

## PANASONIC AG-W1 UNIVERSAL VCR

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Among the new equipment displayed at the AECT annual meeting in Orlando in February was Panasonic's AG-W1 Universal VCR. The AG-W1 allows playback of all VHS videotapes (NTSC-SP, LP, SLP; PAL/Secam/MESecam/MPAL-SP, LP) on any monitor be it tri-standard or NTSC. One can also record in any of these video systems and record and play back in Hi-Fi. I was impressed enough by the demonstration in Orlando that I ordered the AG-W1, which arrived within a week from a dealer in Connecticut. The list price quoted by Panasonic was \$2,500; I paid just under \$1,900 for the unit, which is just a bit more than a very good tri-standard recorder/player.

Since 1985, I had been using a variety of methods in my laboratory to show PAL and SECAM videotapes and live broadcasts from South America and Europe received from our satellite dishes. I purchased a basic standards converter in 1987 for \$11,000; it allowed me to convert international standards received from the satellite before sending the signal to NTSC monitors in faculty offices. It also facilitated the transfer of videotapes from PAL and SECAM to NTSC, but not vice versa. With the AG-W1, however, I can now record in all three standards, convert recorded tapes from NTSC to PAL, Secam and MEdSecam (and vice versa), and use the AG-W1 as a direct line converter

with satellite broadcasts in PAL and SECAM with great success. This model is extremely versatile and easy to use, allowing you simply to choose first the standard you are playing, and then to choose the standard to which you wish to record, using clearly marked controls located on the front panel.

For simple viewing, the user inserts a tape, and the AG-W1 automatically detects the TV system used to record the tape, setting the VCR's tape speed and video head rotation speed accordingly. For recording, one selects the desired system simply by pushing a button on the front panel. The unit is also compact—approximately 19" by 4" by 16", or about the size of a standard consumer videocassette recorder. It has infra-red remote control and a/v cables, and it conforms to international power supplies with voltage selection capability (110-127V/220-240V), although in order to use the 220-240V option you must obtain an alternative power cord set from Panasonic.

The AG-W1 has few limitations, and for me they are of minor significance. It does not have a built-in television tuner, and it will only record in SP and LP (120 and 360 minutes for a T-120 videotape). Its only serious drawback, as Panasonic notes in the operating instructions, is the beat noise that can occur and cause picture distortion during system conversion playback in Hi-Fi.

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## Reviews

Panasonic claims that the development of a dedicated field memory chip and control LSI have enabled them to produce the conversion circuitry so inexpensively and compactly. Whatever the reasons for their new product, I cannot avoid high praise for a system that is so compact, complete, inexpensive, and of such high video quality that

it is as good or better than a more expensive standards converter. The AG-W1 will allow smaller laboratories for the first time to convert between standards, and to use NTSC rather than tri-standard monitors to view PAL and Secam broadcasts, saving them funds and space in the process.