

Denon DBP-2012UD | Blu-ray player | £750

Denon delivers a Blu-ray stunner to take on all comers

Viewed in isolation, Denon's DBP-2012UD looks highly competitive, its specification as extensive as the obvious care and attention lavished upon its build. But compare it with Marantz's UD7006, our current reference Blu-ray player, and you'll quickly discover just how formidable the Denon is. In many ways, it's exactly the same as the UD7006 - but £50 cheaper.

Different face, familiar innards

Of course, while Denon and Marantz share common ownership, the niceties of brand differentiation mean that the DBP-2012's fascia bears the Denon family style. Its key controls have been subtly relocated and, naturally, the remote sports a different

badge. But dig into the manual and you'll find that the two players share all the same key components, including 32-bit/192kHz Burr-Brown DACs, Anchor Bay ABT2015 upscaling and an Analog Devices 12-bit Video DAC. The disc mechanism is also identical, as is the socket-fit (bar some very minor differences).

None of this is meant to detract from the Denon's appeal in any way: quite the opposite, in fact. Since the UD7006 is so deeply impressive, it follows that the Denon is similarly stunning, whether you're luxuriating in the depth and clarity of its 3D images or thrilling to its rock-solid grasp of rapid motion. It's a muscular listen too, with exceptional scale and weight during

USE IT WITH

Inception

An oldie but a goodie, and just the ticket to demonstrate the Denon's brilliance



the biggest action sequences of *Sucker Punch*, plus a stirring, forceful balance with Hans Zimmer's wondrous score to *Inception*. It's even respectably rhythmic with CD, capturing the stomping whirl of Against Me!'s *White Crosses* in suitably swaggering fashion.

All of which means this is a Blu-ray deck you have to audition: as odd as it sounds given its price, it's something of a bargain...

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Excellent picture with standard and 3D discs; formidable upscaling; great sound

AGAINST It's no rival for cheaper decks when it comes to streaming features

VERDICT Marantz's UD7006 has some serious competition in the shape of this in-house rival

It needs to beat

**Marantz UD7006
£800**

★★★★★

From the same stable, this fine player is our current favourite in this price class.



Popcorn Hour PopBox 3D | Media streamer | £140

A true Swiss Army Knife of media streaming

'PopBox'. That's an exciting name for a dull-looking box, don't you think? The stylised etching of the name is a nice touch, but otherwise this is rather plain, angular box that feels a bit cheap.

The thing is, it is cheap - £60 cheaper than the Boxee Box, in fact, and with a very similar raft of features. What that means is that with a couple of notable exceptions the PopBox will play just about any digital media file out there. These can be fed to it from USB sticks or hard disks, or from your computer or dedicated NAS device, which it can access via the ethernet socket on the back or an optional, £18 wi-fi dongle.

Wide-ranging file support

The '3D' in the name indicates that the PopBox is capable of displaying 3D content. It won't, however, display 3D Blu-ray files, instead relying on MKV3D and similar side-by-side and top-and-bottom 3D formats. We're not convinced that there are many folk who will make use of that, but there's no harm in it being available.

Far more crucially, that the PopBox plays AVI and MKV video to a high standard. Standard-def is clean and balanced, while HD is sharp, with deep, insightful blacks and natural colours. It can be set to adapt its refresh rate to match the incoming signal, and if you do feed the unit a 1080p/24fps signal it's not a million miles away from a dedicated Blu-ray player for motion.

The sound has weight and dynamism, and is relatively musical for a box of this type (even if it won't play Apple Lossless).

USE IT WITH

Panasonic TX-P42GT30

The Panasonic a great performer, it has 3D support and has access to on-demand movies via the Acetrax service



The PopBox will even sniff out media files on your network and download artwork and synopses from IMDb. Apps include BBC iPlayer, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. However, while iPlayer is a joy to use via the PopBox, social networking is a tricky task without a QWERTY remote such as the one you get with Boxee.

Still, this is undeniably great value for a streamer with on-demand tendencies.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Vast format support; iPlayer and YouTube; sharp, detailed, natural pictures; chunky sound

AGAINST Remote is no good for typing; no Apple Lossless support

VERDICT Combining playback your own files with VoD makes the PopBox a good prospect

Needs to beat

**D-Link Boxee Box
£200 ★★★★★**

Though it's sitting on four stars, the scrap between the Boxee and PopBox is close



Not only can you play files from your network, you can use iPlayer and YouTube



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