



"Supersize-me"

Vidikron Vision 90 CineWide with AutoScope

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How can you talk about home cinema and not mention those notorious black bars. In the 80's the horizontal bars made videoclips look cool. But today, when you want to watch a film on television the "letterbox" effect that they create is just plain irritating. If you get rid of them, there goes a big part of the picture! And if you keep the original width, image definition suffers and the actors look scrawny.

Over the last dozen or so years, various manufacturers brought out, first, overhead projectors. Then came widescreen projectors and widescreen televisions. These wide screens were supposed to eliminate the black bars. But, surprise, not only does this format not always get rid of them, but whenever you want to watch sports, the news, or the soaps you now have to live with new black bars, vertical this time, on each side.

Along came DVD to help out widescreen televisions by presenting films in 4:3 Pan & Scan and/or Widescreen 16:9 formats for those DVD players that had a configuration menu optimized for them. And, just recently, high-defini-

tion TV is finally well enough established to offer us movies filmed in the 16:9 format. So, in theory, the problem is solved and everybody is blissfully happy.

Happy? No way. You spend several thousands of dollars and you still see, on some films, two thin black bands of expensive, unused pixels. Did I get the menu set-up wrong? Maybe the sales guy was right when he said my cables weren't good enough? The problem, if we can call it that, has been there since the beginning. Feature films are usually filmed either in Cinemascope (2.35:1 aspect ratio) or in Panavision (2.40:1). The widescreen TV has a ratio of 1.78:1 (16:9 = 1.78). Not yet quite wide enough, so ... Take a conventional TV, the width-to-height ratio is 4:3 or 1.33:1. Now, make it 33% wider – you get the 1.78:1 ratio which is that of the wide screens on the market. Now, add another 33%. What do you get? Answer: 2.35:1. You see, the 16:9 widescreen format is a middle-of-the-road compromise between the good old NTSC TV and the wide screen we find in the movie industry.

So what happens now? Well ... at Runco/Vidikron the engineers simply decided to imitate the movies. They out-fitted their projectors with an anamorphic lens. In the cinema projection booth, this lens allows the operator to change the ratio from the 1.18:1, 35 mm film format to 2.35:1 by doubling the width to fit the screen. On the projector we tested, this is done through a combination of digital and optical image processing that finally puts the whole image on the screen.

THE PROJECTOR

Three years ago, Runco bought the Vidikron brand which had disappeared with CRT projectors at the end of the 90's. Even though the companies share resources, the Vidikron brand is independent and its product distribution is more flexible. This allows Runco to expand its line and get more price-competitive products to market. There are 8 models in the Vision series. The Model 90, which we're looking at here, is little brother to the Model 100, but without the LightAmp technology. So it's the same, but not quite as bright ... and not quite as expensive. This is a uncompro-

jectors such as the Vision 90 send the red, green and blue simultaneously and have no colour wheel. The light source is a 275-watt Ultra High Performance (UHP) arc lamp. In this model it supplies both brightness and colour temperature for 2000 hours of use. Brightness is 2250 ANSI Lumens. However, this measurement, which is useful when comparing competing products, doesn't take into account real use conditions. In order to do this, Vidikron uses CSMS (Cinema Standards Measurement System). So, after calibration according to the standards of the ISF (Imaging Science Foundation), the real light output in your viewing room will be 1120 Lumens or 45.3 foot-Lamberts (ft-L). In order to project this image, Vidikron offers a choice of 4 zoom lenses thus minimizing the restrictions imposed by throw distance and screen size.

So it's the client who decides on where to set up the unit and on the image size. These are not dictated by the projector. The lens can be horizontally and vertically offset in order to ensure perfect geometry without the trapezoid effect.

User-friendly features are also evident in the connections. From the humble yellow composite input to the two DVI HDCP inputs, everything is there. A total of eight sources. Add to these the RS-232 port, an input for infrared signals and three programmable trigger outputs – and you enough jacks to keep your installer busy for several days, if you really want to wire absolutely everything. A small fluorescent display completes the information available onscreen and makes configuration easier. Fortunately, all of these jacks are housed in a box behind the unit and are hidden by an access door. As you might expect, the buttons on the remote control are backlit. The remote is extremely simple and allows you to select each source. It comes programmed with four image pre-sets, among them



misg design, so the result is a high-end product that combines flexibility and performance. Using DLP technology, the picture is produced by 3 chips with a 1280 by 720 resolution. In native mode, the Vision 90 outputs a high-definition 720-line signal in a progressive scan.

Since each of the three primary colours has its own processor, the unit produces no "rainbow effect." The "rainbow effect" is an artefact that shows up when colours are created on black and white images, especially when the viewer moves his or her eyes and head. It only occurs on single-chip DLP projectors and is caused by the colour wheel which sends the primary colours in sequence. High-end DLP pro-

ISF Day et ISF Night to adapt the projector to real viewing conditions. The same interface lets you choose from the 5 image formats, thus optimizing whatever type of projection you want.

THE ULTIMATE OPTION

But what really makes this product unique is that you can add the CineWide with AutoScope option. In fact it's this unprecedented feature that was at the heart of this bench test. Physically, the option is composed of two parts: the anamorphic lens and a motorized sled made of alloys machined with high precision to ensure that all adjustments stay

in place. When needed, the sled positions the anamorphic lens in front of the projection lens.

Four adjustments let you superimpose one lens over the other without affecting the image height, centre, focus or geometry. The lens is high optical quality and increases the image width by a factor of 1.33. Positioning is controlled by one of the projector's trigger outputs. This command signal

stretches the picture vertically. For Cinemascope pictures, this digital transformation moves the image edges to the top and bottom of the screen. The black bars are pushed out of sight. The anamorphic lens then kicks in and resets the geometry by increasing the width proportionally. The whole operation takes only three seconds and the image, with the same height, is now 33% wider. The advantage of this tech-



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can also be used to control the motorized curtains which, when used, reveal the full screen width, just like at the movies ... after the commercials.

So much for the physical attributes of CineWide. To complete the effect, the image is digitally modified by the projector. When you select the Cinema mode, the projector

nology is that it maximizes both image brightness and resolution using all of the pixels from the DLP chips for projection of films in CinemaScope.

The Vision Model 90 looks like any other projector. The case is standard computer colour and gives no inkling of anything special, except that the lens diameter seems rather small. In reality, the lens size is quite normal; it's the projector that is really big! The front is 2 feet wide (600 mm to be precise) and the unit, without the CineWide, weighs in at 30 kilos. You do not want to hang this from your ceiling with EZ Anchors! This is an upscale projector and it needs an upscale home. No kidding, you have to keep in mind that a 60-inch high (152 cm) CinemaScope screen will be 12 feet wide (3.7 m). If your listening room can handle a screen of this magnitude, the size of the Vision 90's won't be a problem. In spite of this, the projector is smaller and lighter than most 3-tube CRTs. It's just that we're spoiled nowadays and we're used to the telephone-book size of the current generation of projectors.

Our tests were carried out in a large room equipped with a Goo Systems wall-screen. Carried away a bit by visions of



The anamorphic lens moves into position.

grandeur, and spurred on by a pair of black velvet curtains, we set up a screen that was 90 inches high by 218 inches wide (2.20 m x 5.54 m). A Pioneer DVJ-X1 player gave us a 480i composite signal and Canare cables with BNC connectors carried the signal to the RGB component HD.

Setup of the basic 1.78:1 format went smoothly. After figuring out some of the subtleties of the setup menu, we adjusted the colour temperature with the help of a Sencore CP5000 colour analyzer. This calibration allowed us to easily get an average value of 6500 degrees Kelvin over all gray-scale levels.

The white was impeccably uniform and the purity of the colours was impressive. Adjustments to the anamorphic lens happen last. I would be lying if I said that there is no distortion at all in the corners. However, only a Mire test can pick up this kind of shortcoming; during a film nothing is noticeable.

Talk about power: the intensity was perfectly adequate for acceptable viewing. But I have to admit that we were pushing the envelope. Vidikron recommends a screen no wider than 120 inches for the 16:9 format. We were at 160 inches. Usually it's the image brightness that is most impressive - in this case it was the gigantic picture that

stole the show.

All the material we viewed during the test was on DVD. In theory the 480i image resolution shouldn't be enough for such a huge screen. Yet, in practice, nothing I watched seemed to suffer from the limited DVD resolution. The Model 90's video processor is powerful and the scaling is flawless. In *Memoirs Of A Geisha*, the actors have natural skin tones and textures. This film has many scenes that look alike. This taxes a projector's ability to reproduce shades of colour and levels of brightness that are very similar. On the Model 90, colour integrity was never compromised by the dominant hues. *House Of Flying Daggers*, on the other hand, has lots of colour and contrast. It allowed me to appreciate the saturation of the strong colours. Reds, which are the Achilles heel of projectors using UHP lamps, appeared deep, strong and bright. So I deduce that Vidikron has chosen to emphasize the wide spectrum rather than brute power. It would almost be sinful to do a PowerPoint presentation using this machine. In any case, it doesn't have an HD15 jack. When characters on the screen move quickly, everything stays very smooth with no jerkiness.

I then watched *Ice Age* paying special attention to the colours and the contrast. But I also wanted to check out the IntelliWide feature. The Ice Age DVD is in the 16:9 format. When the IntelliWide feature is enabled, the picture is stretched "intelligently" to fill the CinemaScope screen. I screened the film for several people and not one of them noticed anything weird or irregular. In IntelliWide mode the central part of the picture keeps the proper geometry and you really have to look closely at movement on the edge of the image to guess at the effect. Faces, which we notice more than anything else, don't appear deformed or stretched. Once you've tried a screen this wide, you'll want to watch everything at full width. The IntelliWide feature lets you do just that.

CONCLUSION

The Vidikron Vision Model 90, with the CineWide and AutoScope option is one of the best projectors you can possibly buy for private viewing. Being able to view a film at home in the same format as at the cinema is a very impressive and very prestigious feature.

With equipment of this calibre, the "Oos" and "Aahs" are not only brought on by the screen size, but also by the colours and textures that compare very well to the original film. In fact, some cinemas that don't keep their gear in top shape won't provide the same performance quality as the Vision 90. Of course, the exclusivity of such a setup comes at a price. However a good part of the cost is directly related to the quality of the lenses. Just ask a photographer how much a really good lens costs.

Vidikron Vision 90
Price (with CineWide option): \$42,000
Tel.: 1-888-4-vidikron
www.vidikron.com