Gadget Watch: Look around in Sony's video headset

January 10 2014, by Ryan Nakashima

Juergen Boyny, of Germany, watches a video clip with a personal viewing device at the Sony booth at the International Consumer Electronics Show(CES) on Thursday, Jan. 9, 2014, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

A virtual-reality headset from Sony almost puts you inside a video by allowing you to widen your view when you turn your head up, down or side to side.

Sony's $1,000 "Wearable HDTV" worked as intended in a demo. But a

few quirks made me believe it'll still be a while before we can really step into a recorded video scene and look around for ourselves.

The HMZ-T3W fits snugly on your head, even while wearing glasses, but you need someone's help strapping it in. A big soft pad rests on your forehead, while straps around the back of your skull give you a snug fit.

At 11.3 ounces (320 grams), the device is fairly light. Because it doesn't sit on your nose, I can imagine sitting through a full-length movie with it on. A set of headphones is required.

A hooded viewer contains two screens measuring 0.7 inches (17. 8 millimeters) diagonally. Each screen delivers high-definition images in 720p resolution to each eye. Little slider knobs under each screen help you focus.

In a demo at the International CES gadget show, you are put on a motorcycle racing down the English countryside. Looking down shows the pavement speeding by, looking up shows the clouds. When swiveling to the right or left, I felt like waving to the crowds alongside the road—although I would have looked like a dork to anyone in the real world looking on.

The footage was shot using an action camera with a 170-degree field of view. Sony says the screen is equivalent to viewing a 750-inch (1.9 meter) screen from 65 feet (20 meters) away, though it's almost the same as saying you're watching a 60-inch (152-centimeter) screen from five 5 feet (1.5 meters) away.

A sensor that captures motion was clipped to the back straps in the demo. It measured my head movement, so the view on the screens shifted accordingly. But there was a slight drift. A blind spot on my right gradually encroached into my field of vision, while looking all the way

left required me to crane my neck further and further as it went on.

The HMZ-T3W gave me a flavor of what's possible with video headsets. I don't think I'd buy one, but trying it out was a fun ride.