

“...nearest competitor some £15,000 more expensive...this JVC is a stunner...”



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DLA-Z1

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# JVC DLA-Z1 4K UHD HDR HOME THEATRE LASER PROJECTOR REVIEW



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posted on Saturday, 29th April 2017 by [Steve May](#) | [High-end](#) [4K](#) [UHD](#) [home cinema](#) [projectors](#) [Habitech](#)



For the past six years, JVC has enjoyed critical and commercial success with its evolving family of e-shift 2160p home cinema projectors. But while those models use visual sleight of eye, to create faux 4K pictures, the DLA-Z1 (JVC DLA-Z1E) is the first native 4K UHD model from the brand. The first projector to be THX 4K certified, it's an uncompromising, high-end hero, positioned many rungs up the ladder from its DLA-X75 and DLA-X9500 stablemates.

### JVC DLA-Z1E 4K laser projector: Build quality and features

JVC projectors have a reputation for weight and size, but the Z1 makes its siblings look positively puny. Weighing 37.5kg, it's a proper monster. The sort of projector you might install on Skull Island.

This is the first JVC projector to use its Blu-Escent laser light source. Consequently, operating noise is high. It's very much a big theatre proposition, rather than a media room job, and installers should plan on appropriate accommodation.

The basic chassis reflects its JVC lineage. Rectangular with tapered edges, it measures 500 x 235 x 720mm (w/h/d). The Matt finish is intended to reduce reflections in light controlled theatre rooms

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The diameter of the lens has been increased to 100mm, compared to JVC's conventional 65mm, to maintain 4K clarity to the edge of the screen. Inputs run across the rear. You'll find two HDMI's (both 4K HDCP 2.2 compliant), a 12v trigger and RS232-C, USB service port, RJ45 Ethernet and 3D Synchro Din. The Z1 has support for Control4 SDDP (Simple Device Discovery Protocol) built in.

While the projector supports active 3D, no shuttering glasses (it's compatible with PK-AG1, PK-AG2 and PK-AG3 spex) are supplied. On-body controls for menu navigation are also relegated to the rear panel.

The remote is a standard IR pointer, with backlighting. It offers one button access to all inputs, as well as shortcuts to three customisable modes, plus Natural, Cinema and HDR viewing modes.

Setup is relatively uncomplicated. Zoom and focus are handled via the remote, and there's generous lens shifting – 43 per cent horizontal and 100 per cent vertical. Pincushion correction is available when working with a curved screen.

For a 120-inch 16:9 screen you'll need a projection distance between 3.95 – 7.30m. The Z1 has an anamorphic mode for use with additional lenses, such as Panamorph's UltraWide optics and sleds. The onscreen menu system comprises a familiar tabbed box.

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#### JVC DLA-Z1E 4K laser projector: Performance

Image fidelity is outstanding. The DLA-Z1 has achieved jaw-dropping clarity with a trio of new 4K 4096 x 2160 D-ILA devices. JVC has managed to cram all these pixels into a 0.69-inch device by narrowing the pixel gap by 31 per cent.

Onscreen, this translates to astounding sharpness and visual subtlety. The *Planet Earth 2* demo clip (SDR, via Sky Q) looks astoundingly crisp and vibrant. That glistening leopard, those sparkling rain drops and vividly coloured tree frog are genuinely beautiful.

In *Star Trek Beyond* (Sky Cinema, UHD), black levels appear profound. The projector does an excellent job of maintaining a deep interstellar black, while finding orbiting shadow detail.

Picture modes consist of Natural, Cinema, HDR, Film, THX, plus six customisable users settings, allowing you to create a specific input tailored for animation, for example. The projector also supports ISF calibration.

There's surprisingly little difference between the Natural and Cinema modes and perhaps contrary to expectations, the THX mode doesn't sacrifice 4K resolution at all. With SDR 4K and regular HD sources, which also look superb, the projector does a class leading job.

The HDR viewing experience on a projector isn't comparable to that on a high-brightness flatscreen display. But with the DLA-Z1 there's an extended level of contrast, with peak highlights that really pop onscreen. I was never aware of clipped highlights or crushed shadows.

In addition to HDR10 support, the Z1 is Hybrid Log-Gamma (broadcast HDR) compatible. There's no HLG content to view at the moment, but you will find an HDR (Hybrid Log) option amongst the various gamma settings, alongside HDR (ST.2084), Cinema 1 & 2, plus 2.6, 2.4, and 2.2. Colour profile settings are adjustable between BT.709, BT.2020, DCI, Anime and HDR.

The prospects for Dolby Vision compatibility are less clear cut. When asked for clarification, JVC

offered this official comment: "Dolby Vision standard for projectors are not set. We believe the Z1 is compatible but can only confirm when the standards are set."

While you can manually assign HDR, it's not advisable. The projector is best left running in full Auto mode, free to respond to any HDR flags in the content.



The Z1 automatically recognised an HDR stream of *Luke Cage* (Netflix), playing via a Panasonic DMP-UB900 UHD Blu-ray player, and adopted the appropriate HDR10 profile. When content swaps from HDR to SDR, it then drops back automatically.

However, if you manually select HDR then the Z1 is unable to switch back to the correct mode for SDR, with predictably disastrous results. This foible caught me out for a while, until I realised what was happening.

When HDR is triggered, the projector goes into full brightness mode, increasing operating noise exponentially.

The projector is intrinsically bright at 3,000 lumens, but I found engaging Dynamic Control CTRL Mode 1 adds a beneficial lift to SDR images. *Drumline* (Blu-ray), a marching band comedy, features royal blue outfits with golden yellow bearskin hats and glittering instruments, stomping across a floodlight green turf. The Z1's portrayal is spectacular.

With a full 4K cinematic resolution of 4096 x 2160, the projector has no problems delivering every detail on a high-frequency 2160p zone plate test pattern.

The presentation of *Mad Max Fury Road* (UHD Blu-ray) is fittingly rich, with enormous contrast and deep hues. JVC claims 100 per cent of DCI P3 coverage and over 80 per cent of BT.2020. A screening of *Warcraft* left me awestruck by its luminosity. I've not seen the movie look better - and I saw it theatrically at an IMAX cinema.

This wide colour performance is a point of difference between JVC's laser light engine and TI's far cheaper 4K single chip DLP approach, as seen on the Acer V9800, which is limited to BT.709.

A Dynamic Light Source control allows the DLA-Z1 to adjust the laser output accordingly to the scene's brightness, for better contrast. While you have to watch HDR flagged content in HDR mode, there is

some room for manoeuvre. At times the colour palette looked over-saturated and the APL (average picture level) a tad low in HDR mode, which undoubtedly helps lend headroom for spectral highlights. I sometimes preferred the image a notch up on Brightness and a notch down on Colour. But that's a taste issue.

Of course, not all HDR content is full of sparkle and dazzle. *The OA* (Netflix HDR) is tonally muted with desaturated colours. You would be hard pressed to recognise this as an HDR show, were it not for the fact it triggers the Z1 into howling HDR mode. The Z1's delivery though was smooth and nuanced.

Generally I'm not a fan of JVC Clear Motion Drive image interpolation. When engaged, it introduces obvious motion artefacts. I would go as far as advising it be turned off for all content, because there's no apparent down-side.

When Vin Diesel's crew harpoon the back of a truck off in a high speed road chase from *Furious 7* (Blu-ray) detail remains high and movement fluid. There are no artefacts as Paul Walker throws a camo-clad thug from the back of the truck into the tarmac in front of Diesel and Michelle Rodriguez.



#### JVC DLA-Z1E 4K laser projector: Verdict

The DLA-Z1 is a remarkable projector, one that occupies a unique space in the upscale home theatre market. It's nearest competitor is probably the Sony VPL-VW5000ES, although there's a significant disparity in price between the two. Sony's SRXD giant also uses a laser light engine and boasts a cinema grade performance – but it's some £15,000 more expensive. To put that into perspective: the Z1 is probably best suited for 10-20 seat theatres, while the Sony is more suitable for 25-plus seat venues.

In terms of image fidelity this JVC is a stunner. With it, installers can offer discerning clients a convincing digital cinema experience. Images are extremely sharp, colours wide and black levels and shadow detail excellent. The DLA-Z1 is one of a new breed of elite supercar projectors. Reserve a test drive.

The JVC DLA-Z1E is available now  
Retail price: £35,000

The JVC DLA-Z1E is available through Habitech. For more [news stories about Habitech's home theatre product portfolio](#), visit our [partner page here](#).



#### **Steve May**

Steve is a veteran of the UK consumer electronics industry, having covered it for various media outlets for more than 20 years.

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