

SOLID SIGNAL'S HANDS ON REVIEW

DIRECTV 2017 NEW MENUS a.k.a “The Genie GUI”



The new progress bar is wider and shows how much of a program has recorded.



DIRECTV “GENIE GUI”

genie®

When it comes to updating its menus and its user interface, DIRECTV is about as slow as it comes. The company last updated the look of its menus back in 2011, and in technological terms that’s a lifetime ago. Back in 2011, your phone had a 3.5” screen and you probably used Internet Explorer, at least at work. The world’s changed a lot since then, and finally DIRECTV’s menus have too. We’re calling it the “Genie GUI.”

The goal of the new menu was to put the things people want to do front and center, and I think they’ve accomplished that. It’s pretty clear that the same ideas used to give us the Genie Remote were used here too. Take a look at this list of what’s new, what’s different, and what’s gone . . . and you’ll realize that while some power user features aren’t with us anymore, the average person is going to have an easier time from now on.

The new menu will be rolling out to HR44, HR54, and HS17 Genies, plus clients. The original HR34 Genie, as well as any non-Genie hardware, is going to be left behind on the old menus, largely because they don’t have the processing power to deliver a good experience. All clients and smart TVs will be supported if connected to an HR44, HR54, or HS17.

On HS17 Genie 2 DVRs the new menu will eventually support HDR on future clients, but none of the current clients can support HDR so the menu can’t either. On 4K TVs with 4K clients, the text is still upsampled HD but it still looks fairly good.

What boxes get the new Genie GUI?

Note: HS17 Genie 2 will support the new GUI on all clients. HR34 Genies and earlier will not get the new GUI.



HR44 Genie



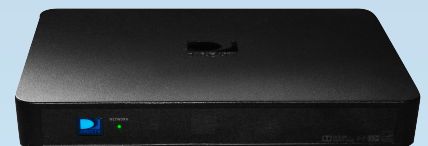
HR54 4K Genie



*Genie Mini Client
(models C31, C41, C51, C61)*

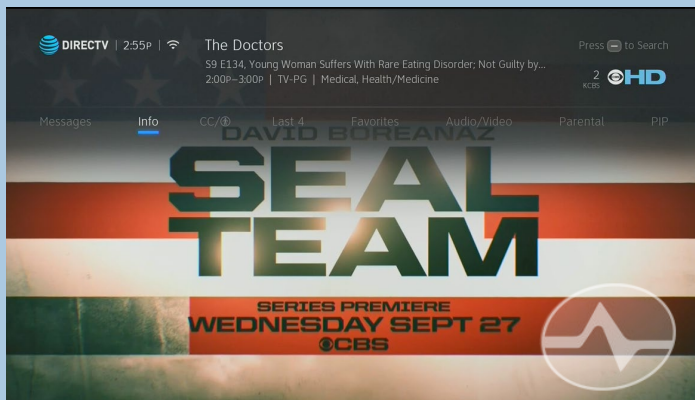


*Wireless Genie Mini Client
(models C41W, C61W)*



4K Genie Mini Client

WHAT'S NEW — THE BIG STUFF



The first thing you'll notice is new type that fits more words on the screen but still stays readable. The channel number and call letters are still there but the logo is much more obvious. Also, the "network connected" icon is on nearly every screen next to the clock on the left side.

On almost any screen you can press the "dash" button to the left of the zero to search.



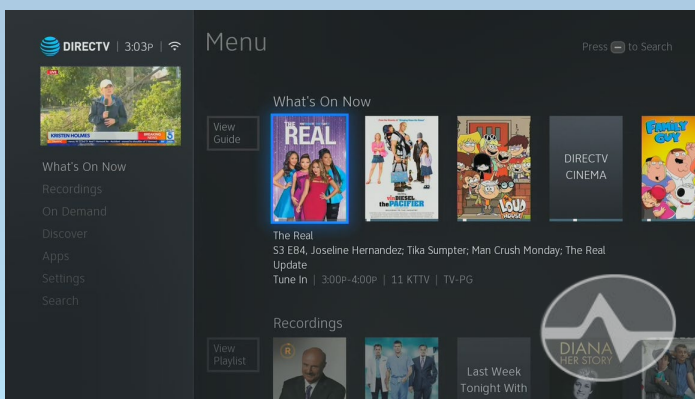
The guide makes it very obvious how far along you are in a show. In this image it's almost 3:00, so nearly the entire half-hour between 2:30 and 3:00 is black. You can see an emphasis on channel logos as well as a revised "Recording" icon that actually shows how far along in a show you are.

The guide still shows only 90 minutes of time, but there is one extra channel shown at the bottom.



The playlist has been reorganized with helpful subcategories at left and more details. Different buttons are used to sort the playlist and just like in the menu and guide, you can press the dash button to go directly to the search page.

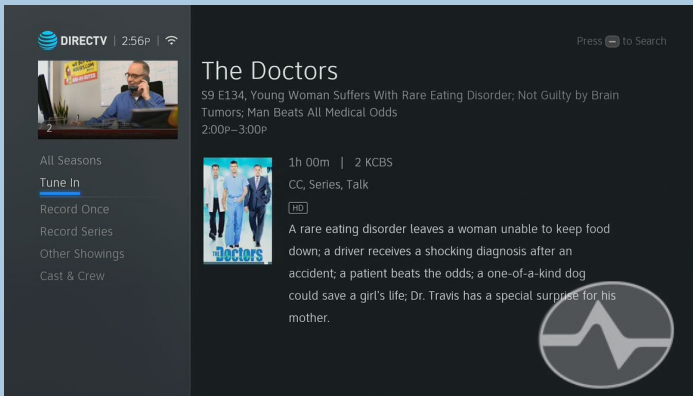
Overall, the playlist and all menus have a contemporary look and feel and are more consistent with each other.



Pressing {MENU} is a very different experience that is much easier to navigate and understand. You get a bright clear look at what's on now and you are only one button press away from a visually-organized playlist. Everything flows easily and it is much harder to get lost in submenus.

You will notice that "What's on now" shows a small indicator at the bottom of each picture to show how far along the show is.

WHAT'S NEW — IN DETAIL

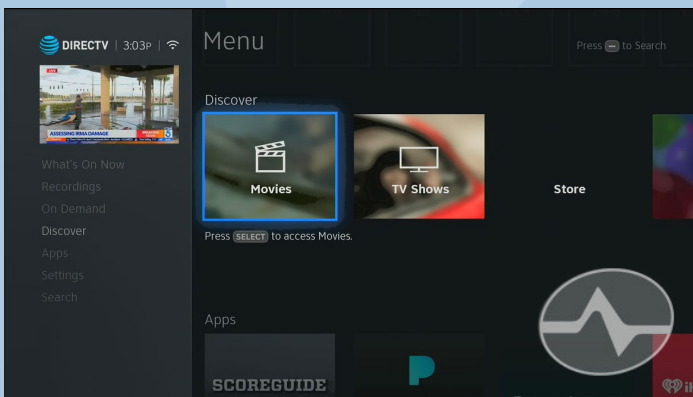


Pressing {INFO} on any program gives you a full description with easy options to look for other episodes of the same program or set up to record future episodes.

Just as before, pressing the record button twice while on a show in the guide sets up a recurring recording.

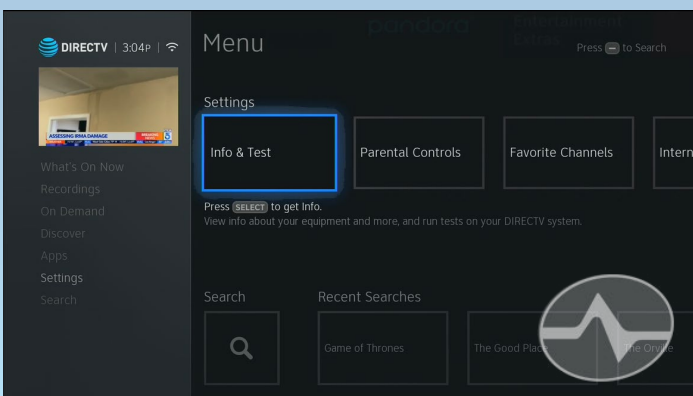


If you're looking at a show in the guide and it hasn't started, there's a new option: "Tune Early." This simply changes the channel right now so you'll be ready to watch. Unfortunately the autotune function that older receivers still have was not put into this update.



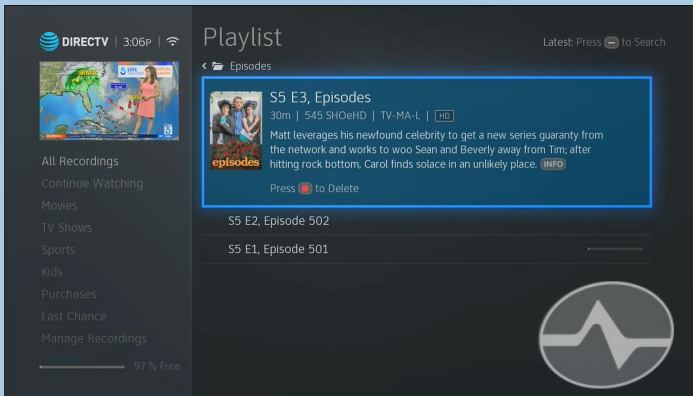
Using the down arrow to scroll through the menu shows a lot of new graphics that looked great in our early review, but not all menus were completely ready for display yet.

You don't need to press the left arrow to go down in the menu, just press the down arrow to go from category to category.



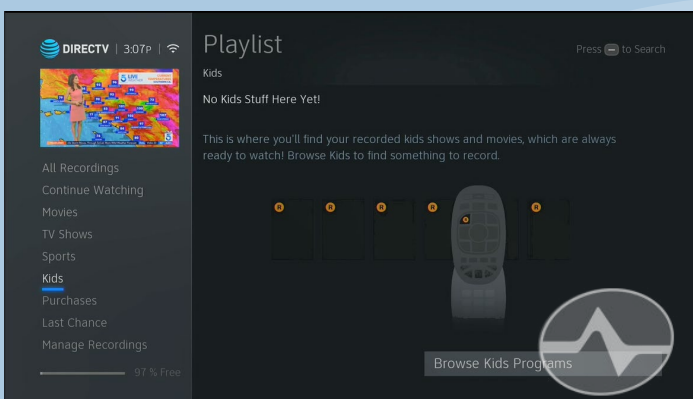
By the time you get to the bottom of the menu, the pictures mostly disappear and you get a lot of text. Just as well because down here you're looking at settings, recent searches, and other things that would be hard to represent with icons.

WHAT'S NEW — IN DETAIL

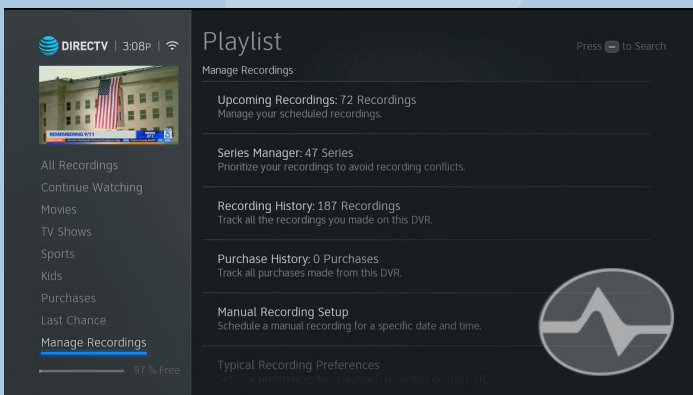


The playlist shows some pretty massive changes. You can look at your recordings in icon view from the menu but if you really want some details, press the {LIST} button and you'll see a lot more.

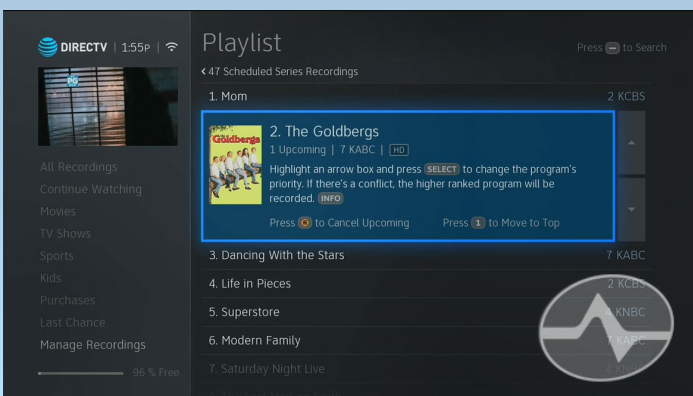
The image at left shows three episodes in an open folder. You'll notice that Episode 501 has already been started, and shows a progress bar to the right to show how much has been watched.



The playlist filters itself automatically. You can look at shows you've started, only movies, only TV shows, only kids shows, and there's a section for rented/purchased programs as well as programs that might be expiring from your playlist. If you don't have any kids' programs, as you see here, you can browse for them directly.



The "Manage Recordings" screens have been reorganized to show more information quickly, with informational sentences that tell you what each submenu does.



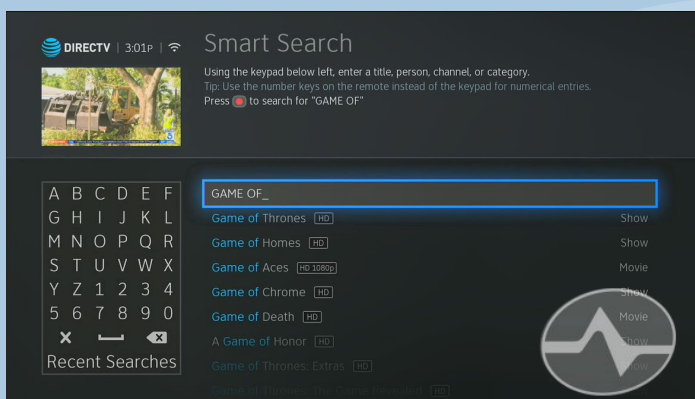
Most people never bother to reorder their upcoming recordings because they never worry about missing recordings. The Genie gives you 5 recordings at once and the Genie 2 gives you 7 at once. So, you don't have to worry too much. If you did want to reorder your series links, this screen has been completely overhauled. You get more information as you highlight an item and pressing the right arrow lets you re-order recordings by pressing the {SELECT} button on the up or down arrows.

WHAT'S PRETTY MUCH THE SAME



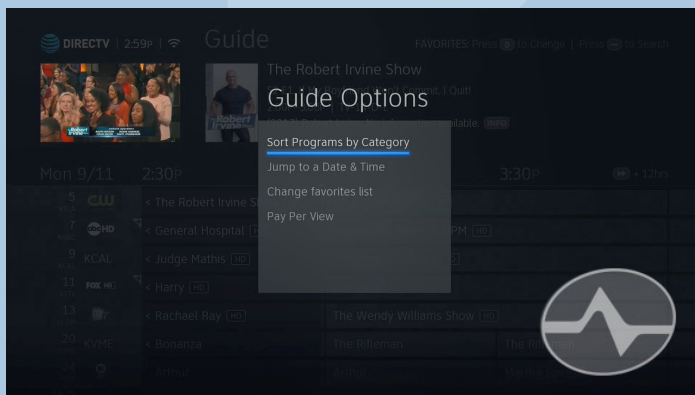
You'll find that a lot of the submenus haven't changed a lot other than getting the overall "flat" look of the new Genie GUI. Because you don't spend a lot of time here, there wasn't a need to really spend a lot of time polishing things up.

This is the "Record Series" menu, which is pretty much the same as it ever was.

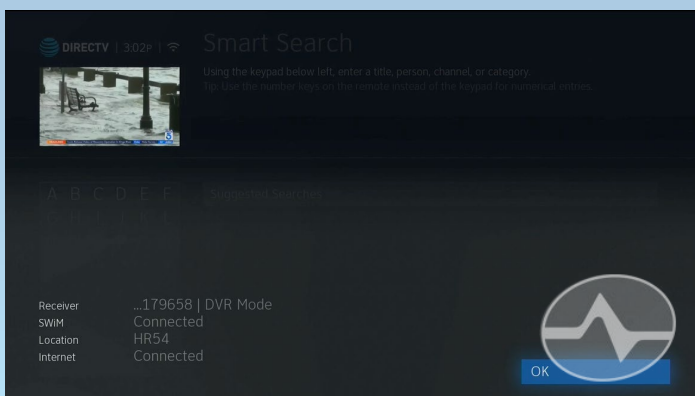


This is the search menu. You can get to search from practically anywhere by pressing the dash button to the left of the zero, but once you get there you'll see more or less the same screen you saw before.

If you find searching tedious, try the DIRECTV app for phones and tablets, which lets you set up recordings by typing into your phone.



The color buttons are gone, except for the red one. Even if you're still using an older remote that has them, they don't do anything in the new Genie GUI. This menu used to come up when you pressed the yellow button. Now it's accessed by pressing the zero button.



This is the menu that used to come up when you pressed the dash button. It's not really needed anymore since you can see your connection status on almost any screen, and since you're guaranteed to have a SWM system with a Genie. If you miss it though... you can press the dash button twice and it will appear.

CHARTING THE CHANGES

SOME OF WHAT'S NEW:

- Press dash button to search from anywhere
- “Tune In/Tune Early” when looking at episode info
- Visual indicators in the menu, guide and record icons to show how far along a show is
- Network status is shown on every menu

SOME OF WHAT'S DIFFERENT:

- Cleaner visual design with thinner fonts and “flat” look
- Totally redesigned menu with easy access to playlist
- Guide with channel icons
- “0” acts to filter the guide and playlist
- Playlist display with informational text in folders and progress bars
- Sports and Kids playlist filters
- On Demand pages look consistent with other menus
- Smaller picture in guide that is now always 16:9 format
- Setting Series Links now defaults to “All Channels” if created through search
- Progress bar shows green only to the point in the show you are

SOME OF WHAT'S NOT DIFFERENT:

- TVApps (although you can access them differently from the menu if desired)
- Same number of hours in the guide
- No recycle bin for deleted programs
- Most preference screens (other than fonts and overall look)

SOME OF WHAT'S GONE:

- Trick Keyword searches to customize or enable hidden features
- Some system test functions
- All uses of color buttons that aren't duplicated by other buttons
- Multicolored backgrounds and screens throughout
- Mark and Delete functionality
- Some program information like “Season Finale”

For those who were looking for a massive change to the way the menus work, I'll tell you now you'll probably be disappointed. This is mostly an appearance upgrade with a few extra functions baked in. But remember, DIRECTV has about 50 million receivers in the field and any change is going to have to be a gentle one. Their research has told them that even people who are anxious to see a new look and feel on their phones don't want to have to go through a long learning curve with an appliance like a DVR.

ONE REVIEWER'S OPINION

Overall I like the new menus. I think they're a lot more contemporary and they really are tuned to use the Genie remote, which is a very popular item with a lot of people. The look and feel isn't too different from the DIRECTV NOW streaming service and the DIRECTV app for phones and tablets, and I have a feeling those devices will start to look even more like the new menus as time goes on.

I like the overall flat look of the menus because it makes it easier to get the information you need. There's a focus on showing you how far along a show is – you'll see little progress indicators not only in the guide but also in the record icons, the menus, and the playlist. This is really helpful and useful. I also like the more compact fonts which look contemporary and give you more room for long titles or episode info.

I like the way that the new menu system works. You really don't have to "arrow over" to go from category to category, just press the down arrow. Every category, including the playlist, gives big bright images whenever possible.

Overall I think the new menus are a win, but I don't agree with some of the decisions that were made. I miss Mark and Delete, although I agree that using the app is really easy and that's how I end up deleting things if I have to delete a lot of them. I think it's too easy to delete a folder full of programs when you only meant to delete one, and without a recycle bin or undelete function, this can be pretty rough if you do it by mistake. DIRECTV's boxes run Linux just like TiVos, so I don't know why a recycle bin couldn't be put in easily.

I have to say, I disagree with the use of grey throughout. The grey menus and grey popups look dark enough that you think they should be black, and if you're trying to calibrate your TV so they are actually black, everything else will look very dark.

Probably my biggest disappointment though is the guide. I feel like there was a real opportunity here for DIRECTV to give you more hours in the guide as well as more channels. There's a lot of empty space that could be used for more information. I wish there was a preference pane to give you two full hours and more than seven channels in the guide. (The old guide only gave you 6, by the way.) If you have an 80" TV, you're going to be able to read smaller letters, I promise. Plus, the use of channel logos is a mixed bag here. Some of the logos are very small with a lot of empty space and some aren't well suited to the space that's there. I don't know if DIRECTV just needs to work with the content providers to get better graphics, or if they just need to think about tweaking the images they have. While the channel name (at least the abbreviated version) is on the guide too, sometimes that's not really helpful. The worst offender here is the Cinemax channels, which have almost identical logos and the abbreviated names don't help either.

Still, the bottom line is that I'm very satisfied with these new menus. They are about the same speed as the older menus in most cases – a little slower here and there – and they look a lot more "2017" instead of "2007." I'm sad to lose some of the power user features but overall, using the app makes up for not having them.

The new user interface should be rolling out to you in the next several months. You won't need to do anything, it will just happen. For those who want to get it a little early, you can try forcing a download on your HR44 or HR54, but it's almost impossible to force a download on HS17s. All in all, you're better off just waiting.

–Stuart Sweet, editor, The Solid Signal Blog

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