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## [Sony PLAYSTATION 3 Exclusive European Preview](#)

### *Hands-on with Sony's next generation console*



After almost 3 months from the initial Japanese launch, Sony has finally decided to let us know the date when their hot new gaming console, the PLAYSTATION 3 (a.k.a. PlayStation 3 or simply PS3), will be made available to the eager European gamers, and that date is March 23'rd. However, since we were extremely curious to see just what this amazing device has to offer, we've managed to get our hands on a unit, with some help from [Flamingo Computers](#), the official importer for Romania, and run some preliminary tests on it. And I do mean preliminary (that's also the reason why this is not a complete review, but only a preview), since we were only able to play some demos we've downloaded from the PLAYSTATION network (and you can check out after the jump our gaming consoles expert's opinion on one of these games, [Gran Turismo HD Concept](#)), listen to some music and watch some pictures and photos, due to certain technical problems, mostly related to the fact that the system was a NTSC model, not compatible with any of our PAL DVDs, and also because Blu-ray discs are still pretty scarce in video stores. However, from what I've been able to see and test, this thing comes packed full of features, although it also has some.....well, peculiarities would be the best way to describe them. Some of the features are amazing, while others are surprisingly bad. It's quite a curious contrast, and I'll try to depict it as much as possible as follows. So, without further ado, let's move on directly to our experience with the PlayStation 3.

**Opening the box** The contents of the box were a bit disappointing. I was able to find in there just the PS3 (the 60 GB version), or the "Big Black Monolith" as the people around the office have called it, 1 SixAxis controller, the power cable, the standard A/V output cable (no HDMI, not even composite, which was really disappointing), and a USB to miniUSB cable for charging the controller. Moreover, in order to provide you with a complete experience (which means also some gameplay), we went online and registered on the PLAYSTATION network in order to get some demos, which you'll be able to check out later on.

**External design features and the controller** *Big, heavy, black and shiny: a photographer's nightmare* The first impression on Sony's console is that of style and luxury. When you take it out of the box and place it near your widescreen TV, it just emanates a feeling of power and respect. It's huge, black with just enough amount of chrome, and looks like it's capable of unimaginable computing deeds. However, that feeling doesn't last too long, since the truth about the PS3 is not as shiny as its external surface. First of all, let's talk a bit about the size. Yes, size certainly does matter, but not when the subject at hand is a gaming console. And the PS3 is clearly the biggest and heaviest of all three next-gen consoles, measuring 33 cm x 28 cm x 10 cm and weighing around 5 Kilos (11 pounds), a lot more than its direct competitor, the Xbox 360. I won't even mention the Wii in this comparison, since Nintendo's console looks like it could be swallowed whole by Sony's monster. The PlayStation 3 is so damn big because Sony has made the very "wise" decision of incorporating the power supply unit into the console itself, and thus also a pretty big ventilator to keep everything inside at a normal operating temperature. I don't really know just how "normal" that temperature really is, but we'll speak about that a bit later. Another pretty big problem is that of the plastic finishing. Indeed, it looks great, but it gets dirty with fingertips in virtually no time, which can really be a big problem, especially if you've chosen it for its sexy looks. Moreover, it's so reflective that, if cleaned properly, it can very well act as a mirror. Hence, it was extremely difficult to photograph it. Our in-house photo-specialist, Tudor, had some pretty big problems when taking the pictures you can see in this article, and only 1 "heavenly" polarizing filter and his skills saved the day and some photos which initially seemed doomed. The thing was

actually so reflective, that you could see the whole room in it, so if you need a mirror around the house, I strongly recommend it. *Buttons and slots placement* One of the coolest things about the PS3 is its power button. The thing is touch sensitive, so you just have to slowly move your finger over it and the console starts, something that really makes you feel like you've got a device from the future in front of you. The same goes for the eject button of the Blu-ray disc, one of the most important parts of the console, which, unfortunately, due to the reasons mentioned above, we haven't been able to use. The PS3 features 4 USB ports on the front, which is pretty sufficient for either connecting 4 controllers via their respective miniUSB cables, or for connecting a keyboard and mouse (which work very well out of the box). Also on the front side there's a card reader for Memory Stick, Secure Digital and Compact Flash cards, a feature which is actually pretty amazing for a product coming from Sony, as they're very well known as strong promoters of their proprietary formats (namely Memory Stick). The back of the PS3 also features some slots of its own, namely the Ethernet slot, the HDMI out slot, the AV Multi Out slot and the Audio Digital out slot, as well as the power adapter. They're placed near the ventilator's fans, so you should be pretty careful with their placement, since they can get pretty hot. *The Controller: no vibes here* The new PLAYSTATION 3 controller, dubbed SIXAXIS by Sony, looks like the teenage brother of the old PS2 controller. Yes, it's true, the wires are gone (viva el Bluetooth), but so are the force-feedback capabilities, and the feeling is not quite the same. First of all, the controller is smaller and a lot lighter than its predecessors, which makes it a bit uncomfortable for the experienced PS2 users. It sports a miniUSB port (used for charging the internal Li-Ion battery), a few LED lights (which let you know when the controller is switched on), and the PS button, placed right in the middle, used for synchronizing the device with the console. The buttons are exactly the same as in the case of the old controller, the only major difference being that the left and right "2" buttons have a more sliding feel to them. Moreover, the SixAxis sports an accelerometer, much like the one equipping the Wiimote, but I haven't yet been able to see it at work. The bottom line, when speaking about the controller, is that it's pretty crappy without the force-feedback capabilities. Yes, it might be wireless, it might have some tilting controls built-into it, but the lack of vibrations really makes it a no-no. **Setup and operation** The setup was pretty easy. All you have to do is plug in the required wires, and start up the console. It's very easy. However, the difficult part begins just now, because, upon powering up, we're thrown into... *The PLAYSTATION 3 Interface* Anyone who has ever used a PSP will recognize immediately the interface. It's built around the same principle, that of a central line of available options, which the user can select by using the controller. Whenever a disk is inserted, the interface is "refreshed", as the disk is recognized and becomes accessible, whether it's a music disc, photo disc or game disc, and the same goes for the memory cards or USB flash drives. Due to the lack of Blu-ray media, as well as the limitations imposed by the NTSC-PAL incompatibility, I was only able to test a normal music CD, as well as CF card with some photos. And I can tell you right from the start that Sony has done a pretty good job with the media playback functions, the result being a machine that crosses the line between gaming console and media center. Thus, the music or video playback functions are very well developed, the controller doing a pretty good job as a remote. However, I was pretty impressed by one feature in particular, namely the sliding option of the photo viewer, which lets you view the photos in old, paper picture's frames, a very nice touch, especially for the people not born and raised in the digital era. *Gameplay* I don't have too much to tell you about here. The games we were able to play were simply demos, but one thing's for sure: there's no colossal change in the gaming experience provided by the PlayStation 3 compared to the one provided by the PS2, despite the fact that we're talking about a next-gen system. The games I was able to play behaved in much the same way as the old ones, albeit for the highly superior graphics, visible even in the absence of HD. Moreover, there was no shred of tilting action. OK, perhaps I had chosen the wrong games, but I would have liked to see some of that controller tilting action they've been bragging so much about. *Connectivity* This

is one of the most important selling points of the PLAYSTATION 3, in my opinion. Its connectivity options work in an extraordinary manner. As mentioned before, we were forced to create a PlayStation Network account in order to access some games. First of all, the console connected to the Internet immediately after plugging in the Ethernet cable, without requiring any supplementary operations. Moreover, the PS3 can connect right out of the box to a wireless network, but that's a feature we preferred not to try (for various security reasons). In order to ease up the registration process, I've connected an USB mouse and Keyboard to the PS3, and, to my surprise, they worked perfectly. No drivers required no nothing. This is one feature for which we must fully congratulate the guys from Sony. After registering, I was able to access the aforementioned page immediately, and started to carry out some demo downloads. They went surprisingly fast, which means that Sony has very powerful servers working around the clock for our downloading pleasure. However, the Sony PLAYSTATION Store wasn't the only thing I've visited. The console features a fully-functioning Internet browser, which allows the user to surf the www at will, and not only visit a proprietary website, as in the case of the Xbox 360. *Media playback* There's not much to say here either, since I've tested only a limited number of media content types, none of it Blu-ray or even HD related. However, we'll talk more about the media playback capabilities later on, when I'll be able to get a Blu-ray movie, as well as some other proper media content. *Heating and noise* I've also tested the temperature of the PLAYSTATION 3, the same way I did with the Xbox 360. Quite surprisingly, the readings were more or less the same, namely around 52 degrees Celsius after around 1 hour of operation, which means that Sony's console can also be used as an electric heater during cold winter nights (great job, Sony, you've created the perfect device for Eskimos). As for the noise, I can definitely tell you that there's no big difference between the PS3 and the Xbox 360, meaning that you won't even hear it, especially if you hide it under a bed or behind the TV set.

**Conclusion** The first impression the PS3 gave me was that of a bulky black machine which sports a very elegant and sleek look, even if that look lasts only till the moment when someone touches it. The quality of the graphics promises to be quite good on HD, and from what I've seen in the demos, the level of detail and physics in the PLAYSTATION 3 games will be absolutely amazing. The interface is also OK, especially if you're used to a PSP, and the fact that the console is also capable of connecting seamlessly to the Internet is really a big plus. The one and only thing I truly hate about the PS3 is the controller. Considering just how great the rest of the console turned out, the SIXAXIS is really a disappointment. The wireless capability and Li-Ion battery really don't make up for the missing force-feedback capabilities, and those 2 sliding buttons aren't too great either, not to mention the diminished dimensions. As for the tilting and accelerometer, we all know who had that idea first, don't we? Sony's really done a great job making the PLAYSTATION 3 a cross between a gaming console and a media center. And the fact that you'll get both a Blu-ray player and a gaming console for the same money is and probably will be in the future the main selling point of the PS3. That, and the amazing graphics, processing power and connectivity capabilities. As for how successful it will prove to be, only time and gamers will be able to tell, especially since they're the ones who have to cough up almost 1000 Euro for a fully equipped system, plus games. **Still photos from the Sony PLAYSTATION 3 Preview:** *Photo: Tudor Raiciu for Softpedia.com*