

S-VHS May Compel HDTV Advances Broadcast TV Eyes High-Resolution Systems

A biweekly column focusing on produces, trends, and developments in the hardware industry.

BY MARK HARRINGTON

AN INTERESTING SIDELIGHT to the introduction of Super VHS is that it has the television broadcast industry quivering in its booths. Think about it. Consumers with a spare grand can visit their local consumer electronics store and pick up a VCR that will play back with more picture clarity than any network broadcast. By November, when the first S-VHS camcorders hit the streets, consumers will be able to buy cameras that record images with more attention to detail than the bulkiest TV camera.

Perhaps the only factor broadcasters have on their side is the intentional lethargy of the prerecorded software industry, which has yet to embrace S-VHS publicly. Until S-VHS movies are released, consumers with the new high-resolution recorders will have content themselves by making better recordings than the networks can. S-VHS records at more than 400 lines of horizontal resolution, compared with broadcast TV's 330 lines. Unveiled in Japan in January, S-VHS machines were shown in the U.S. for the first time in May and were on dealer shelves by the end of July.

Their sudden introduction and release may prod broadcasters into giving more urgent consideration to the implementation of high-definition TV.

Although it has been around for years, HDTV has been stalled in the U.S. by the burdensome prospect of replacing current equipment. Some approaches would require not only drastic revamping of broadcast

equipment but of consumer equipment as well because they wouldn't be compatible with the U.S. broadcast standard, NTSC (National Television System Committee).

Other systems would require two broadcast channels to deliver high-definition images, an approach criticized as wasteful in view of tight air space.

But there may be an alternative. A system introduced in 1986 and successfully tested this year is purported to deliver double the resolution of the current broadcast system while remaining compatible with NTSC. In other words, while consumers would need to buy a new, expensive TV to receive the high-definition signal, they could still receive standard TV on today's sets if they didn't want high definition.

"It would not require an uprooting of the current system," says Richard Iredale, president of Del Rey Group, a California-based research firm that developed high-definition NTSC TV. "It would be analogous to the '50s introduction of color TV. There were a million black-and-white sets in homes, and the industry insisted the system be compatible, which color TV was."

In contrast, Iredale says, "Most of the researchers working on HDTV are in Japan. And they're working on a system that has nothing in common with conventional TV. In other words, Japanese developers are hoping that consumers will be motivated to buy a new \$5,000 TV set and satellite dish in order to take advantage of high-definition color TV."

Del Rey's system uses a technique called TriScan, which digitally encodes high-definition images that are then decoded by receivers in a new generation of TV sets. Because S-VHS doesn't proportionately boost vertical resolution as it does horizontal resolution, it doesn't even compare to HD-NTSC, Iredale

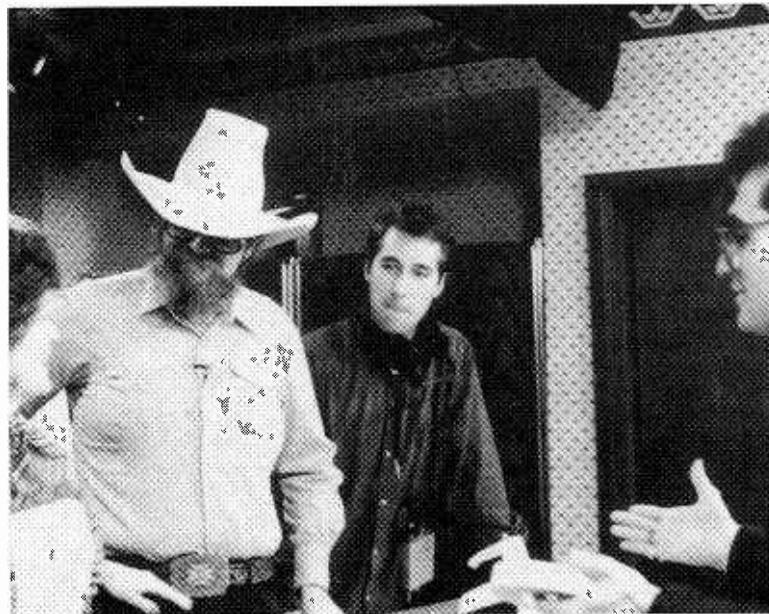
says.

He speculates that HD-NTSC sets would initially cost \$500-\$1,000 more than current large-screen sets, though he expects prices will come down after circuitry is mass produced. After that, most of the cost would have to do with larger, more complex screens and bigger TV cabinets.

Broadcasters would need to buy new encoders at a "nominal" cost to deliver the signals, plus a Telecining machine to convert 35mm film to high-definition video.

Iredale admits his system doesn't quite match the picture quality of the HDTV system under development in Japan, though he says it isn't far off. Called MUSE (for multiple subnyquist sampling encoding), the Japanese system delivers more than 1,000 lines of resolution. Iredale contends that only about 700 of the scanning lines actually go to improving the picture.

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Country Cookin'. Charlie Daniels, with hat, confers with his wife, Hazel, during the taping of "Cooking With Country Music Stars." The 60-minute video, slated for release by International Video Entertainment on Sept. 17 (list price \$19.95), features eight country music personalities sharing their favorite recipes. With the Daniels are, executive producer John Persico, right, and director Spencer Thorton. (Photo: Guy D'Alama)

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TOP MUSIC VIDEOCASSETTES™

| THIS WEEK | 2 WKS. AGO | WKS. ON CHART | TITLE | Copyright Owner, Manufacturer, Catalog Number | Principal Performers | Year of Release | Type | Suggested List Price |
|-----------|------------|---------------|--|--|----------------------|-----------------|------|----------------------|
| 1 | 3 | 31 | BON JOVI-BREAKOUT ▲ | ★★ NO. 1 ★★ Polygram Music Video-U.S. Sony Video Software 95W50030 | Bon Jovi | 1985 | SF | 14.95 |
| 2 | 4 | 5 | VITAL IDOL | Chrysalis Records, Inc. Vestron Music Video 1204 | Billy Idol | 1987 | LF | 19.98 |
| 3 | 9 | 3 | THE DOORS: LIVE AT THE HOLLYWOOD BOWL | The Doors Video Company MCA Home Video 80592 | The Doors | 1987 | C | 24.95 |
| 4 | 2 | 11 | KISS EXPOSED ● | Polygram Records Inc. Polygram Video 440-041-489-3 | Kiss | 1986 | LF | 29.95 |
| 5 | 1 | 9 | R.E.M. "SUCCUMBS" | A&M Records Inc. A&M Video 61710 | R.E.M. | 1987 | LF | 19.98 |
| 6 | 6 | 37 | MOTLEY CRUE UNCENSORED ▲ | Elektra/Asylum Records Elektra Entertainment 40104-3 | Motley Crue | 1986 | LF | 19.98 |
| 7 | 5 | 7 | BEASTIE BOYS | CBS Video Music Enterprises CBS-Fox Music Video 5171 | Beastie Boys | 1987 | SF | 19.98 |
| 8 | 13 | 11 | PRIEST LIVE | CBS Video Music Enterprises CBS-Fox Music Video 5134 | Judas Priest | 1986 | C | 24.98 |
| 9 | 8 | 91 | U2 LIVE AT RED ROCKS | Island Records Inc. MusicVision 6-20613 | U2 | 1984 | C | 19.95 |
| 10 | 7 | 61 | THE #1 VIDEO HITS ▲◆ | Arista Records Inc. MusicVision 6-20631 | Whitney Houston | 1986 | SF | 14.95 |
| 11 | 11 | 7 | ONE VOICE | Barwood Films Ltd. CBS-Fox Music Video 5150 | Barbra Streisand | 1987 | C | 29.98 |
| 12 | 10 | 39 | CONTROL-THE VIDEOS ● | A&M Records Inc. A&M Video 6-21021 | Janet Jackson | 1986 | SF | 12.95 |
| 13 | 15 | 13 | KATE BUSH THE WHOLE STORY | Picture Music Intl. Sony Video Software R0567V | Kate Bush | 1987 | LF | 29.95 |
| 14 | 18 | 3 | RUN-D.M.C. | Profile Profile Video 101 | Run-D.M.C. | 1987 | SF | 19.95 |
| 15 | 12 | 37 | LIVE WITHOUT A NET ▲ | Warner Bros. Records Warner Reprise Video 38129 | Van Halen | 1986 | C | 29.98 |
| 16 | 16 | 5 | RIDIN' ON THE FREEWAY | Arista Records Inc. MusicVision 6-20755 | Aretha Franklin | 1987 | SF | 19.95 |
| 17 | 19 | 3 | BREAK EVERY RULE | HBO Video TVR9940 | Tina Turner | 1987 | C | 19.95 |
| 18 | 14 | 7 | A HAPPENING IN CENTRAL PARK | Barwood Films Ltd. CBS-Fox Music Video 3520 | Barbra Streisand | 1967 | C | 29.98 |
| 19 | 17 | 47 | STARING AT THE SEA | Elektra Records Elektra Entertainment 40101 | The Cure | 1986 | LF | 24.98 |
| 20 | RE-ENTRY | | GENESIS LIVE: THE MAMA TOUR | Picture Music Intl. Atlantic Video 50111-3-5 | Genesis | 1986 | C | 24.98 |

● Recording Industry Assn. of America gold certification for theatrical films, sales of 75,000 units or suggested list price income of \$3 million (30,000 or \$1.2 million for nontheatrical made-for-home-video product; 25,000 or \$1 million for music video product). ▲ RIAA platinum certification for theatrical films, sales of 150,000 units or suggested list price income of \$6 million (60,000 or \$2.4 million for nontheatrical made-for-home-video product; 50,000 units or a value of \$2 million for music video product). Titles certified prior to Oct. 1, 1985, were certified under different criteria. ◆ International Tape Disc Assn. certification for a minimum sale of 75,000 units or a dollar volume of \$3 million at retail for theatrically released programs, or of at least 25,000 units or \$1 million at suggested retail for nontheatrical titles. SF short-form. LF long-form. C concert. D documentary.

Chace Offers Mono Film To Stereo Vid Conversion

LOS ANGELES Chace Productions here, a firm specializing in audio for video, film, and broadcast, has come up with a low-cost technique for converting monaural film to stereo video.

Home video suppliers, such as Warner Bros., CBS/Fox, and Paramount, have been using the system when they release catalog titles to take advantage of the new breed of consumer stereo hardware, says Rick Chace, president and inventor of the technique.

Chace says he has converted nearly 40 titles, including "Dirty Harry," "Magnum Force," "The Outlaw Josey Wales," "Harold And Maude," "Planet Of The Apes," and "Bullitt." Future commitments, he says, call for conversions of another 40 titles.

The process costs between

\$7,000 and \$20,000, depending on how sophisticated the special effects are. That's about one-third the cost, Chace says, of simulated stereo techniques that might be used during movie postproduction or of using three microphones during actual production. He says that only about 1,000 true stereo films have ever been made.

The Chace Stereo Surround Process uses a computer program Chace wrote in assembly language on an Apple, along with a surround processor. The stereo, programmed frame by frame, is mono compatible and can be heard on all home and theatrical surround decoders.

The idea, says Chace, was partly an outgrowth of his involvement with local television station KTLA's stereo broadcast efforts.