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The joys of home cinema

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Barco has long been synonymous with the top end of the home-theatre market and its engineers have earned a reputation for designing CRT projectors that ensure cinema-quality images.

But with new technologies shaking up the market ? challenging CRT projectors in terms of size, weight and price ? the Belgium-based company is fighting to maintain its position at the top by taking these emerging technologies to a new level.

About one-third of home theatres use Barco projectors and all eyes are watching to see whether Barco can translate its success with CRT projectors to the new DLP rivals.

DLP projectors are the latest in video reproduction but they have numerous weaknesses, including the ?rainbow effect?, or poor colour accuracy. This effect exhausts the eyes of viewers, making it difficult to watch the screen for a long time.

In addition, DLP projectors are unable to produce ?pure? white and black. The closest they can get to pure black is an inky dark grey. Moreover, there is often data loss in high-resolution transmission through the cable. The longer the cable is the more data lost.

Barco designers were unable to rely on IC chips and had to develop circuits to take care of the flywheel that reads the spectrum for their DLP projectors.

The Cine Versum is the latest series from Barco that uses DLP technology. The Cine Versum 80 is a very large projector that comes with a picture control unit called the Cine Versum Master.

It serves as an AV control unit with connections for various modules. This clever design allows the projector to be upgraded for different functions. The Cine Versum Master can accommodate as many as eight analogue sources and eight digital sources.

The resolution for every source input is 1600x1200 pixels in a 16:9 ratio.

The Cine Versum Master is not restricted for use with the Cine Versum 80 projector, but can be hooked up to other systems including the DLP projector, PDP, LCOS and LCD technology. It is a very future-looking device.

Another interesting feature of the Cine Versum Master is that it is linked to the projector via an XL/SL video link that transfers all signals, including control, video and audio. The signals are transferred without being compressed.

The XL/SL video link system, which can transfer high resolution pictures for up to 50 meters, is a great solution to the problem of signal loss.

Both the Cine Versum 80 and Cine Versum Master are quite bulky and heavy, but their aluminium bodies are attractive.

The LCD display of the Cine Versum Master is positioned on the front, creating a nice balance. It is also large enough to show the readings clearly.

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The Cine Versum 80 is compatible with hi-resolution anamorphic wide screen input from the DVD or TV, with a contrast ratio of 1100:1 and 800ANSI Lumens brightness. The six-segment colour wheel system has been specially designed to correspond with the timing of the UHP light bulb in the projector.

It can expand the light spectrum to improve the white balance factor while viewing. There is a visible difference when compared to other UHP projectors.

Another secret is the almost-silent cooling fan, which usually sounds like Ocean surf. There is almost no noise from the 34db fan in the Cine Versum 80. It is inaudible even in scenes that are quiet or in which only dialogue can be heard.

The Cine Versum 80 performed incredibly in tests with a number of DVDs that are often used for testing video equipment. The white is natural and the black has many shades.

It can deliver a very natural picture. The ?chroma noise?, or wave colours, usually produced by DLP projectors were absent.

Barco engineers have succeeded in pushing DLP projectors past previous limits. They were able to almost banish the rainbow effect, surely a an amazing feat.

However, the price is not cheap and could shock those who lack a few spare millions. But if you do, then the Cine Versum 80 is unbeatable if you want to go to the movies at home.