



JVC's 'entry-level' native 4K laser PJ lacks serious competition – **Steve Withers** wonders if it might be in a class of its own

# Standing proud

JVC has been wowing projector fans recently with its native 4K images, laser-powered lighting, class-leading blacks and dynamic HDR tone mapping, but the cost of admission ain't cheap. Tested here is the DLA-NZ7, the entry-point into JVC's laser line-up with a price tag of £11,499 that makes it a significant investment. Needless to say, this isn't a PJ you just aim at a white wall.

The 'affordable' JVC option in 2022 is actually the lamp-based DLA-NP5, which is an updated version of the previous generation, adding HDMI 2.1 inputs and support for HDR10+ and 4K/120p. But even the NP5 costs £7,499, so is hardly a budget model either.

In fairness, once you factor in features, performance and alternatives, these beamers start to look a lot more competitive – although the flagship DLA-NZ9 remains decidedly toppy at £24,999. And since the majority of attention will be focused on the NZ7 and mid-range DLA-NZ8 (see HCC #329), which currently retails for £15,799, let's establish the similarities and differences.

### Sibling rivalry

On paper the NZ7 and NZ8 appear very similar, with exactly the same chassis, three-chip 4K (4,096 x 2,160) D-ILA device, BLU-Escent laser light source, and 17-element, 15-group all-glass 65mm lens. They also both have twin HDMI 2.1 inputs that accept 8K/60p and 4K/120p, plus support HDCP 2.3, 3D and high dynamic range – specifically HDR10, HLG, and HDR10+.

They also boast the same Auto Tone Mapping, which reads HDR metadata and adjusts the static tone mapping accordingly. In addition, they benefit from Frame Adapt HDR, which analyses the HDR signal and dynamically changes the tone mapping, along with a Theatre Optimiser that matches HDR delivery to your screen's size and gain.

Other features shared by the two projectors include the same intuitive menu system and backlit remote handset, as well as motorised lens controls and accurate lens memories that help make setup easier. In terms of installation both beamers have a 2.0x zoom and identical dimensions, although the NZ7 is a smidge lighter at 22.5kg, and they can be stand or ceiling mounted.

So, what's different? Most importantly, the NZ8 is slightly brighter with a claimed 2,500 Lumens output, compared to the NZ7's 2,200, and the former has a superior contrast rating of 80,000:1, double that of the NZ7. The NZ8 also has a coating on the inside of its lens assembly to improve contrast performance by suppressing any reflected light, and it uses a wide colour gamut filter that reaches DCI-P3.

The only other difference is that the NZ8 employs a four-directional 8K/e-shiftX device, as opposed to the NZ7's bi-directional 8K/e-shift unit, first introduced on the previous generation's DLA-NX9. This latter only shifts pixels by half-a-pixel diagonally, whereas the new 'X' variant shifts them in all four axes, which allows the NZ8 and NZ9 to display a full 8K (8,192 x 4,320) image.

When it comes to laser-powered native 4K projectors, JVC's only competition is the Sony VPL-XW5000ES (£5,999) and VPL-XW7000ES (£14,999). The former is obviously the most affordable option, but is limited to 2,000 Lumens and drops 3D, wide colour handling and motorised lens controls to reach its lower price point.

The XW7000ES reinstates these features and delivers an insanely bright 3,200 Lumens, but is priced to compete directly with the NZ8. Interestingly, neither Sony beamer has genuine dynamic tone mapping, nor HDMI 2.1 inputs, so there's no support for HDR10+ or 4K/120p.

This puts the NZ7 in an enviable position. It sports impressive features and specifications, has no direct competitor, and is significantly cheaper than the Sony XW7000ES and JVC's own NZ8. If it can deliver a performance comparable to its more expensive sibling, then might it be the best option for any home cinema fan seeking value for money and a degree of future-proofing?

### Keeping up appearances

A JVC NZ8 takes pride of place in my own review system, so I have a point of reference, and the more affordable NZ7 immediately impresses. It might technically be less capable but this wasn't readily apparent. Now, that's not much of a surprise regards the luminance, because the human eye is rubbish when asked to compare brightness, but I was expecting to see more of a drop-off in contrast.

While the NZ7 measures around the claimed 40,000:1, it doesn't look noticeably different,



even in my completely blacked-out dedicated home cinema, to the pricier NZ8. That model undoubtedly delivers marginally better blacks, but they aren't twice as good, or four grand better for that matter.

The hallway fight in *The Batman* (4K Blu-ray) gives the perfect example of the NZ7's contrast prowess, with the darkness looking suitably black and lit only by muzzle-flashes from machine guns. These highlights really pop as they punctuate the action, while the projector teases out all the shadow details as the Dark Knight is briefly illuminated meting out punishing justice with his fists.

This sequence demonstrates another big strength of JVC's latest beamers: class-leading HDR10 dynamic tone mapping. Bloody, muddy Viking epic *The Northman* (4K Blu-ray) climaxes with a fight at night on the rim of an erupting volcano, and the lava is rendered with such precision that all the detail is retained in the molten rock. It's so realistic you can almost feel the heat.

### HDR masterclass

Like the NZ8 there's a dynamic control for the laser but, after a prolonged period testing this feature, I reckon it's best left off. You do get some very nice fades to complete black, but at other times there are obvious brightness

### AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** 4K HDR cinema projector with JVC's 8K e-Shift tech

**POSITION:** Entry-level laser model below DLA-NZ8 and DLA-NZ9

**PEERS:** Sony VPL-XW7000ES

**1.** The NZ7's cabinet bears JVC's 8K e-Shift and D-ILA logos

**2.** All-glass 65mm lens features a 2.0x zoom for a 1.43-2.92:1 throw



## REVIEWS

fluctuations that can get annoying, momentarily lifting you out of the content you're watching.

The NZ7 doesn't have the wide colour filter found on the NZ8, so covers around 89% of the DCI-P3 gamut, as opposed to nearly 100%. However, this makes less of a difference than you might expect, and watching the 4K Blu-ray of *Inside Out*, with its deliberately expanded colour gamut, reveals brilliantly saturated images that retain a day-glow pop.

The downside to JVC's wide colour filter is a 25 per cent drop in brightness, and for this reason the HDR10+ mode on the NZ8 and NZ9 disables it to ensure a brighter HDR experience – so with discs with such grades, NZ7 buyers won't be missing out. Spinning the scene where Schofield wakes up at night in *1917* (4K Blu-ray) found the PJ making use of HDR10+'s dynamic metadata to bring out detail in the shadows, while ensuring the blacks are deep and the flares have real, well... flair.

The NZ7 sports the same upscaling as the NZ8, and it's excellent. My trusty Blu-ray of *Samsara* looked pristine and detailed, with no signs of any processing artefacts. However, unlike its big brother's four-way 8K/e-Shift, the NZ7's bi-directional version isn't a revelation, and in general I preferred to turn it off and simply enjoy a native resolution with 4K content.

### 3D fun and games

Motion isn't always a JVC strong point, and is definitely an area where Sony's home cinema projectors are stronger. That said, this latest generation does handle movement better. The fort attack in *The Northman* is a single-take dolly with the camera moving constantly from left to right, and the NZ7 delivered all this kinetic action without introducing any worrisome judder or other obvious motion artefacts.

For 3D you'll need to pay extra for JVC's optional synchro emitter and glasses, but if you're a fan of stereoscopic cinema you'll love the results. Watching *The Adventures of Tintin* on Blu-ray reveals fantastic 3D images that are bright, detailed and colourful, boasting plenty of depth, and not a hint of annoying crosstalk.

The NZ7 shouldn't disappoint well-heeled gamers either, thanks to its long-life laser light source, 4K/120p support, and low-latency mode that reduces input lag to 36ms. The result is an enjoyably bright and responsive

### SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** Yes. Active shutter (glasses and synchro emitter optional) **4K:** Yes. 4,096 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HLG; HDR10+ **CONNECTIONS:** 2 x HDMI inputs; RS-232; USB; 12V trigger; Ethernet; 3D synchro **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 2,200 Lumens **CONTRAST (CLAIMED):** 40,000:1 (native); 'infinity:1' (dynamic) **ZOOM:** Yes. 2.0x **DIMENSIONS:** 500(w) x 234(h) x 505(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 22.5kg

**FEATURES:** D-ILA device; BLU-Escent laser diode; claimed average life of 20,000 hours in standard mode; all-glass high-quality lens; 8K/e-shift; Auto Tone Mapping; Frame Adapt HDR; Theatre Optimiser; Low Latency mode; Clear Motion Drive; Motion Enhance; 1.43-2.92:1 throw ratio; motorised zoom, shift and focus; 10 lens memories; HDMI 2.1 with support for 8K/60p and 4K/120p; auto calibration

### TESTED WITH



**THE BATMAN:** This dark and gritty comic book movie feels more *Seven* than *Caped Crusader*, but stunning native 4K/HDR images will test a display's black levels and shadow detail, while powerful Dolby Atmos sonics boast plenty of immersion, serious amounts of bass, and expansive soundscapes.

gaming experience, with HDR images that are expertly tone-mapped.

### High-end home cinema

'Entry-level' is a very relative term, and in the case of the NZ7 it's doing a lot of heavy lifting. In every respect this is a high-end projector, and its lower status in JVC's laser stable is only due to the exceptional performance offered by the models above it. In most respects the NZ7 is a worthy alternative, delivering impressive bigscreen images for less wonga. A price tag that's the best part of twelve grand could never be considered affordable, but factor in the competition and the awesome HDR playback, and this peerless performer is definitely a best buy ■

### HCC VERDICT



#### JVC DLA-NZ7

→ £11,499 → [www.jvc.co.uk](http://www.jvc.co.uk)

**WE SAY:** An absence of direct competitors, an impressive performance, and the majority of features found on the more expensive NZ8, make this beamer hard to beat.

**3. A bank of control keys is located next to the PJ's rear-panel connections...**

**4. ...but the supplied handset is likely to be more convenient**

