

PCI TV CARD

COMPRO VIDEOMATE TV GOLD PLUS II



Compro Technology is a well known manufacturer of PC multimedia add-ons. In This Compro VideoMate PCI TV card review, we take a look at its "Power Up" technology called VideoMate TV Gold Plus II. This card also incorporates an FM tuner and together with hardware design for Power up Scheduling.

TV tuner cards used to be pretty pointless. PC manufacturers bundled them with their systems in an attempt to convince you they were of good value. You'd play with your new PC's TV tuner with excitement when you first get it. Then, you'd realise how poor the recording quality was, how limited the scheduling features were and how unreliable it was. After that, you probably wouldn't use it much again.

However, the notion of adding TV functionality to your PC or building a dedicated media centre system for your living room is no longer just a gimmick. The Compro VideoMate TV Gold Plus II's most unique feature is its ability to turn your PC on and off all by itself. Not everyone wants to leave their PVR system running all the time because of the noise it makes. The Compro allows you to switch your PC off, booting it only when a recording is due.

The way it does this is very simple simple. When you install the card, you're directed to plug your case's ATX power

switch into the VideoMate. A second cable is supplied for routing back to your motherboard's ATX power switch connector. However, your motherboard needs to support the PCI 2.2 spec with 3.3V standby power, and the VideoMate has a notch in its PCI connector so it can't

fit into a 5V PCI slot. When you schedule a recording and turn the PC off, the VideoMate will automatically turn it back on again five minutes before the allotted time, load the appropriate software and, start recording. If you have password-protected Windows, the VideoMate software can still log in to start the recording. Once the recording is complete, it will power down the PC.

The VideoMate comes with the obligatory IR remote control and loads of extra software. The remote control will also boot the PC, although this won't take you straight into the VideoMate software.

The core TV functionality comes courtesy of ComproPVR 2, plus there's ComproDVD 2 for DVD playback and ComproFM 2 for listening to the radio. Ulead VideoStudio 7 SE and DVD MovieFactory 2 SE are bundled for video editing and DVD authoring respectively. MovieFactory also allows you to record a TV or video signal straight to an optical disc.

Getting started

When you first load the PVR software, a wizard guides you through the channel-scanning procedure. We found this was a lot faster than many PVRs, taking less than a minute to scan through all the channels. You then use

the resulting menus to give the discovered channels their correct names, and configure the rest of the PVR settings. Aside from watching TV, ComproPVR 2 can record using its own MPEG-1 or MPEG-2 encoder, or a third-party encoder such as DivX.

Other potentially useful features include the Closed Caption function, which allows you to access Teletext, though we found it displayed garbled text. A built-in connection to www.titantv.com is provided for electronic programme guide (EPG) information but, as it's for the USA only, it's useless outside the USA. So in order to line up recordings, you have to set the date, time and duration manually in the scheduler. This is far more involved than choosing a programme from an EPG and selecting record, as you can with Windows XP MCE and Home Media Networks' ShowShifter 3.

The Channel Surf function shows 12 or 16 channels on one display. This allows you to monitor what's showing on different channels. ComproPVR also supports timeshifting, allowing you to 'pause live TV' then continue watching where you left off later. The live programme will be recorded in the background while you watch what was recorded earlier. You can even use the remote to skip ad breaks and catch up with what's currently on the air.

TECHNICAL DATA

INFO www.comprousa.com/new/en/tvcard.html
 PRICE **RM349**

Connection:	PCI 2.2, 3.3V
Video processor:	Philips 7133/7134
TV tuner: video standard:	PAL BG+DK
Capture resolution:	Up to 720 x 576
Capture bit rate:	Up to 30MB/sec
Connections: TV aerial (not supplied), FM radio aerial (supplied), S-Video, composite, IR micro-jack (IR receiver supplied), mini-jack audio in/out, internal audio A/B	
Extras: ATX power switch pass-through for scheduled and IR remote-controlled PC booting	
Supplied software: ComproPVR 2, ComproDVD 2, ComproFM 2, Ulead PhotoExplorer 8, Ulead VideoStudio 7 SE, Ulead DVD MovieFactory 2 SE	