

BY SEAN DOWNEY

LCD MONITORS YOU CAN NEVER BE TOO THIN



Ultra-thin LCD screens are finally approaching the image quality found in higher-end CRT monitors. These are two of the best screens we've seen.

Samsung SyncMaster 172X

This 17-incher arrived tucked up inside a box with the base folded behind the screen. Besides making it much more compact, the folding base makes it easy to mount the screen on the wall. Samsung includes a bracket to do just that. When unfolded, the hinged base raises the screen from one to three inches. The position isn't all that adjustable, but like Barbie, it will tilt but won't swivel.

Once my PC was plugged into the DVI connector at the rear of the base (an analog connection is there, too), the 172X started pumping out razor-sharp text and crisp graphics. My aquarium screen saver never looked so good. Framed by a bezel that's only three-eighths of an inch thick, the screen displayed vibrant colors, solid blacks and uniform gradients. I used a copy of DisplayMate (www.displaymate.com) to put the screen through its paces and found solid black levels, uniform brightness from edge to edge and first-class image scaling above and below the screen's native resolution.

With the fastest pixel response time—12 milliseconds—seen in an LCD, the SyncMaster 172X is designed to handle fast-moving games and detailed movie scenes better than any LCD that came before. While this design has paid off, the 172X still isn't quite as good as a CRT when it comes to action movies and twitch games. The screen



kept up with slower games such as *Halo* but suffered minor image stuttering when the action got hot and heavy in *Unreal Tournament 2004*. Overall this is an impressive PC monitor for all but the most intense onscreen action.

Planar PX212M

This LCD was designed with my father-in-law in mind. It supplies plenty of wide-open space and gives him plenty of control over every single inch. Like all graphic designers, he tends to need a lot of screen real estate. With the Planar PX212M, he gets it all.

Stretching 21.3 inches from corner to corner, the PX212M packs a whole lot of pixels in between its one-inch thick bezel. At 1600x1200, the LCD delivers a breathtaking picture with sharp detail and very good brightness distribution. It produces details extremely well and features a wide 160-degree viewing angle that clearly shows onscreen images from either side of the monitor, from above or below.

Like any good multitasker, my father-in-law normally has the TV or radio going while he's working. He was excited (as much as he gets excited) when I set up the picture-in-picture on the PX212M to display his daily news feed. You can mix and match full-screen and small screen feeds between the composite, S-video, DVI and analog inputs. Audio comes out of the two tiny speakers in the base.

The panel even rotates between portrait and landscape modes. At full resolution the LCD is wide enough to display two *Quark* pages side by side in landscape mode, and can fit a legal-sized document in portrait mode. It would be even better if the desktop orientation shifted automatically when the screen rotated, but the included Pivot Pro software does an adequate job of manually toggling the desktop. ■



Planar PX212M

\$1,400

21.3-inch TFT active matrix LCD
1600x1200 pixel native resolution
Picture in picture
Pivot Pro software
500:1 contrast ratio and
25ms pixel response time
www.planar.com

Samsung SyncMaster 172X

\$650

17-inch TFT active matrix LCD
1280 x 1024 pixel native resolution
Magic Tune software
500:1 contrast ratio and
12 ms pixel response time
www.samsung.com