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Sim2 HT300 Plus

A monstrous achievement for digital projection?

By Max Christofferson

Sim2 Grand Cinema HT300 Plus DLP projector.
$23,999

This is a tale of two projectors. One is a machine with an image to die for. The other is a projector that raises some questions about the claims of plug and play digital projection.

Let me get this out of the way early: had I not calibrated the SIM2 Grand Cinema HT300 Plus I would have returned the widely-travelled review sample as being faulty. Straight from the box (while using factory default settings) the SIM2 delivered an overbright burnt-out and near unwatchable image.

The problems started very early: the standard film opening with the 'Lady with the Lamp' on the computer animated sci-fi-game classic *Final Fantasy* was awash with moving pixels that looked like an early spring invasion of mosquitos. The image itself (around the lamp) was over-bright and moving. Secondly the colour balance was askew and the overall image was a burnt out mess of digitalism.

It simply couldn't be this bad all the time. The solution was projector calibration. And thankfully that's where *Monsters Inc* came to the rescue. Or more accurately, the THX calibration tool supplied on the Zone 1 version of this superb movie came to the rescue.

After spending less than 10 minutes going through the calibration process and correctly setting brightness and contrast levels, the image of *Monsters Inc* was suddenly eye-candy of the highest order. If its possible to have an eyegasm I think I might have had one. Or maybe even two. Even the untrained eyes of the cheap seats beside me were impressed and they predictably came up with far more insightful observations than I did. To paraphrase: "It looks 4D and leaps off the screen".

I didn't disagree. The detail, depth of field and simple overall clarity of the image really made the potential of large screen presentation come alive. Sullie's fur is a real event - it seemed to have real texture and each strand moved independently with air around it.

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It had taken some work to get here, but now that I was here I was going to enjoy it.

But a confession is due: The ability of *Monsters Inc* to make any display device look good is presumably why so many in-store sales displays use it. Digital projection loves images that are clean, with clear edge definition and colour saturation. In short *Monsters Inc* is computer generated film and it fits the performance strengths of DLP projection perfectly.

So what about people. Real people that is with skin and flesh tones and colours that may not be so hyper reality compared to computer generated monsters?

In went the Superbit version of *Resident Evil* and out came a very clean image that was detailed and very engaging. You can quibble about some aspects of its colour balance and perhaps 'overdone' sharpness but overall, this was a very warm, fluid and CRT-like performance.

Behind this level of performance is the new Texas Instruments 'Mustang' 16x9 DMD chip. The new 12 degree tilt mirror is claimed to provide superior black level to the earlier generation DLPs. And in use, the black level is spectacular for DLP and while still incapable of providing black out (total absence of light) this will only really matter to the picture purists.

For those who see DLP rainbows (rainbow colour bands in high contrast areas) it's still a factor with the SIM2 HT300 Plus - but there is good news. This is the first DLP projector I've experienced where I didn't suffer from post projection DLP flicker. I could even say I was comfortable watching it for long periods of time, which is a genuine breakthrough!

Cosmetically, the SIM2 HT300 is unique. A sloping 'sporty front' makes for a style statement for those who have a need to show of their projector wares. And technically, it comes with a typical range of inputs from the stock standard component, s-video and component plug-ins to VGA input and the high spec DVI.

In use, one trick to watch for, is the unit doesn't turn on while using the 'on' button on the remote - try any one of the numbered inputs on the supplied remote. And it won't rank as the most intuitive machine around - but despite the fiddle it's the image you're after.

Like *Monsters Inc* there's a moral to this story. And the moral is that like good audio, you must audition the SIM2 HT300 Plus before purchase. Experience says to take a wide range of DVDs and see if the image is equally adept at animation, real film, video images and off-air broadcasts. View for as long as you can and don't reply on factory settings as being the perfect image sweet spot.

But if the earth moves, Sullie looks real and you discover you're multi-eyegasmic - it could be the projector for you.

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