



AzBox Premium HD Plus

True HDTV and Infinite Features

We could hardly wait for the new Opensat AzBox Premium HD Plus to arrive. After all, it's the first satellite receiver with 1080p full HD video output. We noticed right away that the manufacturer had chosen a sturdy yet very elegant packaging design, and our eyes grew even bigger when we opened the box to first discover a rather large external power pack. As a matter of fact, Opensat really had taken the step of separating receiver and power pack, which actually is a smart move considering the fact that modern receivers generate a huge amount of heat, a substantial part of which comes from the power pack.



So with the AzBox Premium HD Plus Opensat has done something which is so simple and yet so smart that you



Internet browser



really ask yourself why other manufacturers have not come up with it before. Nonetheless, Opensat has equipped the AzBox Premium HD Plus with a small fan to be on the safe side. While doing a great job it would help if it created

a little less background humming, especially with a major heat source being separated from the main unit. But this is a truly minor nuisance rather than something which might potentially reduce your viewing pleasure.

Looking at the AzBox for the very first time two issues will

strike you: First, five screws are easily identifiable on the upper side of the casing, and secondly, four buttons are located not on the front panel but on the front part of the upper side.

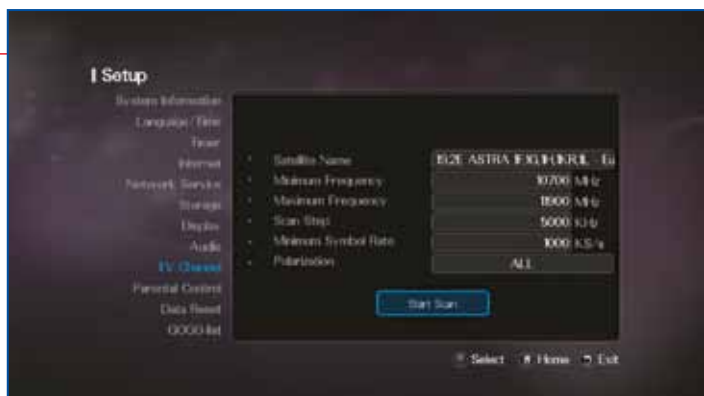
The raison d'être of the five screws becomes clear very quickly: Unscrew them and you see a slot for integrating any 3.5-inch S-ATA hard disk.

At last a receiver that doesn't have to be almost completely disassembled simply to add a hard disk. That's what we call smart design.

Added to that is a very stylish front panel that will blend into any living room environment. It's only the buttons on the upper side that take some time to be comfortable with, and depending on where and how the box is positioned they might even be a bit hard to reach.

Bang in the middle of the front panel a very easy to read VF display is located just below three LEDs which indicate the current operating mode. To the left there are cross-shaped buttons for navigating in menus and lists and together with the previously mentioned buttons on the upper side they allow operating the receiver when the remote control is misplaced or – heaven forbid! – the batteries have run empty.

Hidden behind a flap on the left section of the front panel two CI slots can take in all standard modules. There is



Blind scan search |



AzBox Premium HD Plus channel list |



Display settings |



Channel list editing |



EPG Modus 1 |

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Available online starting from 2 April 2010

also a built-in card reader as well as a USB interface for hooking up external storage media.

Turning the receiver around the back panel leaves nothing to be desired either. Apart from the two sets of must-have satellite IF inputs and loop-through outputs there is HDMI, 6 RCS jacks for YUV, CVBS and analog audio, scart, network interface, USB, optical digital audio out and even a socket for attaching a 0/12 V switch. DXers will love this last feature, particularly as many manufacturers have done away with it completely.

A mechanical power switch rounds off an already perfect first impression.

The AzBox Premium HD Plus comes with an ergonomically shaped remote control that might overwhelm users with all its buttons at first sight. But once you get the knack of it and have become familiar with the enormous range of features this box offers, you'll slowly fall in love with your remote and wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. It does come with a universal mode so that you'll be able to control your TV set with the same unit, making room for more useful items on the coffee table.

Both the receiver itself and the remote control boast a high level of workmanship and it clearly shows that Opensat has decided to use only state-

of-the-art components, an impression that is reinforced with every touch of a button. Unfortunately, our test unit arrived without a printed manual, but this was readily available for downloading from the Opensat website.

Installation

Turn on the box for the first time and it will welcome you with the installation menu on your TV screen. Here you start out with setting your personal preferences, beginning with your preferred language.

The AzBox Premium HD Plus is a truly international fellow with Portuguese, Dutch, Czech, Russian, Spanish, Polish, Serbian, Hungarian, Greek, Bulgarian, Italian, Slovakian and Turkish being available next to regulars such as English, French or German. Similarly, audio language and subtitle language can be chosen so that the receiver automatically selects your preferred tongue if provided.

The internal clock of the receiver can either be set manually or using data sent via satellite. A number of different display formats are available, which goes to prove that Opensat has looked at every aspect down to the very last detail.

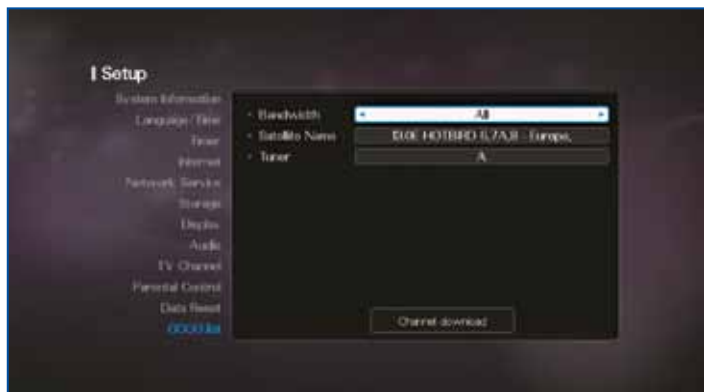
We were particularly interested in the networking capabilities of the AzBox Premium HD Plus, as this receiver comes with a competent web browser, RSS reader and You-



EPG Modus 2 |



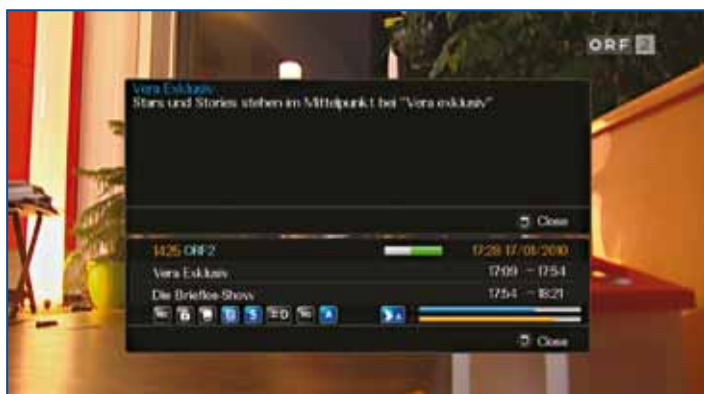
File viewer |



GOGO channel list download via Internet |



Info bar |



Extended info bar |

Tube player. For adding the box to an existing network you can always use the good old RJ45 socket, but you might leave out all the cabling and go for WLAN, which is supported thanks to the built-in WiFi module. During setup the box will detect all available WLAN base stations and will hook up to the desired network once the correct password is entered.

It goes without saying that DHCP assignment of all required network parameters is supported, but you may always go manual and enter all details yourself. The WEP and WPA2 protocols make sure your data stay where they belong and are only yours to see.

In contrast to a number of competing network-ready receivers the AzBox Premium HD Plus cannot only access content supplied on the local network or the Internet, but can be set up to become a fully-featured server for all other networked devices. You may want to turn it into an FTP server, file server or Telnet server, and the receiver is even able to handle dynamic DNS so that it becomes possible to access it from anywhere in the world over the Internet. System settings also include a feature to format all storage media in order to make room for new recordings, if need be.

The AzBox Premium HD Plus is a master of video output options. Next to composite and component video various HDMI resolutions can be selected, ranging from 576i all the way up to 1080p (full high-def), which is an absolute first for a digital satellite receiver. We should also mention the fact that audio options are just as versatile, with PCM or RAW being available next to Dolby Digital, for example.

From the installation menu we proceed to the 'TV channel' sub menu for adjusting the receiver to our local antenna and distribution equipment. The test unit we received came with two DVB-S2 tuners, but according to Opensat DVB-C and DVB-T will also be available shortly.

What's best, any combination of tuners can be paired or easily exchanged to suit individual needs. With two satellite tuners three different modes can be selected: Twin, Loop Through and Separated. With Twin the software assumes that two identical signal inputs are led to the two IF sockets. Loop Through means that only one signal input is available which is led to IF 1 and then looped through to IF 2.

Using the Separated mode two cables from two different sources can be used, so that tuner 1 is fed signals from a DiSEqC setup for several satellite, for example, while tuner 2 gets signals from a single LNB permanently aligned towards a different satellite. The pre-stored satellite list includes data from a total of 182 European, Asian and American satellites, which means virtually all of you should be able to find 'your' birds.

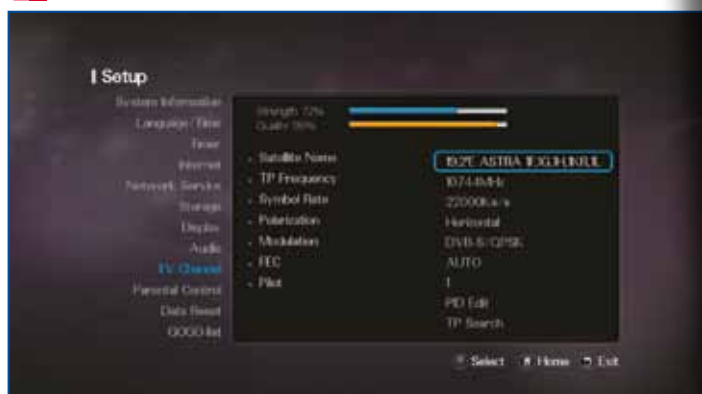
We truly loved that fact that many satellites are not only separated according to C band and Ku band, but also according to footprint. EUTELSAT W2 at 16° East, for example, shows up twice – once with parameters of transponders that can be received in Europe, and the second time with all African transponders. Thumbs up from us for this extremely helpful approach. If only other manufacturers would also go to such lengths when compiling their satellite and transponder lists!



LNB settings |



Main menu |



Manual channel search |



MP3 playback |



Picture viewer |

If you have more than one LNB to address there's the DiSEqC 1.0 and 1.1 protocols for using up to 16 LNBs as well as various SCR settings. A wide range of LOFs for the C or Ku bands comes pre-stored, but there's always the option of manually selecting any out-of-the-ordinary parameters. You will hardly find an LNB the AzBox Premium HD Plus is not perfectly happy with.

If you own a motorised antenna you will have been waiting to hear that not only DiSEqC 1.2 but also DiSEqC 1.3 (USALS) is implemented, so that this receiver will be a brilliant match for each and any DiSEqC motor. So now that all parameters and satellite entries have been matched with local requirements it's time to search for channels. To that end the AzBox offers four different search modes.

In any mode you can select one or more satellites which are then scanned for TV, radio, FTA or encrypted channels. We tested the box for a complete search on HOTBIRD 13° East, which only took slightly more than five minutes for a total of 1288 TV channels and 426 radio channels.

Transponder search works just the same way, with the only difference being transponders rather than satellites that are selected for a search. Thanks to the comprehensive and well-designed transponder databank this really is fun!

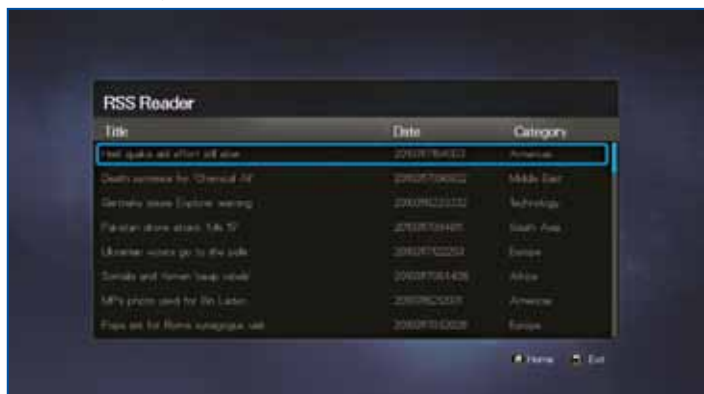
Pros will mostly go for the extended search, which provides access to a whole bunch of search criteria, with PID search being one of them. There are signal strength and signal quality bars on the upper section of the screen to clearly show right away whether or not transmissions are available on any selected transponder.

Feed hunters and DXers listen up now! The AzBox Premium HD Plus has a blind scan feature built in as well. All you need to do is enter the start and end frequencies, polarisation and step size and let the receiver scan the full range within for any active transponders, regardless of pre-stored lists. Using a blind scan search you really can be sure of adding all available

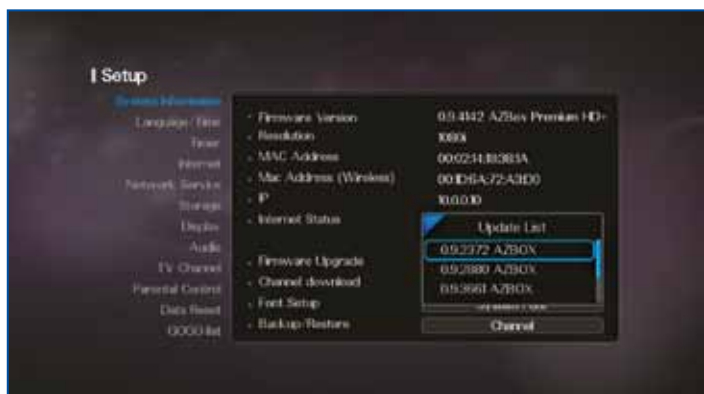




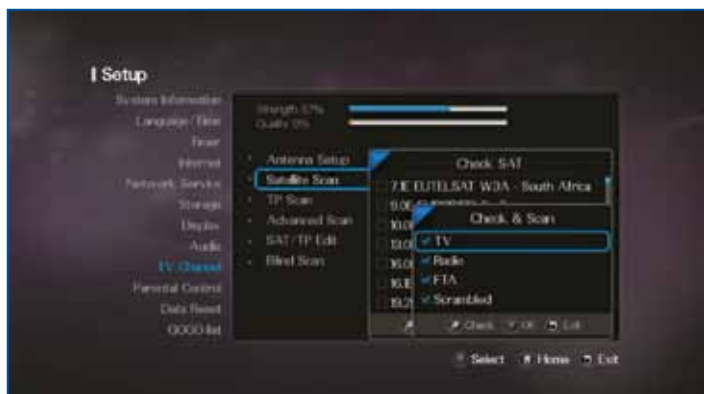
YouTube player |



RSS feed reader |



Software update via Internet |



Satellite search |



Settings |

transponders to the internal memory.

The flip side is that such a search naturally takes its time, and for the same satellite as before (HOTBIRD 13° East) it now took 13 minutes. On the other hand, we ended up with 1416 TV channels and 431 radio stations and at the same time updated the pre-stored transponder list in a most hassle-free way.

Speaking of updating the channel list: Opensat has come up with an innovative feature for its AzBox Premium HD Plus – the so-called GOGO list. It can look up pre-assembled and regularly revised channel lists from the Internet and install these in the receiver.

Gone are the times when owners of motorised dishes had to perform a channel search on each satellite to slowly fill their channels list. These days you simply press a button and the AzBox Premium HD Plus will take care of this in next to now time. Wouldn't you too rather watch satellite TV than watch your receiver search for new channels?

Everyday use

After leaving the installation menu the next thing that pops up on screen is the main menu, which again is divided into 11 sub-section: TV, YouTube, Plug-ins, Films, Music, Photos, File Manager, FTP, RSS, Browser and Settings.

Just by looking through all items it becomes clear that the AzBox is so much more than your average digital satellite receiver. Home Multimedia Centre would be a more appropriate designation. Still, let's focus on good old TV reception for the moment, so this is the menu item we select.

The receiver switches to the first channel on the list. Pressing the OK button calls up the comprehensive channel list which – next to the channel name – also displays EPG information if supplied by the provider. This way you can check instantly which events are transmitted on the individual channels, without having to zap through all channels. It's difficult to imagine a more comprehensive yet at the same time easy-to-navigate channel list design.

You can sort entries according to satellite, genre, provider, country, FTA/CAS or you can create your own favourites lists. This way each desired channel can be found in a breeze, even though the box can store up to 15000 individual channels.

If you press the MENU button a new windows comes up allowing you to edit each channel list entry without having to go through a dedicated menu. Channels can be deleted, moved, renamed, added to a favourites list or genre, country or provider. The corresponding satellite name is also inserted for each entry, which is a great feature for channels that are transmitted on more than one satellite, especially if you you're in alphabetical sorting mode.

Thanks to the integrated TimeShift feature the current event can be paused at any time, only to be continued from that very point at a later stage. You'll never miss a scene any more whenever the phone rings during a movie or news report.

We were particularly impressed with the fantastic video quality of the AzBox. While it is true that – unfortunately – 1080p transmissions via satellite are not (yet?) available, the internal

1080p upscaler does a wonderful job. Zapping between channels is fast, with slightly less than a second even when switching from an SD to a HD channel.

Not that we had doubted it, but as always we also tested SCPC reception with low data rates and as expected this new Opensat receiver delivered flawless results with a symbol rate of just over 2500 ks/s. Weak signals from NILESAT 7° West came in nicely too, even though their C/N was close to the tuner's threshold level.

Multimedia

While the AzBox is not on equal footing with a standard PC, it is nonetheless strong competition in several fields, as its built-in multimedia and Internet features make for welcome distraction during commercial breaks.

With the integrated YouTube player you can easily access this popular video portal anytime you wish. The fact that a lot of content is available in high-def already is an added bonus for the YouTube player's full-screen presentation mode.

The AzBox belongs to the group of receivers with a dedicated plug-in interface

that can be used to expand the feature range of the digital receiver. The sky's the limit for resourceful software developers and the best thing about the AzBox is its direct download from the Internet. This does away with the need for looking around for plug-ins on the Internet first and then transferring them to the receiver for installation.

With a simple touch of button on the remote control you choose any plug-in you'd like to add and that's about it. Judging from past developments we can expect some great stuff from the AzBox online community.

With ever more Internet bandwidth becoming available to more and more users, videos can be downloaded just as easily as music and pictures these days. While this is a great thing it's not much fun watching a blockbuster movie on a PC or laptop display. The AzBox enters centre stage once again as it is capable of playing back almost everything you throw at it through its two USB interfaces.

So all you have to do is save a film on an external storage medium using your PC, hook up the external hard disk or memory stick to the AzBox

and turn on your TV to watch. The following formats are recognised and played back: XVID (SD and HD), DIVX, MPEG1 and MPEG2, MPEG4.2, WMV9 and H.264 in all its different varieties.

Prefer music to movies? The AzBox is the box for you too, as it can play back MPEG Audio MP1,2,3 and MPA, as well as AAC, M4A, WAV, WMA, FLACC and OGG files. This makes CDs a thing of the past.

Internet

Opensat has equipped all aspects of software updating and channel list editing with Internet features in its new AzBox. No more over-the-air loading of new software for hours – top-notch receivers like the AzBox Premium HD Plus have a radically different approach: FTP downloads from the Internet.

Apart from a huge benefit and time saving for users this allows manufacturers to react to any problems more quickly and provide software updates for any glitches that might become apparent during every day use.

True enthusiasts may even try several software versions for beta tests to provide valuable feedback to the manufac-

turer's software development department. It's only logical that Opensat has taken the continuous merging of satellite receiver and Internet one step further and ships its new flagship product with a competent Internet browser. If you cannot find anything you like on TV you don't have to fall back on some more or less useful built-in games to kill time, but may rather access a news site on the Internet, look for tomorrow's weather or even check your mail.

We found the Internet browser to be working very well in our test. It takes some time to get used to navigating with a remote control rather than a mouse or touchpad, but once you internalise this new concept it doesn't pose any problem and quickly turns into fun.

In an increasingly networked world more and more people expect to be fed with instant news on topics that suit their interest. A virtually endless number of RSS feeds meets that demand and Opensat decided to add an RSS reader to its new AzBox as well. It can be used to conveniently display the latest news items provided through a user-defined set of RSS lists.



Just imagine – from now on you cannot only watch the morning news on your favourite channel before leaving for work, you also get all the latest information in all your areas of internet served up right to your TV screen, before you have even turned on your PC!

Last, but by no means least, the AzBox Premium HD Plus comes with its own FTP client which can be used to load data directly to the receiver's hard disk from any FTP server in the world. This is particularly handy for transferring films,

as there is no need any longer to route transfers via your PC first.

To sum up, the AzBox Premium HD Plus truly impressed us in any possible way. It is a true leap forward in home multimedia and opens a window to the future of satellite receivers. Despite the enormous range of features Opensat has made a point of designing a user interface with an eye on usability. Never did it cause confusion and all capabilities of this new receiver were ready at our fingertips at any time.

Expert Opinion

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The AzBox Premium HD Plus is a receiver filled right to the brim with interesting features. At the same time the manufacturer has not forgot what the box was designed for: satellite reception.

Despite its impressive list of functions the AzBox Premium HD Plus is still easy to use and thus suitable for the whole family.

1080p video output is a true first in satellite receivers and we can only hope that content providers will offer that resolution via satellite sometime soon.

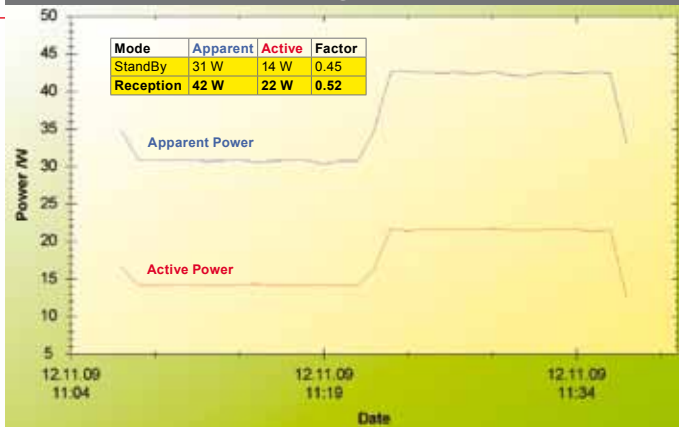
With its AzBox Opensat has designed a great package deal offering TV reception, multimedia and Internet.

Every once in a while some minor software flaws became evident. The EPG, for instance, caused the system to freeze occasionally. We have learned from the manufacturer, however, that they are working hard on perfecting the software so that we can assume these problems will be a thing of the past soon.



Thomas Haring
TELE-satellite
Test Center
Austria

DIAGRAM



First 15 minutes: Standby. Second 15 minutes: During the first minute the receiver powers up, followed by 14 minutes of active use including switching channels, recording, playing back, etc.

TECHNICAL DATA

Manufacturer	Opensat, Edificio OPENSAT, Lagoa C.P. 4950-283 Mazedo, MNÇ Portugal
Fax	+351 251 652 966
E-Mail	info@azbox.com
Model	AzBox Premium HD Plus
Function	Digital HDTV DVB-S2 receiver with various Multimedia & Internet Features
Channel Memory	15000
Symbolrate	2-45 Ms/sec.
SCPC Compatible	yes
DiSEqC	1.0 / 1.1 / 1.2 / 1.3
USALS	yes
HDMI Output	yes
Scart Connector	1
Audio/Video Outputs	6x RCA
Component Video Output	yes
S-Video Output	no
UHF Modulator	no
0/12 Volt Connector	yes
Digital Audio Output	yes
EPG	yes
C/Ku-Band compatible	yes
PVR-Function	yes
USB 2.0 Connector	yes
Ethernet	yes
E-SATA	no
Dimensions	340/243/66 mm
Weight	2.65kg (without hdd)

