

TV Calibration for the Masses

by *Darryl Wilkinson*

Can't afford regular ISF monitor checkups? Let a little Spyder sit down beside you.

Ask any [Imaging Science Foundation](#) (ISF) certified technician, and he'll tell you that if you want to get the best image possible from your TV you need to have key parameters (brightness, contrast, color, etc.) calibrated on a regular basis. Depending on your TV, where you live, and how much your local technician likes you, you can expect to pay anywhere from \$200 to \$500+ for an ISF calibration. Without a doubt, one of these calibrations is some of the best money you can spend on your home theater system. But while the cost of regular calibrations (at least one or two a year are usually recommended) - or for many people even just one - may be something the truly finicky (or the filthy rich) can justify, there's still the great unwashed masses of us out there who'd like to have a great looking TV but can't part with the cash.

Although virtually all home theater displays provide adjustments for brightness, contrast, color, tint, and (on some) color temperature presets, these tools can often be detrimental to the picture quality in the hands of someone with only minimal knowledge of what it takes to create a good image. In addition, the human eye, despite millions of years of evolutionary improvement, is not the most reliable of test instruments when it comes to precisely calibrating a display monitor. To take routine calibrations out of the hands (and eyes) of the ordinary TV watcher, Datacolor plans to release (later this month) the SpyderTV - a home theater variation of their ColorVision computer monitor and printer calibration devices. (I've been quite pleased with the performance of the SpyderPRO monitor color correction device I own.)



The SpyderTV uses a three-legged colorimeter that rests on the front of your TV while it scientifically analyzes and measures the brightness, contrast, color, tint, and color temperature presets. Using a "wizard-based" software package, the system then guides the user to the best scientifically-based adjustment for each control. According to Datacolor, SpyderTV takes fine-tuning to another level with a process that is both accurate and easy to use.

Mark Hunter, Datacolor's technical director of home theater products, explains, "The Datacolor SpyderTV is designed to help consumers make selections that will accurately improve the display on virtually any monitor, from the high-end video screen found in today's most sophisticated home entertainment center to the 36" in your living room."

Calibrating the image on your TV is a truly spectacular thing, but the biggest value of the Spyder TV is that it can be used again and again (every hour if you're that compulsive) to keep your monitor performing at its visual peak. (You could hire a live-in ISF technician, but the room and board alone would be prohibitive.)

Since the SpyderTV is designed to work with CRT, LCD, and plasma TVs, those of you with front projection TVs will still need to become friends with your local ISF technician. For the rest of you, the following stuff is required to take advantage of all the SpyderTV has to offer: a DVD player, a remote control and portable computer (such as a laptop or notebook) with Windows 2000 or XP, and a USB port. Pricing has not been announced.

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