



Viscom VS7000D Multifunction Tablet

Reviewer: Greg Borrowman



Not so long ago, having a TV inside your car was something you could do only after you became rich enough to tool around the 'burbs in a Bentley—by which time you were so old you probably weren't much interested in watching TV anyway.

LCD technology has changed all that. Sure, Viscom's 'Multifunction Tablet' isn't actually a TV, because you can't watch broadcast television; but it'll do nearly everything else you need a screen for, from playing DVDs with widescreen action to those fave old movies you've burned onto MMC or SD cards. There's even a USB input. And yes, it plays music CDs, too.

But wait, there's more! Viscom's tablet doesn't only do all this good stuff in your car: it comes with a monster NiMH battery pack that'll run the screen and the in-built DVD drive and the inbuilt stereo speakers for around two-and-a-half to three hours while you're on the beach, or anywhere else where you can't find an electricity outlet. And since you might not want to leave this little wonder in your car at night, it also runs off 240V mains power, via the supplied adaptor, so you can prop it up on your bedside table—and stayed glued to your screen.

So how much for all this cool stuff? Check the box. Yep, the full recommended retail price is \$499, so you wouldn't pay a cent more, and could quite likely expect to get it for a few bucks less—though the way I think these things will walk out the door, no salesman in his right mind is going to give you a discount.

THE EQUIPMENT

The tablet itself is brilliant! It's just 205mm wide, 160mm high and 32mm deep, and covered with a soft rubber compound

that feels really slinky. At the bottom is a standard thread: that's where the optional battery pack screws in, but if you're not using this pack because you're powering it some other way, you can just fit the screen to a flexible threaded stalk. Otherwise, there's a mounting bracket on the rear.

And if you don't want to go to all this trouble, Viscom supplies a 'monitor mount' that's like a see-through backpack. Put the tablet inside this, and you can strap it to a seat headrest, or the centre of your steering wheel—or pretty much anywhere, really.

Loading a DVD is as easy as pushing it into the foam-protected slot on the right edge of the tablet. Disc handling is good. It's easy to insert DVDs and when you do, they're gripped firmly and retracted into the tablet quickly. When you eject a DVD it protrudes sufficiently far for you to grab it easily, but is still held firmly so that it won't fly out even if you chuck a full-power U-turn.

A 'Resume Play' function is automatic, so if anyone ejects a DVD when you didn't want them to, re-loading that disc will cause play to start at the point it left off rather than from the very beginning of the movie.

HOW BIG IS REAL BIG?

The LCD screen is listed as being a "7-inch 16:9 TFT type with 1440 x 234 resolution and a response time of 30ms". I measured the screen on mine as being exactly 153mm wide and 85mm high, which means the diagonal is 175mm, or a little over 6.8 inches when you're running widescreen. Generally, films will appear on-screen a little smaller than this, because of their aspect ratio: in other words, with the Viscom's 153mm width, they'll display as 70mm high.

You can use the Viscom's Zoom function to fill the screen if you don't mind losing the edges of the movie. In old-fashioned 4:3 mode, the screen shrinks to be 114mm wide and 85mm high, for a diagonal of 5.59 inches. You can switch the screen mode between PAL and NTSC to suit the disc you're playing, but the NTSC mode gives marginally superior on-screen graphics and slightly more screen stability, so this would be the preferred mode. After that, you get control over brightness, contrast, saturation, aspect ratio (16:9 or 4:3PS) and rotation. Rotation should more correctly be described as 'Invert' or 'Flip'

VISCOM

because it just flips the on-screen image 'upside down'.

This isn't an idle option: for instance, you could mount the Viscom upside down on the roof of your car (or whatever) and still watch a movie 'right way up'.

MORE THAN MOBILE

This unit has possibilities that extend even beyond in-car entertainment. If you wanted to watch a DVD on a full-size TV and there didn't happen to be a DVD player handy, you could plug the 'AV' output of the Viscom into the TV. Unfortunately, the video output is composite, rather than the better 'S-Video' or the even-better 'Component Video', but this didn't bother me, 'cos normally I couldn't see myself using the AV output at all. Why bother when the screen's right there in front of you?

Perhaps more importantly, the sound through the front speakers is okay, but not all that great: so if you're the only person watching, you'll get better sound quality by listening through headphones, which can be plugged into a socket on the left edge of the player. (A small bud-style pair is provided free with the player, but your standard street-style Sonys will do a better job by far.)

The Viscom will also play music, but it does so rather strangely. When you insert a standard CD, the main display page image (a giant Viscom logo) remains on-screen, supplemented by a blue bar across the top of the screen that has a 'CD' log at the far left. Then you get a track indicator (TRK 1/12), followed by a loudspeaker symbol (that disappears if you press the 'Mute' button on the remote).. Next up is an 'X' wrapped by an arrow that turned out to be the repeat mode indicator, with the 'X' meaning 'No repeat'. (The 'X' is replaced by a '1' for single repeat, or an 'A' for 'All Repeat'.)

Finally, there's an elapsed time indicator, to the left of which is a clock icon that's replaced by other indicators depending on whether you want to see elapsed time track, elapsed time disc, total time or whatever. Although you can turn off the CD info bar, you can't get rid of the screen display, which I thought strange,

not to say power-consuming. This may all be a bit problematic—the CD facility would be good for musical emergencies, but I wouldn't recommend it for anything else...

I found that the Viscom handled both MP3 audio files and JPEG images from MMC and SD cards, as well as via USB, but I couldn't coerce it to play either file type from my home-recorded CDs. If playing back these files from CD is important, you'll have to experiment. The USB port is very slow, due to the use of the old 1.1 standard. And note that the tablet is set for Region 4, and wouldn't play discs from any other region.

PERFORMANCE

The TFT screen has a resolution of around three pixels per millimetre, with a fairly prominent grid, so when you're sitting at what I'd say was a fair 'personal viewing' distance of around half a metre, you can easily see the gridded nature of the screen on brighter colours, and most especially on the whites. The grid nature and native resolution is easy to assess when watching credits—particularly the end credits for the minor players, which tend to be in smaller type—and is a reminder of the limitations of these otherwise excellent screens.


Rapid movement was handled quite well—better than I would have expected, in fact, given that a 30mS response time is relatively slow these days. The most significant movement concern was when solid lines moved up or down the screen—the dreaded 'venetian blind' effect. Colour balance was generally good, with quite realistic blues and greens, and good skin tones. Saturated reds could flare a little, but not excessively so. Contrast was excellent. I have a DVD with a speeded-up sunrise: the way the Viscom handled the rapid change from pitch black to bright sunlight was impressive. That said, if you've got a movie that's shot predominantly in the dark, you may well have difficulty resolving detail.

I was also impressed by the Viscom screen's off-axis performance. The only area where it falls down is if you tilt the screen away from you, so the top is further away than the bottom: in this axis, the

image quickly 'blackens'. However, if you go off to either side, or are looking down from above, the image stays very clear and bright. In practical terms this means that two people could easily watch from an appropriate distance, and even two seat-belted rear-seat passengers would still have a fair view of the screen.

Tested in a car traveling over a very rough road, the picture proved to be remarkably robust, so far as continuity was concerned, although the sound sometimes fell a fraction behind, with occasional dropouts on the larger potholes. On any half-way decent surface, picture and sound were perfect. You can operate the tablet without the remote control, but it's rather awkward, and you're extremely limited in what you can do (Viscom probably should have added some more 'on-tablet' controls). So remember to keep the remote handy.

CONCLUSION

This tablet DVD player has plenty of competition from very similar products, but I'm convinced Viscom has the edge in the styling stakes. Its USB, MMC and SD functions would up the ante even further, if such interconnectivity is useful for you. Me, I'd be happy to buy it just for its looks and performance. 

TECH SPECS

VISCOM VDA730D-1 MULTIFUNCTION TABLET

Brand: Viscom
Model: VDA730D-1
Category: Portable DVD Player
Price: \$499
Warranty: One Year
Distributor: Tenvox Australia Pty Ltd
Contact: 38 Matheson Street,
 Virginia, QLD 4014
Phone: (07) 3865 3333
Email: tenvox@theforum.com.au
Website: www.tenvox.com.au