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Since the introduction of double layer DVD writers, the interest has been quite overwhelming and is why we keep bringing you reviews of these highly popular drives. The anticipation has now turned into down right obsession and it has become a key component in any current or new system build, thanks to the declining prices and continued media hype. Manufacturers are quite aware of the fascination and is why they have each been releasing their own products which excel in at least one area of the testing methodology used in most reviews. This has led to some confusion as to which drive is best suited for the individuals needs. Today, we compare four 16x double layer drives and highlight both the strong and weak points in order to give you a better idea of which drive is best suited for you.

In this comparison guide, we will be looking at four of the top 16x drives to hit the market, the Pioneer DVR-108, NEC ND3500A, Lite-On SOHW-1633s and the new LG GSA-4160B. We will cover everything from design and features to performance and price. Let's begin with a quick look at each of these drives.

As far as the front bezel design goes, the LG-GSA4160B is by far the most attractive drive of the bunch. However, for those who are looking for a headphone jack, the Lite-On drive is the only DL writer offering a headphone jack, as well as volume control. The Pioneer and NEC drives, in my opinion, are the ugliest drives, with a very plain look that just wants to make you hide the drive period. Although we only obtained the 4160B in black, all these drives are offered with both white and black bezels. If you opt for the more expensive Pioneer "XL" model, it has the most impressive looks of any drive in the market. However, this will come at a very hefty price tag, considering they contain different firmware as well that offer a few extra features.

So, we have determined which is the sexiest-looking drive, but what about performance? I've done some extensive testing on each model to determine which is indeed the most impressive of the bunch. But before we show you performance results, let's briefly look at the features and what they have to offer.

Features

Each one of these drives has there disappointments when it comes to features. Let's compare each to see what they really offer.

DVD Writing

DVD+R DVD-R DVD+RW DVD-RW
LG GSA-4160B 16x 8x 4x 4x

Lite-On SOHW-1633s 16x 8x 4x 4x
NEC ND-3500A 16x 16x 4x 4x
Pioneer DVR-108 16x 16x 4x 4x

While all these drives are indeed 16x models, only two will write to both formats at this speed. The LG GSA-4160B and the Lite-On SOHW-1633s only support 8x DVD-R writing. So if you are one who only prefers this format, the NEC or Pioneer would be the best choice. All of these drives support writing to DVD re-writable media at 4x.

DVD+R9 Double Layer Writing

Write Speed

LG GSA-4160B 2.4x
Lite-On SOHW-1633s 2.4x
NEC ND-3500A 4x
Pioneer DVR-108 4x

The major disappointment with both the LG and the Lite-On 16x drives is the lack of 4x double layer writing support. Pioneer and NEC seem to be the only manufacturers to jump in and release second generation double layer drives supporting much faster 4x writing. In fact, the jump from 2.4x to 4x is quite substantial as we will show you a bit later in this comparison.

DVD-RAM Support

Supported Read Write

LG GSA-4160B YES 5x 5x
Lite-On SOHW-1633s NO NO NO
NEC ND-3500A NO NO NO
Pioneer DVR-108 YES 2x NO

Now this is where both the LG GSA-4120B and GSA-4160B shine above the rest. In fact, it is what has made these drives the most popular DVD writers on the market. Unlike the rest in the roundup, it is a triple format burner, offering full support for DVD-RAM media. The other drives do not support it, with the exception of the Pioneer DVR-108 which supports reading of DVD-RAM discs at 2x. I personally don't see the point in offering only read capabilities, but it's at least one extra feature added to distinguish it from the rest. Fast 5x support of the LG GSA-4160 will actually be tested a bit later in this article.

CDR Writing

CDR CDRW

LG GSA-4160B 40x 24x

Lite-On SOHW-1633s 48x 24x

NEC ND-3500A 48x 24x

Pioneer DVR-108 32x 24x

The fastest CDR writers of the bunch are the Lite-On SOHW-1633s and the NEC ND-3500A. With their support for 48x writing, they make a great all-in-one drive for many users. The only drive lacking in this lineup is the Pioneer DVR-108. Why they opted for only 32x writing is still quite puzzling and is actually why I have found that many are choosing the NEC over the Pioneer. The LG GSA-4160B should not be left out of consideration though. We will show you later that the difference in write times between 40x and 48x is not much to brag about.

Bitsetting Support

One feature I've found that is most important for many users is bitsetting support. Let's compare these drives and see what they offer.

	DVD+R/RW Support	DVD+R DL Support
LG GSA-4160B	NO	NO
Lite-On SOHW-1633s	YES	NO
NEC ND-3500A	NO	YES
Pioneer DVR-108	NO	YES

The LG GSA-4160B does not offer bitsetting support out of the box. However, it is very likely that you will be able to obtain support through an excellent third-party tool called DVDInfo Pro. Right now, they only support the GSA-4120B, but I'm confident with the author that support for this drive will be likely. LG firmware is very hard to hack, however some select few have been able to do so. Using Lite-On's booktype utility, you can change the booktype of DVD+R/RW media, however, the firmware does not automatically change booktype of DVD+R DL discs to DVD-ROM like the NEC and Pioneer models do.

Additional Features

As far as other features go, all these drives have a 2MB buffer but offer some sort of buffer under-run protection, which all work exceptionally well. This is especially useful if you will be burning discs at 16x, which I personally don't recommend just yet. As our individual tests of these drives revealed, burning at this speed is quite unstable, with the exception of the Lite-On SOHW-1633s.

