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NEW **REVIEWS**

COACH CLASS-Y

*At an economy-cabin price, **Mitsubishi's HC3000** compact high-def projector delivers first-class performance.*

At first glance, one might think that Mitsubishi's HC3000 projector is a rebadged clone of its business projector sibling, the HD4000. That model touts high brightness for the PowerPoint crowd and has presentation-oriented features, including a five-segment color wheel with additional yellow and white filters to punch up the perceived brightness to the max. While business projectors are fine for spreadsheets and pie charts, they do a lousy job in home theaters, with skewed colorimetry and washed-out blacks and grays.

The HC3000 is quite a different animal, however. And even though it carries a downright miserly price tag, it shares much in common with more expensive home theater projectors—and its performance is nothing short of amazing. Based on the popular Texas Instruments HD2+ chip, which also carries the DarkMetal moniker, the HC3000 is one of the first to incorporate TI's own deinterlacer and scaler engine (the DDP3020 chip). Mitsubishi has done a fine job of balancing performance and economy, and has even tossed in some forward compatibility by way of accommodating 1080-line progressive video signals.

BY DAVID BIRCH-JONES • PHOTOGRAPHY BY CORDERO STUDIOS

The compact cabinet is nicely finished in muted metallic gray, with a center-mounted lens up front and a sufficient array of inputs around back. The all-glass lens optics can be manually adjusted for focus and zoom. The remote, while on the smallish side, features a full slate of discrete command function buttons: separate power on and power off buttons, individual input selection, aspect ratio, picture controls, and a trio of user memories. These make it easy for your installer to program a universal remote or touchscreen to control the HC3000.

The lamp is rated at a modest 200 watts and features a low-power mode that drops the output by around 20 percent (and reduces the fan noise to an almost imperceptible level). In addition, the HC3000 features a motorized iris, which allows further reductions in light output to improve contrast and reproduction of blacks and dark grays. At the higher lamp setting and with the iris open, we obtain a respectable 37 footlamberts with a neutral-gain 82-inch diagonal screen, suggesting that the projector has sufficient light output for screens in the 10-foot-width range. At the lower lamp setting and with the iris set at minimum, we are able to obtain about a third of that value, giving us a still-sufficient 11 footlamberts with a negative-gain GrayHawk screen. This is the mode we choose for serious viewing.

As is usually the case, the HC3000 is happiest with a 720-line progressive high-definition video signal, as the projector line-doubles 1080-line interlaced signals instead of deinterlacing them as it should. We are pleased, though, to discover that the HC3000 cheerfully accepts a 1080p high-definition signal, properly downconverting it to the DLP chip's native 720p resolution.

The projector scores high on technical marks,

Mitsubishi's remote may be tiny, but it has many of the discrete controls installers love: separate buttons for on and off, for each video input (above) and for picture adjustments (below).

providing a nearly ruler-flat gray scale and a spot-on gamma curve—meaning that the color is consistent from the darkest parts of the picture to the brightest and that objects on screen appear as bright or as dim as they are supposed to. Our only disappointment comes from the actual color temperature measurements, which are about 1,500 degrees higher than the values displayed in the projector's color temperature menu. Mitsubishi acknowledges the validity of our results and advises that production procedures are being adjusted to alleviate the problem. Still, at the lowest or warmest color temperature choice selected, the results came within shouting distance of the ideal color temperature of 6,500 degrees Kelvin. The picture looks a tad bluish, but still provides very neutral grays and realistic flesh tones.

TI's own deinterlacing and scaling engine proves to be a competent performer, sailing through all of the most important tests and besting results obtained from a premium-brand projector we had on hand that costs over twice as much as the HC3000. The chip's BrilliantColor function (which can be disabled) serves to make the color more vivid, but not excessively so. However, we find that with most DVDs and high-definition television shows, the projector still provides excellent color quality with the function bypassed. We love the motorized iris function, which can be used as a high/low brightness control, or a pseudo day/night adjustment, giving us the best combination of brightness and deep blacks at the touch of a button and making it easy to adjust for lights-up or lights-out viewing.

Frequent travelers love an upgrade—paying for a coach seat, but getting bumped up to the front cabin with the comfier seats and better service. The HC3000 is bargain-priced to be sure, but gives nothing away in the performance department. And with the bonus of 1080p compatibility, this projector is virtually future-proof. Coupled with a high-grade screen, the HC3000 will deliver positively first-class home theater enjoyment, but your guests will never guess that you paid a coach fare. HE

DESCRIPTION

Single-chip DLP high-definition front projector. Requires separate projection screen

DISPLAY CAPABILITIES

Native 16:9 chip operates in both 4:3 and 16:9 modes. Accepts 720-line and 1080-line progressive HDTV, 1080-line interlaced HDTV, 480-line progressive and interlaced standard-definition signals (NTSC), 576-line progressive and interlaced standard-definition signals (PAL), plus RGB WXGA computer video

RESOLUTION

1280 x 768 pixels

CONNECTIONS

Component video input, S-video input, composite video input, DB-15 VGA PC input (can serve as a second component video input), HDMI digital video input, USB connection for servicing, 12-volt trigger output for screen or lighting control, RS-232 serial port for external touchscreen control

DIMENSIONS

4.2 x 12.2 x 9.7 inches (hwd)

PRICE/CONTACT

PRICE: $2,495

CONTACT: mitsubishi-hometheater.com, 888.307.0349