



ENTERTAINMENT STORAGE & MEDIA PLAYER

ZAPPITI NAS & 4K PLAYER



We thought we'd seen just about everything there is when it comes to home theatre equipment, and then Zappiti comes along and defines a whole new segment for the modern world of entertainment — a ripper, storage and a player for your movie collection.

EQUIPMENT

For our review, we were supplied two boxes — one large, housing the disc ripper and the storage, the other much more compact, containing the system player and controller.

So, to the first box. This is essentially an eight-bay NAS (Network Attached Storage) device (pictured above). But although it looks quite a bit like most such devices, it's locked into this specific function of storing and serving up your movies. For those not familiar with this kind of stuff, it's pretty straightforward. A NAS is simply a device with one or more hard-disk drives. Instead of plugging it into a USB socket directly attached to a computer, it is plugged into your home network. It has software inside that manages the storage and can perform housekeeping and so on.

This is a big NAS, and it comes without any disk drives installed. It's up to you to buy them. Western Digital Red drives designed for use in NAS are recommended by the company. These

drives are presently available in capacities of up to at least 8TB (we're told that the unit will support 10TB drives). There are eight bays, so you can have up to 80TB storage.

Assuming a Blu-ray movie is typically 25GB in size, that'd be enough to hold well over 3000 movies, which makes for an impressive collection. Quintuple that (at least) for DVDs.

The eight bays allow for easy drive installation. You lift up the lever on the front of one and it slides out a little. You pull it out completely. The drive slots into the bay and you put in the four securing screws, then slide it back into place. The software on the NAS looks after the rest (although our experience suggests that 'looking after' can take many hours, sometimes a day or so, on a NAS, especially if there are data protection schemes in place). It was supplied to us with a single 6TB drive installed.

Horizontally across the bottom of the NAS is an optical disc tray compatible with DVD and Blu-ray.

This is required, of course, for ripping.

The Zappiti 4K Player (pictured right) is a much smaller unit which you put near your TV as the

device that will play the content from the NAS. Its input is Ethernet — it does have Wi-Fi, but given the high bit-rates of many Blu-ray movies, wired Ethernet seems the best way to go. Indeed, we'd suggest that you should be certain to use gigabit network connections to make sure there's sufficient bandwidth for stutter-free performance.

The Zappiti 4K Player is based on the Android operating system (v.4.4) so it appears to support



Zappiti's 4K Player with a screen showing the customisable Zappiti interface.



the possibility of using apps and such — we have played with some in a previous encounter with this player alone (see the last issue of *Best Buys Audio & AV*). This time we were focused on how it works together with the Zappiti NAS. But note that the 4K Player also has a hard-disk bay built in for local storage, if you want to add a drive there.

As the name implies, it supports output up to 4K via HDMI. It is loaded with the Zappiti Media Centre software which plays back and manages the videos. We'll return to its functions shortly, but first let's put it to use.

But we must also note that there are three player options: in addition to the review unit there's the Zappiti 4K Mini (\$450) and the Zappiti 4K Duo (\$650 — this one has two hard-drive bays built in).

Although a complete product, the Zappiti system is under continuing development with new features being added — for example the NAS RIP Audio Video Edition has just been announced, which backs up CD discs too.

PERFORMANCE

We normally like to review equipment as though we'd just purchased it new from the shop and had to set it up from scratch, but with one thing and another, including deadlines, this was not possible this time; it had already been set up by the distributor. The instructions seemed to be clear enough.

So we plugged both the NAS and player into our gigabit network, the player's HDMI output into our AV receiver, and applied power to both. Within a few minutes all was working smoothly. The distributors had already loaded some 15 movies onto the NAS, a mixture of DVDs and Blu-ray discs. We played a couple of sections quickly just to make sure everything was working. Then went straight to putting a couple of our own on it.

Talk about easy. We popped a DVD into the optical drive tray, closed it and the unit got to work, ripping its contents. Thirty-five minutes later the tray opened up, job done.

Well, almost done. The data was on the hard disk — but then the Zappiti Media Centre on the player gets to work. When you start it up it scans the movie folders, and if it finds anything not already indexed it sends off identifying data to the Zappiti servers out there on the internet somewhere, and hopefully finds a match. If it does, cover art and fairly detailed movie information is downloaded and attached to the rip. Later when you select the movie this is the information that will be shown. It includes genre information so you can drill into your collection that way as well.

Much of the information has been provided by other Zappiti users. If you rip a movie not known to the Zappiti servers, you'll have an opportunity to add the information yourself, including a reference



Three sizes of Zappiti Player (the 4K 'Player' we tested is the middle one) with different levels of internal HDD storage and connectivity, but all deliver the full app operation and 4K playback.

to the Internet Movie Database so that additional information can be automatically downloaded.

The DVD that we ripped was made available on the unit as a complete disc, with menus and special extras and so on.

It's different with Blu-ray discs. With these, it's just after the movie, not all the other stuff. Apparently to work out what to rip from Blu-ray discs it uses the heuristic: 'grab the biggest title'. Zappiti admits that this will work most of the time, but not all the time. For example, the unit had already been loaded up with the 2009 Gerard Butler actioner 'Gamer'. But rather than the 95-minute plain vanilla movie, it had ripped the 132-minute 'Icon Mode' version of the movie, which intercuts making-of segments and director's commentary into the movie.

However it did work with the movie we ripped. This was a relatively small title — 17GB in total. The Zappiti ripped this in 40 minutes. The rip includes all the embedded audio tracks and subtitles, so you can switch languages and subs during playback using keys on the player's remote.

Playback was excellent. Even Blu-ray titles flowed smoothly on our gigabit network. You can have the unit upscale to 4K at 24, 25 or 30 fps. With our 4K TV, the 'Auto' setting chose 2160p/30. When we played 50Hz DVD rips, the unit suggested an output change to 1080p/60 rather than 2160p/30, correctly pointing out that picture quality will be better (too many dropped frames at 30p). But it would have been better had it offered 1080p/50. So you should set that output standard if you're mostly watching Australian content. Ripped Blu-rays will automatically play back at 1080p/24 with that setting.

Even on ripped Blu-ray titles you can skip around by chapter, or jump to different sections of the movie in 10% cent increments using the number keys.

We're curious creatures, so we did a little exploring. An IP scanner app on our computer disclosed the IP address of the Zappiti NAS once we'd connected it to the network and started it up, so we were able to bring it up in Explorer. It had five visible folders: Documents, Pictures, Music, Recorded TV and Videos. The first four were empty

while the fifth one (Videos) was locked to us. We were denied permission to access it, which seems to us a wise move by the designers. Who knows what damage people on your network could visit on the contents of the NAS!

We also tried looking at that IP address using a browser and didn't get very far, other than an information page suggesting that the NAS was powered by Windows Home Server 2011 software. Good solid stuff, that.

CONCLUSION

The Zappiti NAS and player are seriously impressive bits of kit. It's not just that they work, but that they work smoothly, with most aspects of the system thought through to deliver maximum convenience to the user. The NAS is flexible to grow with your storage needs, since you can start with a couple of drives (they can RAID for data protection) and add more as required. This is good stuff. ■

Zappiti NAS & 4K Player

- Effective and well thought-through system
- Potentially massive capacity
- Good picture quality

- Auto 1080p50/60 switching would be a great convenience

Zappiti NAS: \$4800
Zappiti 4K Player: \$550

NAS

Connections: 1 x Ethernet, various others not intended for use

Storage: 8 x 3.5 inch HDD bays

Dimensions (whd): 315 x 190 x 265mm

Weight: 8.10kg

4K Player

Inputs: Ethernet, WiFi, 1 x USB 3.0, 2 x USB 2.0, 1 x SD, 1 x 3.5 inch HDD bay

Outputs: 1 x HDMI, 1 x Optical digital audio

Dimensions (whd): 280 x 50 x 200mm

Weight: 1.35kg (no HDD installed)

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