

BLU-RAY PLAYERS

Best buy £600-£800

Pioneer BDP-LX71 | £600

★★★★★ www.pioneer.co.uk

Much like Madonna and films, equally stunning movie and music performance in a Blu-ray player never quite works out... until now

FOR

Superb looks and solid build quality; rich, great sound; detailed picture

AGAINST

Not the smoothest of operators; no onboard DTS-HD Master Audio decoding; not Profile 2.0

VERDICT

The BDP-LX71 lacks the versatility of some of its rivals, but it's in a different league when it comes to picture and sound quality

JUST A CURSORY glance at the BDP-LX71 is enough to get you hot under the collar.

This is a luxurious piece of home cinema kit. The glossy black fascia is punctuated by a striking neon blue display and a collection of sophisticated touch-sensitive buttons. Each press is acknowledged by a small white glow from the relevant button.

A master of movies and music

After spending time with a variety of discs, it's apparent that this is the closest we've come to a Blu-ray player that deserves audiophile and videophile tags. The BDP-LX71 is a clear step up from budget players. Blu-ray soundtracks have a sense of refinement and subtlety about them that cheaper players can only dream about. In *Transformers*, as the Autobots crash to earth, the Pioneer manages to marry the explosive effects and stirring background music with spectacular results. When it comes to dialogue-heavy moments, the Pioneer sounds clear and natural.

Spin a few CDs and the Pioneer proves it's as talented with two-channel content as it is with multichannel. The *Dark Knight's* OST sounds dynamic and dramatic. Instruments keep their natural tone throughout.

The Pioneer is equally impressive with picture quality. With *Transformers*, the LX71 delivers vibrancy and detail by the bucketload. The red and blue hues on Optimus Prime's body are striking, but not garish. The Pioneer is great with fast

movement and prevents all those complex robotic transformations from descending into a blur of body parts.

Spin a standard issue DVD and the Pioneer again comes up trumps. Clothing textures in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* look natural and detailed.

However, we do have a couple of gripes. The LX71 can't decode DTS-HD Master Audio onboard. Pioneer claims that this functionality will be made available via a future firmware upgrade, but for £600 it should decode everything straight out of the box. If your home cinema receiver can't decode HD audio, this is a problem. You'll also notice that there's no Ethernet port on the player. This is because the LX71 is BD-ROM Profile 1.1. So, while you can enjoy Blu-ray's Bonus View functionality, you can't take advantage of the interactive

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BD-Live content found on some discs. It's not a vital feature, but it would be nice to see it included.

But, niggles aside, this is an extremely talented Blu-ray player whose positives far outweigh any negatives. Spin a disc and you're guaranteed a picture that sounds just as fabulous as it looks.



Pioneer is as comfortable with high-quality visuals as it is with stunning music

WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL?



Touching stuff

This is one sexy piece of kit – the shiny black fascia, the gorgeous neon blue display and an array of nifty touch-sensitive buttons that, when gently pressed, glow a small white glow.



Be converted

The BDP-LX71 is fitted with an improved high-speed video DAC and high-grade audio DACs – no less than four – courtesy of Wolfson, as well as the ability to stream all known audio codecs.



Keeping in tune

Pioneer's ability to carry a tune is largely down to the proprietary Precision Quartz Lock System (PQLS), which synchronises music data coming from the Blu-ray player to the receiver.



Pure heaven

Pioneer reckons the '71 will kick bottom at DVD upscaling – its built-in PureCinema deinterlacer should cut down on the nasty artefacts commonly associated with interlaced material.

SPECS

PLAYS Blu-ray, CD, MP3, DVD±R/RW, DivX
OUTPUTS HDMI, S-Video, component, composite, AUDIO OUTPUTS Phono, digital optical, digital coaxial, eight-channel
1080P Yes
24FPS Yes
HD AUDIO CODECS All (except DTS HD, DTS HD Audio)
HDMI 1.3a Yes
BD PROFILE 1.1
DIMENSIONS (hwd) 12 x 42 x 36cm
WEIGHT 3.7kg

TRY THESE

THESE DISCS MAKE TOP TESTERS FOR THE PIONEER 'LX71



AC/DC – LIVE AT DONINGTON

Put your sniggering *Spinal Tap*-isms away and rawk as the Devil intended. A test and a half for the 'LX71, and your neighbours.



CASINO ROYALE

Sean's still the man (the sparkling *Dr No* Blu-ray will firmly cement that, see p66), but Daniel Craig is a mean mutha in this – and we love it!



MASTER AND COMMANDER

A truly rip-roaring treat: Russell Crowe takes on the high seas and the French in Peter Weir's wood-splinteringly exhilarating tale.



Good vibrations

The 'LX71's loading draw and driving mechanism are positioned just below the centre line of the chassis to reduce any unwanted vibrations. Plus, the audio, video and power supply boards have been kept separate to minimise vibration and interference.

Designs they are a-changing

Perhaps due to criticism from some of the build of its earlier players, Pioneer has had a design rethink for the 'LX71. It's now a far beefier chassis, with an aluminium front panel, gold-plated connection ports, dedicated audio and video boards, and nifty touch-sensitive buttons.

Missing link

With a complete audiovisual experience in mind, Pioneer has 'Kuro link' – in other words, the ability to control a Pioneer AV receiver and/or DVD recorder and the 'LX71 as one, big happy home cinema family using just one Kuro remote.

PERFECT PARTNERS SYSTEM PRICE £7295



PLASMA TV
PIONEER PDP-LX5090

★★★★★
£ 2500

Pioneer's 50in plasma is the perfect focal point for this system. It's one of the finest flatscreens that money can buy and delivers a truly stunning picture. Go to p50 for the full review.



MULTICHANNEL RECEIVER
PIONEER SC-LX81

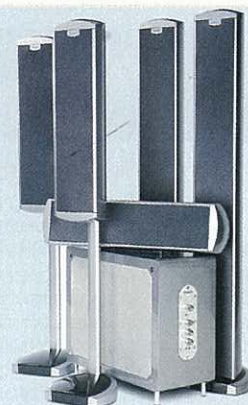
★★★★★
£ 1500

A descendant from Pioneer's £5000 Susano amp, the SC-LX81 displays similar traits. Its dynamic delivery allows for a thrilling experience. Go to p82.

STYLE SPEAKERS
TANNOY ARENA
HIGHLINE 500

★★★★★
£ 2695

Treat it right and it will deliver everything from subtle ambience to full-on action, not to mention sounding really rather fantastic with multichannel music and stereo CDs alike. Go to p113 for the full review.



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