

MSI Optix MAG27CQ review

With a relatively small selection of screens, MSI aimed to make the Optix MAG27CQ something special, and succeeded. A high refresh rate, 1800R curved panel and 1440p resolution make this panel ideal for those that like a smooth and colourful experience on their gaming rigs.

By Mark Pickavance | 09 Mar 2018



EXPERTS RATING



MSI OPTIX MAG27CQ REVIEW

Unlike the big monitor brands, MSI doesn't have many different designs in their inventory. At the time of writing, their Optix 32, 27 and 24 screens number just nine models, including one 32in option and a couple of 24in displays.

The 27 Series are the most numerous with six examples, and the MSI Optix MAG27CQ reviewed here is the flagship design.

As MSI isn't a maker of displays, the advantage is it can cherry-pick what technology is available from panel makers, and then have its own slant applied to that hardware.

MSI has a gamer-orientated product range, and the MSI Optix MAG27CQ is pitched directly at the same customers who enjoyed their motherboards and graphics cards. But is this a 'me too' offering, or did MSI deliver something with wider appeal than fans of their unique branding?

PRICE

Arriving in March 2018, the UK MSRP is for the MSI Optix MAG27CQ will be £419, and logically you should be able to find it for less online. You can buy it from **Laptops Direct for £399**.

Its MAG27C brother, with 1080p resolution, will have a £369 price tag, and it also has a smaller 24in sibling, the MAG24C, at a £269.

Flat 1440p resolution panels can be bought for less, but most brands are only offering 1080p curved screens at 27in and in this price range.

If you are happy to drop to that resolution, one of the MSI's alternative designs, the larger Optix AG32C 32in has the same £419 price point. Samsung's C27HG70 27in 1440p 144Hz design is an extra £130 and is one of the relatively few curved alternatives with this exact size, resolution and high refresh.

One cheaper option is the LG 29UC88, a 29in ultra-wide IPS design that offers 144Hz, although it only has a resolution of 2560 x 1080 for around £375. For this sort of build quality and features (curved and 1440p), the MSI Optix MAG27CQ seems a quite reasonable price, if you're looking for exactly this spec.

FEATURES AND DESIGN

For many gamers 32in or bigger is their ideal screen size, but 27in is most often where their resources realistically run out.

The MSI Optix MAG27CQ is 27-inch 1800R curved screen with a natural resolution of 2560x1440 (WQHD). That seems to be something of a sweet spot for game screens. Because unlike 4K, you don't need a top end video card to drive a reasonable frame rate at that resolution.

Connectivity is via three possible inputs: DisplayPort 1.2, HDMI 2.0 and DVI. That ticks most boxes for both PC and console use, almost irrespective of what video hardware you have.

The only caveat is that you only get the top 144Hz mode in DisplayPort, as HDMI 2.0 only supports 120Hz at 2560x1440, and DVI only 60Hz (with a 24+1 pin DVI cable).

Therefore, to get the full MAG27CQ experience, DisplayPort is a necessity, had you not already worked that out. As with most curved displays, the MAG27CQ comes with a custom support foot fashioned out of a robust metal and plastic combination.

The support allows a 65mm of fall and rise, 45 degrees of swivel and tilting from -5 to 15 degrees. There isn't any rotation, and the support doesn't have enough vertical travel to handle portrait mode if it did.

There are VESA 75 mountings under where the stand attaches, so you're not forced to use the provided support.

As with many thin curved panels, MSI passed on speakers with just a through headphone jack instead. It also declined to include a USB hub, though there is some interesting LED lighting on the rear of the screen.

That does beg the question that if the person who paid for the screen can't see these lights, aren't they a bit superfluous?

A better-considered feature is the 'frame-less' nature of this design, where only the very bottom of the screen has any proper border. In reality, the side and top have a 7mm gap to the start of the display.

But this isn't so large that it would entirely ruin the effect if you had three of these panels arranged to create a truly ultra-wide view.

As with almost all the recent gaming designs we've seen, the MAG27CQ uses a small five-way joystick to access an on-screen menu. One nice twist MSI put on this is that pushing the stick one way brings the main menu up and the opposite direction a smaller list of available inputs.

As for specific modes, there are only five; standard, movie, FPS, RTS and Eyesaver. And, if you use any of these other than 'standard' then brightness, contrast and gamma controls are disabled.

Most owners are likely to choose one of the modes and leave it set there, predictably. As this screen isn't promoted for professional colour use, that it doesn't offer Kelvin colour temperatures, but instead 'cool', 'warm' and a user-defined RGB is acceptable.

There are also two Gamma levels and contrast controls, but these are only accessible in 'Standard' mode. Support for long use with reduced blue content is also appreciated, even if it is debatable how many gamers will choose to use it.

PERFORMANCE

As with all our screen reviews, the Datacolor Spyder5 calibrator was deployed to assess the worthiness of the panel MSI picked for their Optix MAG27CQ.

The panel in this design has all the traits of AHVA (Advanced Hyper-Viewing Angle) technology. A solution that offers the extended colour gamut and viewing angles of an IPS panel, while delivering the refresh rate of TN technology.

AHVA has been widely used by both Samsung and LG in their screens, so we suspect that one of these is the originator of the panel inside this screen.

In their specification, MSI quotes sRGB of 110% and NTSC of 85%. It doesn't quote AdobeRGB value, though this product isn't meant for photographic or video colour balancing.

Our tests returned 100% sRGB and 85% for both NTSC and Adobe RGB, although the Datacolor application doesn't track values above 100%, regrettably. Almost every value that MSI quoted was either exactly right or very close, so we're happy to accept that 110% value in this instance.

Brightness and contrast were also very close to their quoted values. With the default, Gamma 2.2 set, the tonal response curve was closer to 2.1. But it remained consistent across the whole response range.

GOOD IMPRESSIONS

What these tests don't reveal is how nicely balanced this panel is where colour and contrast are concerned. The panel MSI used is excellent quality, but it hasn't tried to push any aspects too far regarding backlighting or colour vibrancy.

For desktop work, it's remarkably sharp and clean, and almost entirely free of frame shadows. While the gaming fans get strong colours that aren't garish, and a very high refresh reduces screen lag to an absolute minimum.

If you own a modern AMD GPU, the screen is FreeSync compatible, allowing the video card to adjust the framerate to match the frame rendering speed precisely. The result is a much cleaner appearance as screen tearing can't spoil the view, however frenetic the action gets. Nvidia's G-Sync technology isn't supported in this design, unfortunately.

Overall, the MAG27CQ is great for someone who uses their system for serious work and play, as the gaming enhancements don't undermine it for serious use.

Curved screens take a little getting used to, but the experience is a positive one irrespective of how you are using the PC. At just 250 cd/m², this isn't the very brightest screen we've seen, but gamers usually avoid sunlight, and therefore that shouldn't be a big issue.

MSI could have included a USB hub, ideally, but in all other respects, this is an exceptionally effective solution.

SHOULD I BUY MSI OPTIX MAG27CQ?

As we expected from MSI, the Optix MAG27CQ is a class act for those that want curved 1440p resolution, 144Hz and very little lag. With very few products that directly compete with this specification, MSI might have found a niche to exploit with what turned out to be an excellent product.