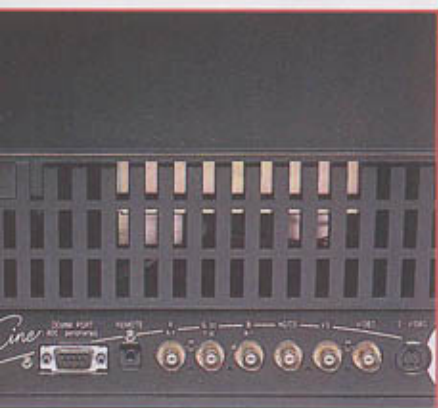




The Belgian brand is one of the biggest names in CRT projectors



The remote is backlit for use in the dark



These BNC sockets will take a progressive component video signal



Voila – the concealed control panel

BARCO CINE 7 LT ♦ £6,380 (APPROX) ♦ www.homecinema.barco.com ♦ 0118 966 4611

# Old guard at vanguard

FORGET EYEBALL-SCALDING DLP PROJECTORS. FOR A TRULY THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE YOU WANT TO GET OVER TO THE DARK SIDE. JOHN ARCHER TRIES THE BARCO CINE 7 LT AND CAN ALMOST SMELL THE POPCORN

**Y**ou've got to feel sorry for the poor old cathode ray tube. After attending the birth of home entertainment as we know it and giving decades of dedicated service, no one can ditch it fast enough. CRT screens are disappearing under gossamer layers of LCD, DLP and plasma upstarts, beside which the bulky CRT technology has about as much sex appeal as a pile of vintage compost.

Nowhere is this more true than in the world of video projectors. DLP and LCD newcomers tend to be cheaper, more flexible and infinitely easier to set up than CRT models, as well as being available in far more prodigious quantities. Indeed, new CRT projectors appear so infrequently that it's hard for them to retain a presence in buyers' minds these days.

For CRT guru Barco, this is a ludicrous state of affairs. It believes CRT still has the best pictures for video viewing, and is happy this month to put its money where its mouth is with its new projector, the Cine 7 LT.

Sitting at the bottom of the Barco range, the 7 LT is effectively Barco's current Cine 7 (a product which continues in production, incidentally) but with the cheaper option of a line tripler rather than a line quadrupler. This keeps the Cine 7 LT's price below 6.5K: low enough, therefore, to pitch

it against many mid-to-high-end DLP rivals. So, it looks like the projector war is about to hot up again...

The Cine 7 LT gets off to a bad start. The sheer bulk and weight of its black-clad body comes as a hernia-inducing shock after the supreme portability of rival technologies. Then there's the setup. Whereas DLP and LCD projectors can be plonked on a coffee table and be up and running in minutes, the 7 LT needs a professional Barco installer who is likely to take between three and five hours to complete the job. And, once installed, the 7 LT can never (ever!) be moved again, even by a few inches, without the installation having to be repeated.

## WITH KNOBS ON

There's a pretty wholesome array of video inputs at the 7 LT's booty end, including component video BNCs (naturally able to take progressive scan) and a 15-pin PC jack. And, as you'd expect with such a complex beast, the 7 LT is dripping with features. But our advice would be not to touch them once the installation bod has left your premises! Just for interest's sake, however, I should draw your attention to noise reduction circuitry, motion processing, the facility to turn the line multiplier off (more on this later), auto and endlessly flexible manual

## LAB REPORT

**Colour:** Very good – minimal bleed, reasonably hard edges, no noise

**Geometry:** Excellent – so long as your installer has done his job right

**Frequency response:** Excellent – clarity to 5.8MHz and beyond

**Convergence:** Excellent, if installed well

## HCC Practical Tip

If you've got used to a DLP or LCD projector or, like most people, you run your CRT TV with its contrast levels way too high, you might be tempted to start ramping the 7 LT's brightness and contrast up. But we strongly urge you to resist this. Ramping up the brightness/contrast has all sorts of unpleasant knock-on effects, and once you get used to it, the darker look is actually very cinematic – so long as you have no ambient light in the room. For the record, after much playing around, the essential settings we selected (which should serve as a good starting point) were: contrast 70; brightness 45; sharpness factory preset 2; motion processing on; noise reduction off; line interpolation on; colour 49; contrast enhancement 72.

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convergence and geometry tools, different colour warmth for different sources and a contrast booster.

Much more important than its features count, though, are the 7 LT's specifications. The most awe-inspiring of these is a quoted contrast ratio of more than 15,000:1. The very best DLP rivals only boast around 2,500:1. (Although, before we get too carried away, differences in measuring techniques have been known to make these figures not really worth the paper they're written on!)

The 7 LT can also take HDTV, handle 60Hz PC feeds up to 1,024 x 768 resolution, deliver 1,000 TV lines, and cough up brightness of 1,000 Lumens at 10 per cent of peak white. It uses a Toshiba T180 7in CRT system with USPL HD145 lenses and, while it does require a fan to keep itself cool, this runs with just 35dB of racket. For a little while,

though, all these myriad talents and options don't seem to deliver an especially gratifying picture. Dark areas seem excessively dark, the picture seems muted, and there's an apparent softness to the finish. Hmm...

### LOOKING AFRESH

The longer I watched, however, the more these initial disappointments started to feel like strengths. What at first appeared to be excessive darkness started to feel like a truly profound black level (one so good that I'd misinterpreted it, having become used to the comparatively grey black rendition of rival technologies). Ultimately, the 7 LT's black level is more like that of a commercial cinema than anything seen on a DLP or LCD projector. As for the muted quality of the image, this is

simply down to the 7 LT's fastidiously sticking to the sort of brightness levels best suited to projected video rather than data footage. This gives exceptionally natural colour rendition, which extended viewing reveals far outweighs the spurious advantage of watching a picture that merely sings your retinas more efficiently. Likewise, the slight softness translated over time into another indicator of truly cinematic atmosphere. DLP/LCD images might look steelier and more detailed, but this can often lead to noise and a strangely distracting experience.

Now that I was tuned into the Barco's wavelength, other subtle signs of greatness struck me – like no jaggedness around curved edges, no trace of any panel structures, no blanking lines, just a full, fluid, fabulously celluloid-esque viewing experience. The uniformity of tone is awesome, too, by which I mean that there's no over-emphasis, ghosting or haloing to edges. Nor was the impressive purity of image

## FEATURES

Electrostatic focusing; liquid cooling; colour correction; colour filtering; Scheimpflug correction; 5 x 5 zone convergence system; 32 memory banks; 1.25:1 to 2.35:1 ratio support; multiple colour balance (°K) supported; 60in to 300in image supported; IRIS3; motion processing; noise reduction; backlit remote

**Specifications:** 7in Toshiba T180 system; 1,000 Lumens brightness; 1,000 TV lines optical resolution; 1,024 x 768 resolution supported; RGB bandwidth (-3dB) 75MHz; 15-50kHz horizontal and 37-210kHz vertical scan frequency range; line tripler  
**Connections:** Component via 3 BNCs x 2; HD/VD BNCs; 4-pin S-video; composite BNC; PC RGB via D9 connector; RGB via 5 BNC  
**TV formats supported:** HDTV, 480i, 575i, 480p, 575p, 1080i, 720p, PAL, SECAM, NTSC  
**Dimensions:** 727(d) x 550(w) x 302(h)mm; **Weight:** 39kg

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