



Technomate TM-1500 CI+

TECHNOMATE HAS JOINED THE BLIND SEARCH GANG WITH A NEW RANGE OF RECEIVERS, BUT IT ISN'T FOLLOWING THE PACK, AS ALEX LANE DISCOVERS

There are few manufacturers who put out new brands of receiver as often as Technomate. Although it doesn't seem like a long time since the TM-5500 range, this is the first in an entirely new batch of Technomates boasting new software and features. The rate at which new models are released can be confusing, but it does mean they're always up to date.

The most significant new feature is Blind Search, but you'll also find Auto Navigation, which enables several satellites to be searched at once, a multi-channel display, and Technomate's unique DiSEqC movement display, which isn't essential but shows attention to detail.

The receiver is smart and compact, with a porthole-style window over the four-digit LED display, and only basic controls for power and channel change on the front. To the right is a drop-down flap covering the Multicrypt card reader and common interface slot. Multicrypt is one of the current crop of read-anything conditional access softwares that make it far

easier to operate a pirate card with several different types of encryption on board.

The remote control is an interesting design. It is large and has good chunky keys, but the central grouping of menu, channel and volume control keys are slightly difficult to get at because they're recessed.

Setup & searching

The installation menus allow you to set up and save as many active satellites as you like, from a very comprehensive list. You've got a choice of C and Ku-band LNB types, and DiSEqC switching for up to four LNBs. The manual claims this receiver supports DiSEqC 1.1 switching for up to 16 LNBs, but with only one level of control, that's not possible.

You can jump straight to searching for channels from Satellite Setup menu, but motorised users will need to set up movement limits, and find the satellites manually if they've only got a dumb DiSEqC 1.2 motor. There are coarse and fine movement settings, and USALS users have only to set their move-

ment limits before they start hunting channels. You can pick which transponder you use for satellite-hunting, and there's also an onscreen movement display where you can fine-tune any positions you're not happy about, while watching TV.

To find channels, you've got a choice between the very quick Auto Navigation, which uses a traditional list of transponder frequencies, or Blind Search, which searches for any active frequencies at the position. You've got the usual choice of just looking for TV channels, and you can just look for TV channels (ignoring radio and data channels). There's also Network Search to use information transmitted by associated bouquets.

The Blind Search option isn't one to choose if you want to get a quick start, because even in Fast mode it can take two hours to scan the whole Ku-band, and in Detail mode you can expect it to take seven hours. You can halve this by selecting either horizontal or vertical polarisation, but that's still a very long time. The trade-off is ultimately worth it because

the TM-1500CI+ finds channels ignored by many other receivers.

Finally, you can narrow down a search in the traditional way by programming in a frequency, and by using PIDs if you need to.

Navigation

You've got capacity for 5,000 channels, which should be enough for even the most tenacious channel-scanner with a big dish, and the sorting options are very powerful. Pressing 'OK' reveals a channel list screen where you can sort channels by satellite, then by encryption (either all, free or by individual encryption types) and finally into alphabetical or transponder order. The current channel is shown in a corner with its frequency below, and you can browse without having to change channels.

There are also eight favourites lists which have generic names by default, but you can change them to your needs, and view them instantly with the remote's 'Fav' button. You can rename channels and edit PIDs, move them around the master list, delete channels, or set the channel up/down buttons to skip them if you're just surfing through.

The EPG theoretically supports a full seven-day EPG, though it just shows two hours of programming for six channels at present, with a thumbnail view of the selected channel, and

any extra programme information. There's an onscreen info banner which shows signal strength, channel name, satellite, encryption, frequency, time, and has optional PID figures and programme information display.

Performance

The picture quality of the TM-1500CI+ is nothing to be ashamed of – even after testing a hi-def receiver! Pictures are stable, with rich colours, even in composite video mode – and you can adjust the colour balance to suit. The tuner seems fairly resilient with low-quality signals, so you shouldn't be troubled by digital artefacts.

The sound is passed perfectly by the digital audio output, although there's no AC-3 encoding for Dolby Digital channels. The analogue stereo outputs are very clean, but audio quality really depends upon the channel you watch.

Features

Eight event timers can be set via the EPG, and any channel can be assigned a PIN lock. The channel list (and transponder database) can also be edited on a PC using the software available on www.technomate.com.

Verdict

The blind search is efficient but slow, and, overall, the TM-1500CI+ is a polished receiver at a competitive price ■

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RATING

BUILD	★★★★★☆☆
SETUP	★★★★★☆☆
SEARCHING	★★★★★☆☆
NAVIGATION	★★★★★☆☆
PERFORMANCE	★★★★★☆☆
FEATURES	★★★★★☆☆
VALUE	★★★★★☆☆
OVERALL	79%

FEATURES

Receiver: Technomate TM-1500 CI+
Price: £119

No LNB inputs: 1
LNB loopthrough: Yes
DiSEqC: 1.0, 1.2 USALS
No channels: 5,000
No satellites: 32
Selectable FEC: Yes
Symbol rate range: 2000-45000

CAM: Multicrypt
Common interface: 1
Teletext: Built-in & VBI reinserted
EPG support: DVB 7-day
Timer: Eight-event, 1 year
UHF modulator tuning: Channels 21-69

Expansion bus: Serial
Software upgrade: PC
AV outputs: 2 RGB Scarts, composite video out, stereo audio out, coaxial digital audio out
Supplier: Technomate, 328 Hoe Street, London E17 9PX
Tel: 020 8509 2440
Web: www.technomate.com

Very fast generally; Easy setup

Blind search may be too slow for some

Auto-Navigation can scan several satellites automatically

Eight favourites lists and powerful channel-sorting features

Set up to eight timers from the EPG

Multi-picture mode lets you monitor several channels

Modulated UHF loopthrough
Composite video output
TV Scart supports RGB and composite video
Serial port for upgrading software and editing channel lists
Stereo audio output
Coaxial digital audio output
VCR loopthrough Scart supports RGB and composite video
LNB input rated to 400mA for DiSEqC motors

THE OPPOSITION

Manhattan Plaza ST-200

A speedy blind search receiver with DiSEqC 1.2 and USALS, plus twin common interface and optional Irdeto CAM



Echostar DSB-880

A speedy, compact receiver with twin common interface and built-in Viaccess CAM. Latest version has full DiSEqC 1.2 and USALS controls, but not blind search



ICE FC3000CI

Good value receiver with twin common interface and full DiSEqC/USALS motor control, plus lots of other useful features

