivered a smoothly rendered, vivid picture with deep, rich colours and clearly defined detail. The sense of realism was powerful, inviting the viewer into the picture, and creating an almost three-dimensional effect.

Blu-ray titles on hand for this test included a sampler with clips from a number of movie and music releases, among them 'Sahara', and Ramsey Lewis' 'Legends of Jazz' featuring Jane Monahan and John Pizzarelli.

In both cases, colour realism, skin tones, crisp resolution and excellent motion rendition were the highpoints, with an inherent believability and smoothness that never appeared crass or overstated. Inky blacks and ample contrast allowed subtle shadow detail to be recreated realistically, too.



As a side note here, it's important to remember that plasmas will generally offer finer tonal transitions and smoother motion than even the best of the current high-def LCD crop, so a least part of the credit for the picture quality here should be attributed to the Hitachi.

Having said that, I also used the BDP 10 in the company of a high-end Samsung LA37A550 32-inch full HD LCD screen, and found that the HK was still able to deliver superior colour depth and crisp, finely rendered images.

When asked to play DVDs, the Harman Kardon happily obliged. Its built-in upscaling operated seamlessly, and it seemed to dig out the maximum image quality from the discs. On 'Live from the Royal Albert Hall', Robbie Williams seemed to jump from the screen,

and 'Quantum of Solace', often used for demo in Blu-Ray format, looked almost as sleek and crisp in DVD.

The BDP 10 appeared to deliver the various digital soundtracks to the Marantz, allowing the receiver to make the most of Dolby True HD and DTS-HD Master formats, as well as the more conventional Dolby Digital or DTS on DVD.

It performed admirably with Red Book stereo CDs via its own analogue stereo outputs, displaying a penchant for pace and tonal spread, albeit sounding slightly dry at the treble end of the spectrum. Imaging was tidy, and staging expansive, with good focus and a believable, generous sound picture.

None of the Blu-ray discs in my possession were compatible with the BD Live feature offered by the Harman Kardon, so I didn't

put that aspect to the test.

The USB port easily recognised several flash drives, and even a FAT32-formatted external hard drive. An in-built media launcher makes accessing data files such as MP3 and WMA music files, or JPEG image files, as simple as navigating through folders and files, much like on a computer.

The Harman Kardon BDP 10 Blu-ray player delivers on almost every front. It's simple to set up and easy to use, compatible with all the current formats, and provides for Ethernet and USB to extend its functionality and versatility even further.

Most of all, it delivers the goods in outright performance terms, especially when partnered with equally talented ancillaries. Definitely a player to put on the short list.

**Deon Schoeman**

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