

Handheld 3M digital projector offers glimpse of the future

September 17 2009, By Victor Godinez



You probably shouldn't buy the MPro120 handheld digital projector from 3M. But you should definitely be excited about it.

Right now, handheld projectors are useful to only a small slice of the gadget-buying population -- say, traveling workers who give lots of presentations to small groups and don't want to lug around a heavy traditional projector.

But the technology is improving rapidly and will eventually give us all 50-inch high-def televisions we can tote in our pockets.

Last year, I tested the Aiptek PocketCinema, which used 3M's first-generation "pico projector" technology.

The MPro120 uses the second generation, and it shows.

While the resolution is the same (640x480), the image is brighter and sharper.

The MPro120 connects to game consoles, DVD players, iPods, computers and just about anything else with a video output connection.

Setup is easy, and the device ships with just about every connector, power plug and cable adapter you'll ever need.

It is missing any kind of onboard or expandable memory, though, so you can't store videos directly on the projector (whereas the PocketCinema had both 1 gig of built-in memory and a [card slot](#)).

Once you're up and running, the image expands nicely up to 40 inches or so.

3M claims you can go up to 50 inches, but that's going to be too blurry for most people.

The projector also has built-in speakers that are a step above tinny, but it would have been nice for the MPro120 to include a headphone jack in case you wanted to use this device to watch movies on an airplane, for example.

The biggest drawback to the projector, though, is that the technology seems to be evolving so quickly that it's hard to recommend spending \$349 on the MPro120.

HD versions of these mini projectors are probably coming next year, and after that, hopefully, we'll start seeing these projectors integrated directly into MP3 players, cellphones and portable game systems.

Nikon, for example, recently unveiled its \$429 Coolpix S1000pj, a point-and-shoot digital camera with a built-in projector.

And more products like that are undoubtedly around the corner.

Still, if you need something like the MPro120, the device is solid and quiet and spits out a more than serviceable image.

Just don't be surprised if you find yourself opening your wallet again next year for the new and improved version.

Price: \$349

Pros: Image quality is much improved from last year's technology and is decent up to 40 inches or so.

Cons: No onboard memory, memory card slot or headphone jack. Image resolution is still low.

Bottom line: It's expensive and it's missing some features, but the MPro120 works well now and is a tantalizing glimpse of the future.

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