

VideoMate Vista T500F

Turn your PC into a home entertainment system

Details

Price: £44.95 inc VAT
Manufacturer: Compro
Supplier: Aria
Website: www.aria.co.uk
Required Spec: 1.7 GHz CPU, 50MB HD space, 512MB RAM, free PCI slot, Windows XP2 or Vista

Ratings

Quality: ★★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★★

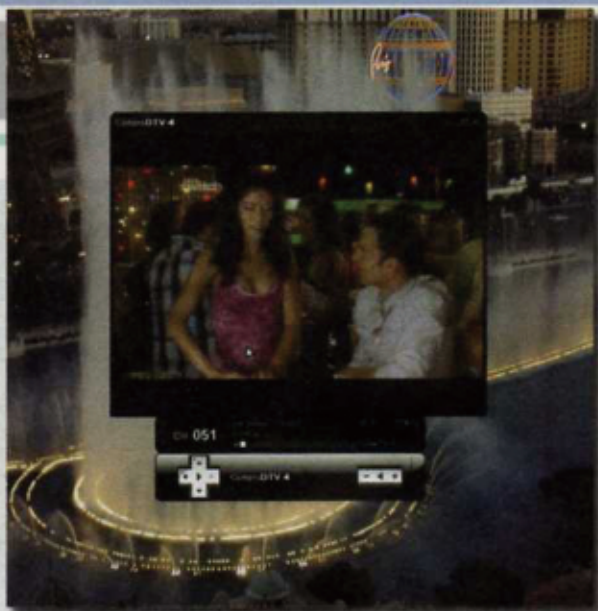
OVERALL
8

A relatively new idea, well produced and inexpensive as well. Recommended

TV tuners for the PC are nothing new, and I'm sure you've all seen the new miniscule USB-key-style units that seem to be prevalent these days. But their physical size means they have certain limitations, whereas this latest product from Compro seems to turn the clock back, to when we filled our PCI slots with all sorts of goodies.

The VideoMate Vista T500F is basically a hybrid DVB-T and analogue TV/FM reception tuner housed on a PCI card. The main difference between this and other similar cards I've reviewed is not only its dual function, but because it has a couple of unique features I haven't seen before. For example, it has a pass-through connection for the power switch on your motherboard; the implication of this is that you can switch your computer on with the supplied remote handset. Which incidentally has specific buttons for controlling the Vista Media Center, (but sadly there's no comparable facility within Windows XP). You can also use the power switch feature to shut down the computer after a scheduled recording.

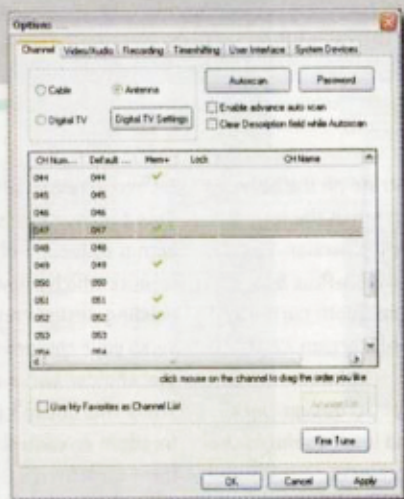
In fact, the unit is fully Vista compatible and one of the few to be certified so by Microsoft. To



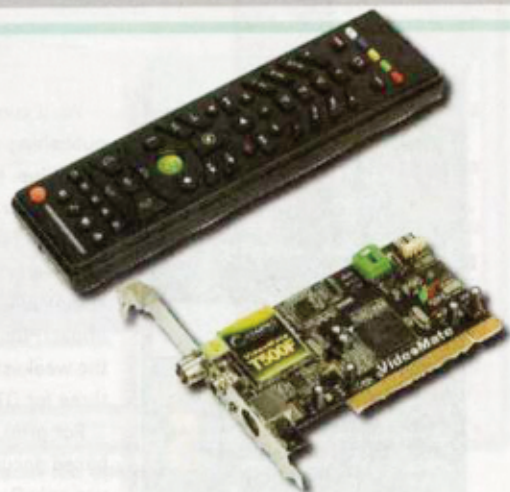
▲ VideoMate on the desktop

reinforce this compatibility it comes with its own convenient sidebar gadget. This allows you to play a file, watch TV, listen to FM radio or schedule recordings. Because it has such integration with Vista, there's very little processing overhead when you're using it.

For such an inexpensive item the card is packed with features, including an MPEG-2 encoder, a plug in infrared receiver (for the remote) and a breakout lead incorporating S-Video, composite and sound. This can be used to capture video from analogue camcorders, although this is no



▲ Dialogue for scanning the frequencies



better than the capture facilities offered by the majority of modern video cards.

Installing the card is perfectly straightforward and, because the drivers are digitally signed, is completed in a matter of minutes. Incidentally, if you don't intend to use the power-switching options, you don't have to connect the

power cable to your motherboard. I feel that this is one feature that might put off some prospective buyers, who are perhaps not quite so technically minded and wouldn't feel comfortable pulling wires off their motherboard.

Once the card is installed, the DTV 4 software will automatically scan to find the channels available using the interface settings you

choose; this can be cable, antenna, or digital TV. You then have the option of naming the channels and setting things like a favourites list and even password protecting some channels (this could stop the wife buying things from awful shopping channels). Picture quality and channel numbers are obviously affected by the aerial you use.

As you might expect the system supports image capture, TV recording, time-shifting and recording straight to disc. The package also includes a special edition of the excellent Ulead DVD Movie Factory, so you can, capture, edit and record your own programmes to DVD, having had the pleasure of using the VideoMate. **mm Joe Lavery**