Tiviar α+

- full integration into media network
- compatible with all digital TV norms
- capable of recording three events simultaneously
- can be used with motorised satellite dishes
- excellent blind scan mode for satellite TV
A triple TV tuner PVR that will set your heart on fire

They say that you should never judge a book by its cover, but we also know from experience that good looks ignite a desire to find out more. The same is true for receivers and the first impression they create. When the new α+ from Tiviar arrived at our test lab we were immediately struck by its stylish packaging, and when we opened the box and took out the receiver the look on our faces only seemed to suggest one word: WOW!

Tiviar ships its latest receiver model complete with a remote control, HDMI cable, power cord, loop cable for connecting the two DVB-S2 tuners as well as a USB dongle. The one thing that is missing is a comprehensive manual, but a concise quick start guide is available which features the manufacturer’s website from which you can download the full-scale manual. To make matters even easier there is also a QR code printed right on the quick start guide so that you only need your smartphone or tablet to scan the QR code and a few moments later the manual is available for you to explore.

The front panel of the α+ comes without visible buttons and the only elements that catch your eye are a brilliant 12-digit VFD display and a status indicator which at the same time serves as the standby button and consists of a stylised and backlit palm leaf. A flap on the right side of the front panel hides two CI slots which are fully CI+ compatible, as well as two card readers, a USB port and two buttons for switching channels.

The back panel is another feast for the eye. Being a triple tuner PVR receiver, the α+ sports two satellite IF inputs (one of which with loop-through output), as well as a combined DVB-T2/DVB-C signal input. But that’s only the beginning: You’ll find an HDMI output, an optical audio output, a total of six RCA jacks for YUV, stereo audio and CVBS video, a euroscart socket, an RS232 connection and an RJ-45 network interface. Three USB 2.0 ports and an e-SATA socket are also available on the back panel for connecting exter-
nal storage media and/or the Wi-Fi dongle. Speaking of storage, it is possible to install a 2.5-inch SATA hard disk right inside the receiver and Tiviar even supplies all required cables and mounting components with its new receiver – that’s what we call user-friendly. The back panel features are rounded off with a mechanical power switch.

The remote control that comes with this receiver is of remarkably high quality and the choice of materials makes for an extremely pleasant look and feel. Contrary to most remotes we have tested so far, the surface is completely level with no raised buttons, which adds to the overall appeal of the remote control. All buttons are clearly labelled, easy to reach and positioned right where you would look for them by intuition. Last but by no means least is the Wi-Fi dongle that is also part of the set and which can be attached to one of the USB ports to hook up the receiver to your local Wi-Fi network at home. It is fully compatible with the 802.11 b/g standards and should therefore be capable of working with any Wi-Fi infrastructure you may have.

User-friendliness shows in many different ways, and the installation wizard of the α+ is one of them. In a smoothly designed set-up routine your new Tiviar receiver asks you for basic settings such as language, IP address, time zone and available reception modes. Once that is accomplished the wizard will initiate a channel search (since this receiver does not come with a pre-stored channel list), after which it turns into standard operating mode and shows the first available channel.

Pressing the MENU button will bring you right to the truly smart main menu, which consists of two sections. The first is a single-line bar on the bottom of the screen which features five entries that can be selected and edited freely. Five entries are not enough? Simply press the UP button on the remote control to show twelve additional entries. This should keep most users satisfied. The user interface of the main menu is based on the app concept for smartphones. Each menu entry can be positioned freely and apart from the basic items like music, video, photos or settings there are menu entries for directly accessing timer events, the channel list editor or the EPG. In short, the minimised main menu offers five quick access items for speedy operation, while all other menu entries can be found in the extended menu, which of course can also be fully customised to meet all end user requirements.

Our fingers are itching now to turn all this theory into practice, but for the sake of completeness we have to take a closer look at all options offered by the settings menu first. This menu section is clearly structured and lets you adjust virtually all details in order to meet your very demands. Since this receiver comes with a number of connection options for external storage media it is possible to determine one medium for PVR recording and another one for timeshift buffering, for example. The fact that the α+ supports the NTFS file system deserves special attention.

1. Language selection of installation wizard
2. IP settings
3. The installation wizard includes an optional signal search for all three reception modes
4. Satellite settings
5. Settings menu
6. Managing storage media
7. Both the channel list and all individual settings can be saved onto an external USB storage medium
8. Channel list editor
9. Popular channels can easily be moved into one of the favourites lists
10. Antenna settings
11. Language settings
12. AV settings
13. Comprehensive list of pre-stored satellites
14. The second DVB-S2 tuner can be fed with an independent antenna signal or with the looped-through signal from tuner 1
15. Convenient editing of the transponder list
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. SCR LNBs (Unicable) compatibility</td>
<td>compatibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. DiSEqC protocols 1.0 and 1.1 are supported</td>
<td>DiSEqC protocols supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. The receiver can be used to control a</td>
<td>DiSEqC 1.2 motor supported</td>
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<tr>
<td>DiSEqC 1.2 motor</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Putting in the position for controlling a</td>
<td>DiSEqC 1.3 motor supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DiSEqC 1.3 motor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Status of the currently received signal</td>
<td>Signal level and signal quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(signal level and signal quality)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Manual search</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Blind scan search</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Advanced search</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>24. Provider selection in fast scan mode</td>
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special praise, since it makes sure each recording can be saved as a single file without size restrictions. If you decide to create a DVD with your recordings at a later time, this will prove incredibly helpful.

The new Tiviar box can provide an output signal with one of the following HDMI resolutions: 576i, 576p, 720p, 1080i or 1080p. Hidden behind the AV settings you will discover a menu item that influences the standby behaviour of the α+. If you select the energy saving mode here the receiver will take a full 34 seconds to power up after standby, but your patience will be rewarded with less than one Watt of energy consumption while in standby mode.

In DVB-S2 mode the receiver comes with a pre-stored satellite and transponder list featuring the specifics of 94 European and Asian satellites in total, which offers a good starting point for exploring the skies. Any gaps can easily be filled with a blind scan.

It took us only a few moments to find proof that Tiviar has put in a lot of effort and development resources into designing its α+. So it’s only natural that all DiSEqC protocols (1.0, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3) are fully implemented, LOF values can be set manually, if need be, and SCR LN Bs will work smoothly with this receiver as well. The transponder and satellite editor deserves special mention in our opinion, as it allows adding, editing or deleting entries with above-average ease of use.

But how do you fill your channel list in the first place? Auto, Manual, Blind, Advanced and Fast are the search modes that are available by default. As far as blind scan is concerned, it can be restricted to either the high or low band or to one of the two polarisations. Regular readers know that we never take a manufacturer’s word for anything, and this is why the α+ has to prove its worth in everyday practical use as well. The standard (auto) search in HOTBIRD 13° East took six minutes and arrived at 1495 TV channels and 370 radio stations. If you invest slightly more time and choose blind scan instead, you will be rewarded with 1550 TV channels and 372 radio stations after 13 minutes and a half minutes.

With such a huge offering from a single orbital position alone it’s great to know that up to 10,000 entries can be added to the overall channel list. Once it is (partly) filled the comprehensive editing features of the α+ come in very handy. You can delete, move, rename, PIN-lock or skip-mark individual entries to your heart’s content. What’s more, a single touch of a button adds channels to one of the favourites lists so that you don’t end up searching for your favourite channel later on. We did appreciate the fact that the channel list as well as all initial settings can be saved onto an external storage medium and are always available as backup at a later stage, if required.
40. Fashion TV with the Tiviar α+
41. Internet TV (unfortunately with only three default channels at this stage)
42. New Internet TV channels can easily be added manually
43. A total of 58 Internet radio stations are pre-stored
44. New Internet radio stations can be added manually
45. Thanks to DLNA the α+ is able play back multimedia content from other devices in the local network
46. Network settings
47. Network search
48. Channel list editor
49. Popular channels can easily be moved into one of the favourites lists
50. Info bar in minimised view
51. Info bar in extended view
52. EPG for up to seven channels
53. EPG of a single channel
54. EPG of a single channel

The new Tiviar PVR receiver is capable of handling three recordings simultaneously and we can only commend the manufacturer for not saving on processing power. Switching from one channel to the next takes approximately one second, which is a good result and will certainly please those couch potatoes out there no end. The remote control comes with several direct access buttons in order to quickly call up specific settings or functions such as language selection, bookmarks, teletext and the like. PiP (picture-in-picture) is available, too, and while this is a feature most receivers boast, this particular model manual search option for a single frequency are available in DVB-T2 and DVB-C mode. If required, a +5V current on the centre wire of the coax cable can be created in DVB-T2 mode in order to supply power to an external signal amplifier.

The OSD design of the α+ is not just elegant, innovative and logical, it also makes for a remarkable user experience. Smart details allow an extremely smooth flow of information – just think of the following features: The channel list is not superimposed over the currently watched program, but fills the entire screen with the current channel shown in a small window. Channels can be sorted according to alphabet, reception mode, tuner, CAS system or provider or can be searched by name with the help of an on-screen keyboard. With hundreds or even thousands of channels finding their way into the channel list those helpful features provide valuable help.

We have already dealt with the minimised/extended menu structure of the main menu, and the same concept is used for the info bar as well. Every time a new channel is selected the only information that is shown is the title of the current event. Pressing the RIGHT button on the remote calls up the next event as well. The electronic program guide (EPG) is in line with the excellent overall concept and design of the α+ and lists the program schedule for up to seven channels at the same time or upcoming events of a single channel. The Media Highway (MHW) EPG system used by the Canal+ group is implemented as well and one of the striking features of the α+ is its search function within the EPG. This way, you’re always sure to find your favourite shows and you can even opt to create a repeat timer for recording daily or weekly events. Simply select the event you want to record and the PVR system will take care of all the rest.

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55. EPG search
56. A dedicated function on the remote control is available for directly changing the currently received satellite
57. Timeshift function
58. Audio selection
59. List of all previous recordings
60. MP3 playback
61. WMV playback
62. MPEG playback
63. MP4 HD playback
with its three tuners really offers some added value. The PIP feature can be set at two different modes (one channel in the background and a second one in a small window, two different channels side by side in small windows).

The satellite tuner turned out to be of very good quality and flawlessly processed SCPC transponders from TURKSAT 42° East, which have a very low bandwidth, as well as weak signals from ASTRA 2D 28.2° East at our test location. The same holds true for the DVB-T2 tuner selected by Tiviar, which did not falter when fed with a weak signal from our small indoor antenna. Obviously, we also checked out the receiver’s credentials with signals from a local cable provider and – needless to say – the α+ easily detected all available DVB-C channels.

Let’s dig a little deeper into the various multimedia and network features of the α+ now. For starters, basic functions like audio and video playback as well as image viewing are implemented neatly, with the following file formats being accepted: MP3, WMV, MPG, MP4 (TV), DivX and AVI as well as JPG and BMP. On the audio front WAV, OGG and MP3 are implemented. Multimedia files cannot only be played back from a locally attached storage medium, but can also be requested from any network source.

Thanks to full DLNA (Digital Living Network Alliance) support the α+ will automatically identify all available AV sources in the local network and will happily play them back. For our test we used both a Windows7 PC and a digital television receiver as available sources, and the Tiviar was able to play back all music and video files from those two devices. Then again, we wouldn’t have expected anything less.

We should note at this stage that the α+ cannot only access files from other devices in the network, but can also provide its own files to compatible third-party devices. This means the receiver acts as a Digital Media Player (DMP), but also as a Digital Media Server (DMS).

The Internet is gaining ever more importance in combination with TV reception, and Tiviar has certainly taken into account this development when designing the α+ PVR receiver. FreeTV+ and Internet TV are the two platforms that provide multimedia content via the Internet to owners of this Tiviar receiver. FreeTV+ is based on the app concept we know from smartphone and tablet operating systems and allows creating customised access options to services such as YouTube and Fashion TV. Soon 200 apps will be available here.

The same is currently true for the Internet TV platform. While the concept looks promising and should eventually provide a substantial collection of channels streaming their program via the Internet, the status quo leaves some room for improvement, as the only channels that are available by default are: Al Jazeera, Dog Channel TV and the Mobile Channel. A simple touch of a button will update this list from the Tiviar servers, even though we were not offered new entries during our test. This is not to worry, however, since individual services can easily be added by simply manually putting in the corresponding streaming address. It’s the same story with radio streams, which sported 58 entries from a number of different countries by default. This number may of course have changed in the meantime, since Tiviar is constantly updating its range of services in the background and might have increased the number of stations and channels available since the time of this test. Updates can easily be downloaded from the Internet to
the α+, or users can decide to use their PC for downloads and a USB memory stick for updating the receiver.

An OTA function for this is called “FTA Downloading”. Pushing the “Download” button in main menu gives several choices as “latest Version of SW”, “FreeTV+ contents”, “Channel data” and so on.

Another new feature, which was not yet available at the time of our test, is “Air TiVi+”. This is a very unique and powerful function that allows streaming to an iPad or iPhone. This app is available from the Apple App store; an Android version is also available.

We’ve been waiting for truly smart integration of all digital reception modes in a single device for a long time, and the α+ from Tiviar clearly proves that it’s a recipe for success. A lot of brainpower has gone into designing all features and functions and into creating a smart-looking and easy-to-use graphic interface. All we can say is: mission accomplished!

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