While FreeSaT HD receivers in the living room tend to be twin-tuner recorders, when you want to make the most of an HD TV in the kitchen, bedroom or family room, usually a straightforward HD Freesat set-top box is all that’s required – which is exactly what you get with Manhattan’s Plaza HD-S2.

Even better you get everything from an HD Freesat box that you could possibly ask for, including BBC iPlayer and ITV player, easier access to non-Freesat channels and cracking quality high-definition reception – and all for less than 50 quid, which has to be a bargain.

**Build and connectivity**
The HD-S2 is small, almost to the point of not being taken seriously. Although not quite in the mini-receiver league, it’s just 21cm across and only 4cm high – that’s the size of my paperback copy of Cloud Atlas.

Despite its small size, the HD-S2 has some style about it. The front panel is a shiny black acrylic panel with pleasant curved ends, set in a matt black plastic frame. There are just three buttons (power and channel up/down) on the front and a single power indicator light. It’s all very understated and classy.

A look inside reveals the chassis additions for a card reader on the right hand side of the front, but the HD-S2 is only available as a Freesat machine for unencrypted channels.

The rear of the receiver is pretty busy. Manhattan has not gone overboard with the connectivity, but it’s got all that most users are likely to need. There’s a single LNB input, but this does not drive a
‘Despite the relatively small price tag, the Plaza HD-S2 delivers top-notch pictures and sound’

The back panel also includes an Ethernet socket for connection to a broadband router (for online catch-up TV) and a USB socket for updating the software (although over-the-air downloading of updates is also available). It’s a shame this is not also for connecting PVR storage – if you want to record Freesat programmes, you’ll have to get a Freesat+ machine.

The one part of the HD-S2 that lets the side down is the remote control. Although this operates fine and the buttons are sensibly laid out, it is small and cheap looking and not up to the standards of the receiver.

**Setup**

All Freesat receivers follow much the same set-up procedure, laid down by Freesat, and the HD-S2 is no different. On first switch-on, you set the HDMI output format, check the signal levels, enter your postcode (using either the number keys in the onscreen keyboard) and start the search. This takes about 1.25 minutes, which is quite long for a Freeview receiver, but still short enough for hassle-free occasional use.

The HD-S2 will also search for and find non-Freesat channels, of which there are a good few – the likes of Arise News (in HD), Horse & Country TV, and innumerable shopping, music and religious channels.

You can either search an individual transponder (a Manual Scan) or all of them (Automatic Scan). In the test, the Automatic Scan took under 1.5 minutes to find all the channels on 28.2°E that are not part of the Freesat platform. As there is no DiSEqC control from the HD-S2, searching for (and viewing) channels from other satellite positions is not very practical. You can use a manual LNB switch to change between an LNB for 28.2°E and one for some other satellite position, but you cannot search for a satellite on the other satellite because its transponders are not in the HD-S2’s database. Instead, you can search each individual transponder and find that channel's position, but it’s a tedious way to scan a satellite.

The only other set-up process is the internet connection, and this is all automatic with DHCP setting the network addresses (although these can be set manually, too).

**Basic Use**

Like the setup, the receiver’s everyday operation is largely controlled by the Freesat specification. However, Manhattan has bent this a little to make it easier to use and more flexible.

The Freesat channels are listed onscreen with a preview window showing the currently selected channel. You can preview another channel by highlighting it in the list and pressing OK, and then switch to viewing that channel with another press of the OK button.

You can also switch directly to other channel lists – Freesat radio, non-Freesat TV, non-Freesat radio and the favourite channels lists are all displayed ‘in parallel’ so you can

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**FEATURES**

- **No LNB inputs:** 1
- **LNB Loopthrough:** No
- **DiSEqC:** No
- **Selective FEC:** No
- **Symbol rate range:** 2000 - 45000
- **Blind search:** No
- **Linux:** No
- **CAM:** None
- **Common Interface:** None
- **Teletext:** DVB-decoded
- **EPG support:** DVB
- **Timer:** Unlimited events, 8-day
- **Hard drive:** None
- **UHF modulator tuning:** n/a
- **Software upgrade:** Over-the-air or USB download
- **Data ports:** USB, Ethernet
- **AV outputs:** SD output: TV Scart (Composite, RGB), HDMI output: HDMI, Optical digital audio

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**CONNECTIVITY**

1. **LNB input**
2. **Ethernet network connection**
3. **USB data connection**
4. **HDMI**
5. **Optical digital audio output**
6. **TV Scart**

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**DiSEqC switch (or DiSEqC motor) so this really is a machine for 28.2°E only – although that won’t put off the audience this receiver (and Freesat itself) is mostly aimed at.**

The main connection to a TV screen is via HDMI, which delivers hi-def images and digital sound. For those with a separate sound system, there’s an optical S/PDIF digital audio output, too.

The only SD video and analogue audio output is the single Scart socket, but that’s enough for connection to a DVD recorder or PVR for recording programmes. The Scart might even be connected to a stand-alone modulator to send Freesat TV around the home by UHF, but like most Freesat receivers, the HD-S2 has no built-in modulator.
Upscaled to HD for display is impressive, too. Given a half-decent internet connection, BBC iPlayer and ITVplayer videos are presented in excellent shape, and overall you’re left with the feeling that the Plaza HD-S2 is performing well above its price. 

**Verdict**
The Plaza HD-S2 probably takes a straightforward Freesat receiver about as far as it can go. The tuner behaves well with any reasonable signal, the images and sound are excellent, and the integration of non-Freesat channels into the user-friendly navigation means that the HD-S2 is more than ‘just’ a Freesat receiver. That the HD-S2 is also so ludicrously cheap makes it the clear choice.