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PLAYSTATION® 3

If you're a gamer, you may have November 17th flagged in your calendar. That's the U.S. launch date for Sony's long-awaited and much-anticipated PLAYSTATION 3. Incorporating a number of new technologies, the PS3 promises to offer new levels of gaming performance. So what's it got under the hood, and is it worth the asking price? And if you covet one, what are the odds of getting your hands on it before the roof-lights come down and the tree gets composted? The answers, in brief, are "lots," "yes," and "good luck."

Performance-wise, the PS3 represents a major leap forward. Not only does it feature HDMI™ output at resolutions up to 1080p (which is considered a high-performance resolution even for PC gamers), but it also uses the new HDMI 1.3 chips, which support Deep Color output. According to Ken Kutaragi, President of Sony Computer Entertainment, Inc. (SCEI), *"By introducing the next-generation HDMI 1.3 technology, with its high speed and Deep Color capabilities, PS3 will push the boundaries of audiovisual quality to the next level of more natural and smoother expression on the latest large flat panel displays"* On the audio front, PS3 supports a variety of formats including DTS™, Dolby® 5.1, and even the new "lossless" Dolby TrueHD.

Built around a cell processor and NVIDIA's RSX graphics chip, it comes standard with 256MB RAM and another 256MB VRAM, as well as Ethernet, USB, Bluetooth, and (drum roll please) a Blu-ray disc player. That last item should take some of the sting out of the price tag, which is \$499 for the base model or \$599 if you want built-in Wi-Fi and a bigger hard drive (60GB vs. 20GB). As of this writing, the first wave of standalone Blu-ray players are sporting pre-order price tags in the \$1,000 range, making the PS3, in its own way, quite the bargain for early adopters.

If you were one of the lucky ones who pre-ordered a unit through GameStop, congratulations. Those pre-orders were snapped up in a flash, and the company has suspended the program. With consumer interest running high and an installed base of something like 100 million PS2 owners, that portends empty store shelves and a lot of not-so-festive holiday scalping on eBay. But if you can get your hands on a console, the good news is that game publishers already have a number of PS3 titles on the shelves, and more are scheduled to release before the holidays. Some of the more popular titles are bound to be shooters like Resistance: Fall of Man, F.E.A.R., and Rainbow Six: Vegas, as well as more family-friendly games like Madden NFL 07, Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07, and Call of Duty 3.

Consumer Electronic Control (CEC)

In every HDMI cable, one of those nineteen pins is dedicated to something called CEC, or Consumer Electronic Control. What the heck is it? In short, a bi-directional bus that allows HDMI devices, regardless of brand, to remotely control each other. Though it has only been implemented to date in a few devices, that's bound to change as systems become more complex and consumers begin to feel more pain over the limitations of "universal" remote controls. It offers the possibility of true "one-touch" functionality across multiple devices, even when multiple manufacturers are involved.

CEC is a relatively new technology, but the notion of integrating remote control functions has been around for a while. Antecedents include the Philips SCART system - the "big plug" interconnect seen on some European devices - as well as Sony's S-Link technology. CEC was written into the HDMI specification to provide this sort of intelligent control functionality across manufacturer lines, with a single protocol and a standard command set for all devices employing it.

One early implementer of CEC functionality is Panasonic (Matsushita), whose EZ Sync™ functionality enables one-touch control of multiple devices. A DVD player with EZ Sync (branded as VIERA Link in Japan) can control other compliant devices, for instance powering up all the necessary components for watching a DVD movie with one touch of the "play" button.

One Touch Play is just one of the standardized CEC functions, along with One Touch Record and One Touch System Standby. Other CEC functions include System Information (i.e. auto menu language selection), Feature Abort, Routing Control and Power Status. CEC is an optional feature set in HDMI, and implementing it is not a requirement for compliance testing. However, if a manufacturer chooses to design in CEC, he has to implement a standard feature set that includes, at a minimum, these seven basic CEC functions.

What does the future hold for CEC? Hopefully, a simpler and happier existence for the typical home-theater user, without the challenges of programming (and re-programming) a universal remote, or the frustration (and clutter) that comes from using a different remote for every device. True, it's never going to serve the needs of a multi-zone, whole-house user, but that's not what it's designed for. The purpose - and the promise - of this technology is to simplify the operation of a standard home-theater stack.

Going forward, as more manufacturers decide to implement the technology, Simplay Labs will be putting more emphasis on CEC testing so that when you buy a CEC-enabled device, you can have confidence it will work perfectly with other CEC-enabled components. We are currently ramping up to offer a full CEC testing regimen in early in 2007, and are considering other measures to make sure the technology is well-received in the marketplace. For instance, we may introduce a distinctive logo mark for tested products that feature verified CEC functionality. What do you think? If you have comments or suggestions related to this issue - or to any aspect of the Simplay HD program - please feel free to send us an e-mail.

Simplay-Verified Products

Three Yamaha A/V receivers have passed our testing program and earned Simplay HD verification: the RX-V2700, the RX-V1700, and the HTR-6090. We've also been testing cables, and are happy to report that Acoustic Research now has a number of HDMI cables verified for full 1080p performance, including the PR184 (3 foot), PR185 (6 foot), and PR186 (12 foot) models. The Simplay HD website provides a more complete and up-to-date view of verified products: check it out [here](#).



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