

LOEWE SPHEROS R 37 MASTERPIECE ♦ £5,800 (Approx) ♦ 0800 027 6465 ♦ www.loewe-uk.com

One for art Loewes everywhere



Loewe raises its already high design game with the modestly titled 'Masterpiece' LCD TV. John Archer searches for flaws

German TV guru Loewe can't be accused of lacking chutzpah. After all, if you're going to call a TV 'Masterpiece', you've got to be confident that it's something special otherwise you're setting yourself up for a serious fall. But it's almost annoying to report that, aesthetically at least, the Spheros R 37 Masterpiece really does look special... *incredibly* special.

The first thing that sets it apart from the LCD and plasma pack is the fact that the skinny screen is built flush on to an equally skinny floorstand. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the screen is built into its stand, since inventively, Loewe appears to have hewn the stand and screen frame out of the same hunk of raw material. This means there are no seams to spoil the fascia, leaving you goggling at a single, gorgeous expanse of high-gloss, jet-black loveliness that's unbroken until it reaches the grey-fronted speakers right at the bottom.

Hydraulic controls

I also love the bold, metal circle of the infrared receiver, and the way this monolith of a TV is set atop a circular pedestal that can rotate the TV left or right hydraulically via the remote control. In short, the Spheros R 37 is probably the most attractive TV released this year.

More explanations for what is, by 37in LCD TV standards, a pretty high price tag, become clear during a hunt for connections. But before I cover those there's another bit of design splendour to admire, as it turns out that Loewe has built a full-on multimedia tuner box into

the stand's rear. You simply pull this up to a horizontal position while cramming in all your AV gear.

The highlight of this fearsomely specified AV box is a DVI input with HDCP, making the Masterpiece compatible with Sky's upcoming high-definition STB. There's also a set of high-def/progressive scan capable component video jacks, and a full set of six audio line outs to back up the TV's onboard Dolby Digital decoding.

You'll also find two coaxial digital audio inputs, a coaxial digital audio output, two Scarts, a PC audio input, two infrared link jacks, a VGA input, and a nine-pin control jack. What's more, this being Loewe, you can add optional extra feature modules to the Masterpiece, such as an online web-surfing module and wireless home automation kit.

Moving on to the Masterpiece's features list, you'll discover a variety of justifications for the steep asking price.

RATINGS

Highs: AV performance, upgradability, design
Lows: Occasionally confusing operating system, remote control

Picture	★★★★½
Sound	★★★★
Features	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★½

Not least among its attractions is a built-in 100GB hard-disk recorder. This offers all of the normal recording features you'd expect, including the pausing of live TV and multiple picture quality settings.

The set carries noise reduction, too, plus a movie mode for improving the appearance of DVD playback, Dolby Virtual processing, twin-tuner picture-in-picture facilities, and an inspired onscreen, interactive 'instruction manual' which makes getting around this complicated TV easier. It's a pity the remote control's a bit fiddly, though.

Simply the best

The Masterpiece's body is so lovely that poor pictures from the screen would

LAB REPORT

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Colour	✓			
Geometry	✓			
Contrast	✓			
Resolution	✓			
Colour temperature				
(pre-calibration)			8000K	
(post-calibration)			8000K	
Luminance				
(pre-calibration)			52fL	
(post-calibration)			50fL	
Contrast ratio				
(pre-calibration)			430:1	
(post-calibration)			305:1	

SIGNAL COMPATIBILITY

DVD (NTSC) 480i	●
DVD & DVB (PAL) 576i	●
NTSC/PAL progressive 480p/576p	●
High-definition 720p	●
High-definition 1080i	●

FEATURES

Specifications: DMM/DVI modes; twin-tuner picture-in-picture; motorised stand; one-piece glass fascia; auto tuning; high-def and prog scan compatible; AV box built vertically into TV's rear; built-in HD recorder with bookmarks for recordings; automatic cache option; four recording qualities; four picture search speeds, pause live TV; Teletext with split-screen option; noise reduction; interactive onscreen instructions; Dolby Virtual; one-touch record; parental lock; timer functions; multiple aspect ratio support; audio presets; max volume; picture rotate; loudness mode' Dolby Virtual audio option; Dolby Digital decoding; part of Loewe System range, so multiple stand

and upgrade modules available (see Practical Tip); 1,366 x 768 native resolution; black level booster; contrast 800:1; brightness 450cd/m2; video timer
Connections: S-video input; composite video input; stereo audio input; headphone jack; VGA input; DVI input (with HDCP), component video input, two Scarts (one RGB); RF input; two stereo audio inputs; IR-link input; RC5/RC6 remote input; Loewe System Link; 5.1 channel line outs; two digital audio inputs; one digital audio output; PC audio input; System link; control jack
Dimensions: 992(w) x 1,100(h) x 90(d)mm
Weight: 67kg

A work of art: the R 37 will add style and panache to any living room



'The Masterpiece is probably the most attractive TV released this year'

stand out like a sore thumb. So it's a relief to report that the picture quality is anything but poor. In fact, with strong sources it's up there with the best in class.

The biggest highlight is the picture's black level response. It overcomes this traditional LCD weakness superbly, giving pictures plenty of contrast, depth and texture.

As is usually the case, the absence of the grey misting effect associated with a poor black level lets the screen's colours look resplendent, too. Crucially, though, the hues are also as natural as they are radiant.

Another plus over many rival big LCD screens is the unit's suppression of noise, be it grain, moiré over details, or LCD dot crawl. What's more, the

picture is also largely free of LCD's traditional smearing issues.

This Loewe is predictably at its best with high-definition and progressive scan video feeds. It's unlikely either source will disappoint (at least once you've increased the vertical size of the high-def picture by a pixel or two to remove a visible scanning line at the screen's top).

If I had to pick a flaw in the Masterpiece's pictures, it would be that they're not quite as textured and detailed as some of its competitors. But then the screen is intrinsically less noisy than some, which is a trade I suspect some buyers will be more prepared to make.

The R 37's hard-disk recordings are very good. At their highest quality, recordings are indistinguishable from the original broadcasts.

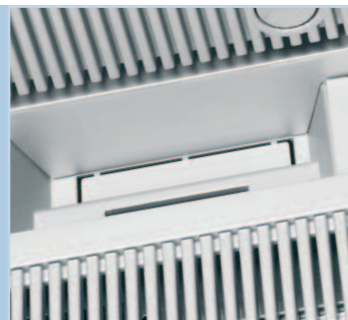
The Masterpiece's pictures are backed up by above standard audio. Particularly remarkable by flatpanel TV standards is the amount of bass. Mid-bass reproduced smoothly, powerfully and fully without edging out the treble details that bring a soundstage to life.

Conclusion

I don't think Loewe has been presumptuous in calling its new TV a 'masterpiece'. Both inside and out, it's more like a work of art than a TV ■



The sonics match the R 37's great picture performance



You can add a multitude of upgrades and modules via this slot



Nicely designed, but the remote remains a little fiddley



Front-panel connections are provided for easy game hook-up