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PG07 A HOME ENTERTAINMENT PC SYSTEM!

ON THE COVER

We've set ourselves a

series of challenges of late, and this week we're at it again. With a budget measuring up less than £500, Russell Barnes was sent off in search of his dream home entertainment PC. It had to look nice, else his other half wouldn't let it in the lounge, and it also had to deal with the wealth of multimedia materials he wanted to throw at it. In short, it was a bit of a challenge, but our Russell rose admirably to the task. Find out all about it over on Page 7.



PG53_DIRECTX 9 GRAPHICS CARDS

ON THE COVER

Whilst there still aren't

too many games making full use of DirectX 9, there are a whole raft of them on the way before Christmas. With that in mind, we've used this week's group test to round up some of the current graphics cards on the market that support DirectX 9. And we found a fair variance in performance and value too, as we pitted them all head to head. Find out which one emerged victorious, starting over on Page 53.



PG35 ECTS 2003

ON THE COVER

The European

Computer Trade Show is Europe's biggest annual event for leisure software. We recently made the trek around the Earl's Court venue to dig out some of the titles on show there that caught our eye. Among the higher profile titles, we reckon we've unearthed a hidden gem or two. See what you think of some of the titles that could be infesting your PC over the coming months on Page 35.



OVERCLOCKING WORKSHOP

Our monthly workshop for those who like to squeeze everything they can out of their PC digs out some interesting stuff on the upcoming Athlon 64. Page 104.



MY FIRST NETWORK

One Micro Mart reader has taken the plunge and set up a home network for the first time. Read how he got on! Page 44.



HALF-LIFE 2

Is this the reason why many PC users are currently considering an upgrade? We find out what the fuss is about on Page 40.

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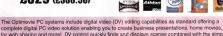












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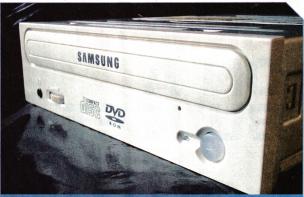
How would you like your home computer to stand shorter than a pencil case ruler? Do you want to pause live TV to check your e-mail, compile your entire music collection or view your holiday snaps from

the comfort of your living room sofa? If you want all that and a top of the line gaming platform to boot there's no need to wait another two years for another artist's render of Microsoft's HomeStation. You can build one yourself

with this feature and a cool five hundred quid in the bank. Who needs Bill Gates when you've got all the know-how you need over the next few pages?

It's been a long time coming, but we're finally reaching the stage where





THE DAYS OF THE BEIGE BOX HAVE GONE - WITH NEW AND STYLISH COMPONENTS READILY AVAILABLE TO USE IN YOUR PC SUCH AS THIS, THE SAMSUNG SD-616Q

the household PC need no longer be tucked in the dinglest, darkest corner of the house. The massive beige box has finally evolved into a manageable, stylish entertainment centre capable of catering for all your home living and relaxation needs. PCs have gradually been making their way out of the office and into the lounge for some time thanks to companies like Shuttle (www.shuttle.com) who have combined fashion and new technology to create an outstanding range of bare bone PCs. It's been a long time dream of mine to do away with the clunky old VCR, DVD player and music centre that takes up a fair portion of space in my lounge. In fact I've tried in vein to introduce various PC builds to the TV cabinet in the past, but they've always been missing one vital ingredient or other. My final build wasn't too bad now I think of it - not entirely dissimilar to the spec I've settled on for this feature - but the noise drove my fiancée and I up the wall. Being in charge of lounge décor and all, she pulled rank and deemed my midi-tower effort too ugly to become a permanent fixture. But with the advent of affordable mini ATX motherboards and bare bone systems featuring stylish

looks and quieter cooling technology the lounge PC has finally come of age.

THE BACK BONE

Let's digress to the matter at hand building the sharpest, smallest and most capable box of tricks five hundred pounds can grant us. What we need is a strong foundation to build this little entertainment centre on. The actual motherboard and barebone system I've opted for isn't the cheapest available. I have chosen the Shuttle SN45G nForce 2 for a few reasons. Looks and build quality amongst others rank highly, but the most significant reason is its off-theshelf compatibility with the latest Barton Core Athlons and 400MHz DDR Ram it's got a real sting in its tale. The Nvidia nForce 2 chipset comes highly recommended and it doesn't fall short in features as you can see form the specification box nearby. This little beauty will set you back no more than £180 including VAT and - at the time of writing - companies like Micro Direct had a fair few in stock. It has everything we need to build our multipurpose home entertainment system on and more besides. Though only as 'future proof'

SN45G N-FORCE2 BARE BONES SPECIFICATIONS

Form Factor

Dimensions

Processor

Memory

Chipset NVIDIA nForce2 Ultra 400 + MCP-T

Audio

Fast Ethernet

Front Panel

Indicator: Blue HDD Indicator: Orange, Mini 1394a

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■ Extension Bays 2 x 3.5" 1 x 5.25"

■ Accessories

User manual XPC Installation Guide, Motherboard Drivers. All required Cables, Screws, Twin Adhesive and



If you can't quite muster a full £500 for your system all is not lost. The cheapest suitable Shuttle bare bones system available (at the time of writing) is the SK410 at only £140 including VAI. Though offering most of the features you'l find in the chosen system, it only supports up to £68MHz CPUs and RAM. If it takes your fancy you'll be able to save a few quid on your CPU and RAM also - I'd recommend the AMD Akhlon XP 2400+. Bangfor-buck the best. Thoroughbred chip money can buy and generally considered one of the most reliable overclocking CPU's in the Athlon XP family.

as the Athlon XP processor itself, it boasts all the mod cons a modern system needs including 8X AGP, USB 2 O and Firewire. So that's the motherboard and chassis sorted, we now need some solid bread and butter components to get this baby up and running. Let's start with the CPU. As we've got full compatibility with the latest Barton cores it would be a shame to waste the opportunity. After weighing up the various options bearing in mind the cost constraints to stay within budget I decided on the Athlon XP 2500+ 333MHz (Barton core). It cost me £70 from E-Buyer and I've never had a complaint from one even when clocked well over stock speed.

Next up is the RAM. I've opted for a brand name DIMM of 2700 (333MHz) RAM that cost just shy of £30. To be honest 256MB isn't ideal considering I'll be running Windows XP, but for the sake of the budget I'm happy. For another twenty or thirty pounds it's easy to double your RAM and is highly recommended especially if you're intending on pushing the machine with your chosen applications. It's also worth noting that I could have also opted for a

larger stick of generic RAM for very little extra expense. In my experience however, it's definitely worth spending a little more for brand name RAM from somewhere like Crucial or Samsung. They're generally of a higher build quality and thus work better under pressure. The penultimate bread and butter component in this section is the hard drive. Again, I've opted for a slightly more expensive brand name version to maximise reliability and read times. This particular Seagate drive (the Barracuda) spins at 7200 rpm and offers 80GB of storage space for £55 - a worthy investment. Being that we're replacing a video recorder with our own digital creation you may deem it necessary to go over budget with a second drive or a bigger single drive. Later on I'll go into detail about the network I've put in place to link this project system with my main computer, meaning this single drive is ample so long as large files like the football match I had to work through can be transferred and backed up onto DVD.

The final component in this section is the CD drive. As discussed, I plan to network this machine to my main PC so there's little need for a writing facility, though DVD playback is a strict requirement. At a few pence shy of £25 the Samsung SD-616G is a great DVD ROM that boasts PowerDVD software. It was also voted the Editor's choice in a DVD ROM round-up in issue 762 and who am I to argue with that?

GRAPHIC MATERIAL

So that's the boring bit out of the way. We've now got a good solid system housing some excellent value for money components. The next item on the agenda is deciding what's going to fill the AGP slot. The graphics card is particularly important for this type of system because not only do we require good 3D performance to do the latest games justice, but we also need good DVD playback, TV tuning and TV-out if we're to do away with all our old TV cabinet boxes. Because I plan to keep the single PCI slot free for future use (it's nice to have room to manoeuvre!), I've selected a card that offers integrated TV tuner capabilities instead of two separate cards. There aren't many cards of this ilk available so it didn't take me long to select the ATI



THE MSI MEGA PC

What a sexy beast! This fantastic mini ATX system from MSI would've been my first choice if cost wasn't an issue. It'll set you back over £200 for the bare bones and only comes in the Intel flavour. It has an on-board radio tuner, remote control and card reader. If you've got the extra cash to build an Intel system (their CPUs are too expensive for me!) then this could be right up your street.



based Sapphire Radeon 9000 Pro All In Wonder Theatre.

Now I know what some of you might be thinking: the 9000 Pro isn't exactly up there with the fastest 3D cards. Pound for pound however it's the most powerful and feature packed card there is. At only £115 including VAT there's no getting away from the fact that there

is no better substitute considering the 8X AGP, 8 pixel pipelines, impressive video editing, smooth DVD playback and a software suite to die for included. What it lacks in 3D (compared only with the most expensive substitutes) it more than makes up for with its incredible array of features perfect for a system such as this.





BY CHRISTMAS YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO PICK UP ATI'S TV WONDER PRO PCI TV TURNER FOR AROUND £80. AN EXCELLENT CHOICE IF YOU PLAN TO SPLIT 3D AND TV BETWEEN THE AGP AND PCI SLOTS. SEE WWW.ATI.COM FOR MORE.

Take the TV tuner aspect for the card for example. Not only does it come replete with a remote control that works through walls (via RF) that can also control other windows applications, but it has a feature list as long as your arm that guarantees the highest picture quality. It uses pixel shaders to remove blocky artefacts for streaming video that also allows for greater scalability and uses advanced filtering algorithms to reduce noise and ensure optimum picture quality at all times. TV-On-Demand allows you to pause live TV and instantly re-play live broadcasts at the touch of a button and that's just the tip of the iceberg. You can capture and edit in MPEG-2 format at up to 720x576 at 25 frames per second and then burn it to CD or DVD using the bundled authoring software. I can't emphasise enough how stone has been left unturned to ensure that your TV, DVD and digital recording needs are well and truly catered for with this card.

AGP ALTERNATIVES

If you're not concerned with budget and adamant that the 9000 Pro doesn't throw enough polygons around for your taste, ATI also have All in Wonder versions of the 9600, 9700 and 9800 Pro. These all feature the latest in TV tuning and home cinema technology (some aspects have been updated since the 9000 series), but they also boast 128 Mb of onboard DDR RAM and amongst the fastest clock speeds available today. The sheer polygon pushing brute force of the All in Wonder 9800 Pro will set you back more than four hundred pounds though - is the extra RAM, core speed and kudos worth it? You decide. As I've intentionally left the single PCI slot free in my project PC's build there's nothing to stop you from opting to split 3D capabilities and TV tuning to the separate expansion slots. When compared with the All in Wonder 9000 Pro however, it proves a more expensive





IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR AN EXCELLENT SURROUND SOUND SYSTEM TO ADD THE FINISHING TOUCH TO YOUR ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM, CREATIVE'S INSPIRE 5500 COMES HIGHLY RECOMMENDED AT AROUND £100.



THE AUDIGY 2 EX IS A

method unless you really want to sacrifice video quality and functionality a select the cheapest of all cards.

SOUND INVESTMENT

Thanks to the excellent onboard AC'97 sound chip that comes with the SN45G there was little need to worry about investing extra money in a separate sound card for this system. Though on board sound isn't really known for the highest quality audio, Nvidia offer amongst the best integrated sound available with a good driver and software package that allows for six channel surround compatibility. If you're not concerned with budget and only the best possible audio quality and features Creative's range of internal and external sound solutions are amongst the best there are. If your PCI slot's still free then the Audigy player at around £50 offers great value, but the Platinum version of the Audigy 2 Ex is where you want to head if you're into creating or mixing music. If your PCI slot is out of the frame all is not lost however. The Sound Blaster Extigy is Creative's top flight

external card that will comfortably sit on top or beside your entertainment system and connect up via USB. It really looks the part as you can see from the picture, but will set you back somewhere in the region of £130. Take a look over at www.creative.com to find out more.

NETWORKING YOUR NEW PC

This section assumes that you already have a fully functioning computer elsewhere in the house that's connected to the Internet and offers on board LAN - not terribly unlikely in this day and age.

Taking a look over the specification I've chosen for this project I can see two good reasons why we'd want to have a local area network connecting your machines. Firstly and most importantly, our project machine would otherwise have no means of connecting to the Internet. With a little bit of effort setting things up you can share the connection from your usual computer with your lounge computer - we'll be looking at this in detail in a while. Secondly, because of cost constraints our project machine offers no means of





A GENERIC INTERNAL CARD READER CAN BE YOURS FROM LESS THAN £5. MAKE SURE IT'S COMPATIBLE WITH YOUR MOTHERBOARD FIRST, HOWEVER.

writing data to any kind of removable storage device. No CD or DVD writer, not even a floppy disk drive (whatever use they are these days bar flashing the odd BIOS). There's little reason why you shouldn't go over budget and invest in a combo drive that offers DVD playback and CD writing functionality, but with a standard network cable costing no more than five pounds (assuming you're networking two computers) there's little reason to bother. Instead you can simply send whatever data you wish to back-up down the wire to the office PC and burn it from there.

ESTABLISHING YOUR NETWORK

If you're a duck out of water when it comes to networking there's no need to tune out here or scrap the idea totally. When it comes to connecting two machines both offering on board LAN features setting things up is really as easy as connecting the wire at both ends and letting Windows do the rest. Admittedly when it comes to sharing an Internet connection things are a little more complex, but I've covered the crux of it to get you going. Once your network cable is in place enter Internet Explorer on your project PC (not the PC with the Internet connection) and go to Internet Options within the Tools drop down menu. Go to the Connections tab and opt. to 'never dial a connection'. Now go to LAN settings and within Automatic Configuration uncheck the 'automatically detect settings' and 'use automatic configuration script' tick boxes. Look between the configuration script' tick boxes. Look between the control of the configuration server tick box. If you run into problems or just want to learn more the Micro Mart web site's got all the info you need. Just click on the 'features' tab and do a search for 'network' and you'll soon be up and running.

FINISHING TOUCHES

All that's left to do is add a couple of suitable finishing touches to really finish off our lounge entertainment system. Though the versatile remote control that comes bundled with the All in Wonder 9000 Pro will help us navigate through most of our TV, music and Internet Exploring needs we still need a solid keyboard and mouse combo to control windows and play games. As we don't want to sit on the floor in front of the telly we need a wireless solution that doesn't break the bank.

Unbelievably, after only a short scoot around a few various e-tailers I found several solutions for around £10. Each came complete with multimedia hot keys for ease of use and generous guarantees. Though a little out of budget the Memorex bundle (£15 from E-Buyer) pictured nearby has everything

COMPONENT

- Shuttle SN45G N-Force2 Mini Aluminium Barebone system
- AMD ATHLON XP2500+333MHz FSB Barton £7
- Brand Name PC2700 RAM 256mb DDR 184pin DIMM £30
- | Seagate Barracuda 80Gb 7200rpm | UDMA100 Hard Drive £55
- Samsung SD-616Q
- Generic Card Reader £10
- Sapphire Radeon 9000 Pro All In Wonder Theater 64MB Tv Tuner Tv-Cut. £115
- Generic Network Cable
- Generic Wireless Keyboard & Mouse
- Total Cost

£500

we need to let us compose e-mails, surf the net and play Unreal Tourney and still have money over for an internal six in one card reader. What better way to finish off our system than with an internal card reader to view digital camera snaps on slide shows? For this I went to E-Buyer again and found solutions as cheap as £5 that slot into the free 3.5 inch internal bay usually set aside for a floppy disc drive. They do require the use of the Internal USB header and there can be compatibility problems with some motherboards, but a quick driver download is usually all that's required to rectify any dodgy situations. And there you have it. A complete home entertainment system that will fit in your TV cabinet - all I have to do know is teach my other half how to turn it on



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	Compaq iPaq H3950 Pocket PC 64MB		£271.92
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,4			

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29070	Memorex MX4350RF Wireless House White	£10.95	£12.87
40571	Harry Potter Octical Mouse + Pad	€3.99	€4.69
45809	Creative Mouse Lite - Optical Wheel Mouse	€9.50	£11.17
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42975		€38.84	€45.64
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41377	Epson Perfection 1260 Scanner True 1200dpl	£44.22	£51.96
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3072	Dynamode V.92 Fast - Internal PCI Modern	€7.99	€9.39
8409	Ebuyer ADSL USB Modern	£24.99	€29.37
8448	Ebuyer 1 Port ADSL Router	£31.95	£37.55
8551	Linksys Adsl Gateway + Firewall 4	€125.14	£147.04
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092	Sunbeam EL Cable Red	€!
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746	Case Window Applique Kit 20cm Biohazard	€:
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Canon I320 Bubblejet - A4 2400x1200dpi



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Code Code		ex VAT	inc VA
31446	Samsung ML-4500 600x600dpi 8ppm Laser	€55.63	£65.3
42324	Hewliet Packard Deskiet 3325c Inkjet Printer	€29.99	€35.2
36962	Hp Deskjet 3420c 10ppm 1200dpi A4	€38,34	€45.0
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Memorex Wireless Keyboard, Mouse Bundle MX5500 RF keyboard + RF Scroll Mouse in White



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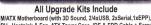
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README .TXT

Got your diaries with you? Hope so, because by popular demand - and we've been asked every week since the last one - the Micro Mart Computer Fair is returning! This year, it'll be taking place on Sunday November 30th, and again, we will be at the NEC in Birmingham.

Over the coming weeks, we'll have more details of some of the things that will be going on, as well as news on how and where to get your tickets, which will be on sale soon. For those who didn't go along last year, you really missed a treat, with some terrific computer deals and over 100 exhibitors. This year, it'll be closer to Christmas, and so there's no excuse not to come along and get your Yuletide computer related gifts, all from one place!

As I said, more news on this shortly, and I would like to thank those who have kept a continued interest in the fair over the past twelve months. Hopefully, myself and the rest of the Micro Mart team will get to meet even more of you this time around !

Simon Brew

MICROSOFT 2003

What else you should be expecting...



Last week, we told you about some of the keyboards, mice and desktop sets that

Microsoft were releasing before the end of the year. This week? We're talking about some of the software. Already. Encarta 2004 has gone on sale in three different guises, but there are a few other titles we need to update you on.

First of all, there's Autoroute 2004. the annual update of Microsoft's route planning software. It's out any minute now for £49.99, and new this time round is real time GPS tracking, plus a cool feature called drive time zones. This feature allows you to select a point on a map, and then the program will calculate what you can find within, say, ten minutes driving distance. Other than that, the program still covers all of the UK and lots of Europe, has lots of points of interest to tempt you to turn off the road, and seems really quite easy to use.

Money 2004 is out at the same time and for the same price, with new additions this year including a credit



centre. Here, you will find a summary of debt accounts, find out about credit management and put into practice some what-if scenarios. The program also has a dynamic homepage, so Money headlines will



appear to keep you up to date. The program's aim is still to get your finances straight and in order, and in some cases, it can even talk to your online bank.

Works Suite 2004 is something you'll have to wait until October for, and the pricing is yet to be confirmed, although is expected to be cheaper than last year's edition. They've kept the actual Works application itself the same, but also in the box you'll find copies of Word XP, AutoRoute, Photo Standard (we're coming to that). Money 2004 and Encarta 2004.

On the digital imaging side, Photo Standard 9 is a £29.99 application designed to help you edit your photos as easily as possible. You can import pictures with ease, correct them and distribute them, and the program also features 1,500 pre-created templates for the likes of calendars, cards and such like. If you're after something a little bit more from your photo editing though, then you might like to give Digital Image Suite a try. Costing £69.99 and out now, this is a sophisticated digital imaging package, again with the emphasis on value for money, that also features tools to easily manage and organise your images. Thousands of templates are included, as well as some strong manipulation tools. You can find out more on all of these products at www.microsoft.com

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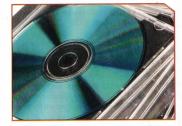
DO CD-RS DEGRADE?

Dutch magazine seem to think so

We're indebted to the work of PC Active, a publication based in Holland, for this particularly nugget. They've been testing numerous CD-Rs from a variety of manufacturers, and have found that in a matter of months, some have degraded to the point of being pretty much unreadable. The tests showed that damage was caused even at basic room temperature, without exposure to the sun. This damage was to a selection of discs that they burnt nearly two years ago, and it does raise alarm bells for those of us who used CDs to store vital data.

What causes the differences between different brands of CD-R? The answer, it seems, is due systems. Some dues used in the

production of discs have proven to be more stable than others, although sadly at the moment it seems that names aren't being named, but nonetheless, it's food for thought.



ECTS AWARDS

At the end of the annual European Computer Trade Show (of which you can read more about on page 351, the assembled hacks get together and vote for their Best Ofs from the show. And the winners? The best PC game of the show went to Far Cry (UbiSoft), best console game to XIII (UbiSoft again), best online game to EverQuest II (er. UbiSoft), overall best game to XIII (that's UbiSoft again) and The London Games Week award went to Half Life 2 (phew, that's Vivendi more on that on Page 40).

CONTACT DETAILS UPDATE

Recently in Micro Mart we reviewed both the OCZ 3700 Dual Channel GOLD series memory, and the Soyo Dragon 875 motherboard. Attached to both reviews, we omitted to give reference to the firm who supplied, and who stock the two products, which we will correct here. The company is Chillhlast (www.chillblast.com), who you can also reach be phone on 0208-892-7555. Apologies for any inconvenience caused.

PS3 BACKWARDS

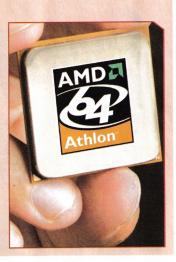
Sony have confirmed that the in-development PlayStation 3 will be backwards compatible. It means the console will be able to play titles developed for both the PSOne and PS2 consoles. Er, that's it.

BOARDS AND CHIPS

Could Athlon 64s come bundled?

The countdown is on for AMD's highly anticipated launch of the Athlon 64 later this month, with much riding on it for the chip manufacturer who has lost ground to Intel over the past year. And when the chip finally hits the market, it seems that several motherboard manufacturers are looking into bundling an Athlon 64 processor with their boards, in an attempt to get people using the chip as quickly as possible.

If there's a price benefit here, then as far as we're concerned this is a good move, although at this stage much depends on whether the motherboard manufacturers can get sufficient supplies from AMD. The chip formally launches on the 23rd of September, but until early next year, supplies of it are expected to be quite limited. For now, you can read more information on the processor at www.amd.com



INCOME DISPOSED

> ON AT THE FLICKS

Tomb Raider: The Cradle Of Life (12A)

This summer has been the summer of sequels, some hetter than others and while Lara Croft Tomb Baider The Cradle Of Life is no X2 (Or even Charlie's Angels 2) it is definitely not a Legally Blonde 2! It is in essence an hour and a half romp of mindless adventuring fun that you can switch your brain off and watch through a haze of popcorn, accompanied by a large Coke. The story involves an orb that is recovered from a hidden underwater city that can when decoded find the cradle of life in which the legendary box of Pandora is hidden. So it is up to Ms Croft and her two assistants (no. not those) to travel the globe, facing certain doom and generally moving from one set piece to the next. While not taxing on the old brain cells, the film did not deserve the bashing and eventual flop status it got from critics. Even those with a bitter taste in their mouths from the most recent Tomb Raider game will find something to enjoy here.

6/10

> ON DVD

The Ring (15) £19.99

No, no, no, no. Whilst undeniably one of the creepiest films to emerge from Hollywood in recent years, The Ring is nonetheless far below the standard of the Japanese original, Ringu. The original was creepier, had a much better cast and didn't feel the need to explain everything to the nth degree. The American remake could, we concede, have been worse, but it's still quite inferior to the original, which is also available on DVD in the UK. Oh, and the DVD skimps on the extra features, ton

5/10

IN AN INSTANT

Pinnacle update their range

Four new applications are heading to the shelves from Pinnacle Systems, two of which are updates of existing products and two are brand spanking new. Coo.

Let's deal with the updates first. The two titles getting the refresh are InstantCopy and InstantCoPyD, both of which move up to version 8. The press release is remarkably candid about the fact that InstantCopy is designed for - and we quote - "copying DVD movies to recordable DVD discs, transferring DVD content to recordable CDs and duplicating CDs". Us more responsible folk at Micro Mart feel obliged to remind you of your responsibilities to observe copyright. Just like we did there.

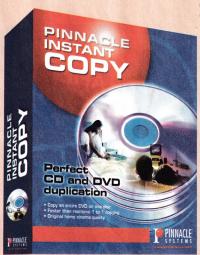
Anyway, InstantCopy 8 works faster, includes more user customization and allows you to store a DVD as an image file on your hard disc, which can then be played back using DVD playback software. InstantCD/DVD 8 meanwhile is a suite of tools to held you create any kind of recordable media. Again, this works faster this time round, and the interface has been tidied up as well. Plus there's full support for MP3, and the package actually includes a full copy of InstantCopy 8.

The two new titles? Well, there's Instant PhotoAlbum for starters, which is the latest in a fast expanding selection of programs designed to help you organise your photo and video files. Here, you can

merge them into interactive slide shows, with fancy menus and music too. User-friendliness is

once more key it seems, and tools are built in for burning a slideshow of images to a CD or DVD too, again with fancy music and so forth. Instant VideoAlbum is the final title, and that lets you archive, capture, protect and share your video footage, with features that allow you to clean footage up, enhance the video quality and remove unwanted sounds. You can also output to CD or DVD.

The four products go on sale from October 1st. PhotoAlbum is the cheapest (£19.99), and moving up the scale we have £29.99 apiece for InstantCopy and VideoAlbum, with £44.99 for a copy of InstantCD/DVD. More information at www.pinnaclesys.com



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BELKIN TARGET STUDENTS

Want to sell them bags

You can tell it's time for a new term, with savvy manufacturers targeting their products to those

returning to education. Belkin have firmly taken their seat on this rapidly accelerating bandwagon, with a new collection of laptop bags, which they're hoping that students will snap up in their droves. The bags include

fashionable design features too, apparently, alongside compartments for things like pens and disks. The main function of these leptop bags is to, er, carry a laptop around in, and with that in mind they're made from strong, yet lightweight stuff. Prices start at £29.99, and more information on them can be found at www.belkin.co.uk

MUSIC ON THE MUVO

New MP3 Player from Creative, then

Once upon a time, Creative Labs

bestowed upon the world their really quite snazzy MP3 player, the MuVo2 (er, apparently that should be a squared sign). It's a unit that has a capacity of up to 850 songs (or around 25 hours of audio at 128kbps), playing back tracks in both MP3 and WMA format, and it's built around a 1.5GB micro disk, It hooks up to a

PC via a USB 2.0 connection, and measures a teeny-weeny 66x66m.

With the usual stylish design, the unit also has a backlit blue LCD display, and an icondriven operating system to help you make your way around. The unit can also get up to ten hours out of its battery. The price? £199.99, and you can find out more about it at www.creative.com

PROTECT YOUR SCREEN

Keep those prying eyes away

Fed up of people accessing your computer without your permission? Then you might consider investing in a bit more protection, namely ActiveScreenLock, a little application that quite simply adds another password-protected window on top of every other one. By then blocking all key

combinations until the password is entered, your computer can sit there happy and safe. It's an American product so you need to buy it as an electronic download, which will set you back around £16. A free 30-day trial version can be found at www.dmvsoft.com if you fancy giving it a trial run first.

0800

MY FAVOURITE PROGRAM

Larry North has sent in this week's recommendation for a little heard of program that some of you may find useful. He writes: "What a complete nightmare of a weekend. I took nearly 100 pictures at my niece's wedding and then while trying to delete the pictures of my thumb I deleted all the pictures. A desperate internet search revealed several programs claiming to undo it. The first two programs found. About to give up, I downloaded the trial version of 'Photorescue' from Datarescue. This was the smallest of the programs to download and the easiest to use. No installation, just run the zipped executable and choose the drive containing the Smartmedia disk and search. Within 30 seconds of disc activity thumbnails of my deleted pictures started to appear. 99 in all were listed. To save the pictures to disc, it was necessary to purchase the full program at a cost of \$29 and repeat the process. This 'miracleware' is available at http://www.data rescue.com/photorescue/. Nightmare over - a life saving program which I just can't praise enough."

OUR WEEK IN WEBMAIL

Hmmm. The continuing theme of the newsletters you're signing us up for at micromart@email.com (and help yourself if you want to sign us up for more, just keep 'em clean) is that we need exercise. This week, we've been sent something on weight training tips, including details of how to motivate ourselves. Plus we're being encouraged to exercise our arm mass. More worrying is that we've also been signed up to The Cemetery Shop - perhaps all this exercise will tip us over the edge? Oh, and remember how a week or two back we were begging whoever signed us up for the New York Times newsletter to unsubscribe us? Well, we've now found ourselves members of the New York Post mailing list too. Next time, we're just going to keep our traps shut....

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	GRAPHICS CARDS	ONLINE Ex Vat	ONLINE Inc Vat
Dr.	32Mb ATI Xpert 2000 Pro CEM (Sapphire) 44Mb ATI Raideon 7000 PTL (Commet 35) 44Mb ATI Raideon 7000 RTL (Sapphire) 44Mb ATI Raideon 7000 RTL (Commet 35) 44Mb ATI Raideon 9200 SE RTL (Commet 35) 54Mb ATI Raideon 9200 Septimini 54Mb ATI Raideon 9200 Pol ATI In Worder RTL Sapphire) 54Mb ATI Raideon 9200 Pol ATI In Worder RTL Sapphire) 54Mb ATI Raideon 9200 Pol ATI In Worder RTL Sapphire) 128Mb ATI Raideon 9200 Pol ATI IN Sapphire) 128Mb ATI Raideon 9200 Pol TruT, Sapphire) 128Mb ATI Raideon 9200 Pol TruT, Sapphire) 128Mb ATI Raideon 9200 Pol TruT, Sapphire)	15.79 25.36 27.06 33.66 40.90 43.23 96.03 124.63 74.91 111.43	18.55 29.80 31.80 39.55 48.06 50.80 112.84 146.44 88.02 130.93
PRO	128MS AT Radson At in Worder 9700 PRO FITL Sacchine 128MB ATT Radson 9800 Pro (Connect 3D) 128Mb ATT Radson 9800 Pro RTL (Sapphire) 64Mb Geforce 2 MX 400 PCI Low Profile 64MB Excalbur Geforce 2 MX400 - with TV OUT	236.83 258.81 241.23 32.62 24.37	278.28 304.10 283.45 38.33 28.63
	64MB XFX Geforce 4 MX440 (TV Out / RTL) 64Mb XFX Geforce 4 TM200 Rtl 128Mb XFX Geforce FX 5200 128MB XFX TM200 8X AGP Turbo	27.78 68.48 46.48 76.18	32.64 80.46 54.61 89.51
	64MB Gainward FX Pro 660 TV (FX 5200) 128MB Gainward FX Pro 660 TV-DVI "Golden Sample" (FX 5200)	50.80 59.63	59.69 70.07

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	3.5 Floppy Disk Drive 1.44Mb 40Gb Maxtor (Fireball) 5400rpm 40Gb Maxtor D'Max Plus 8 80Gb Maxtor D'Max Plus 9	5.50 37.84 36.95 46.92	6.46 44.46 43.42 55.13 75.16		NEW E	oox 8RDA (DDR / Nforce2) ox 8KMM3I (Onboard VGA / LAN / USB2) ox 8RGMI (Onboard VGA / LAN / USB2) ox 8RGAMI (Onboard LAN / USB2)	58.65 47.96 70.00 64.73	68.91 56.35 82.25 76.06	
RO	2006 Maxtor D'Max Plus 9 2006b Maxtor D'Max Plus 9 2006b Maxtor D'Max Plus 9 (8MB Cache) 806b Maxtor D'Max Plus 9 - SATA (8MB Cache) 1206b Maxtor Max Plus 9 - SATA (8MB Cache) 2506b Maxtor MaXLine Plus II - SATA (8MB Cache)	63.97 131.07 63.59 77.72 199.82	75.16 154.01 74.72 91.32 234.79		Sc Sc Sc Sc	oltek SL85DRV5 (Skt 478) oltek SL75KAV (SDRAM M/Board) oltek SLKT400-A4C (DDR M/Board) oltek SLKT400-C (IDDR M/Board) sus A7V8X-X (DDR M/Board) LAN	38.53 34.08 39.56 40.25	45.27 40.04 46.48 47.29	
RO	40Gb Hitachi Deskstar 120GXP 60Gb Hitachi Deskstar 180GXP 80Gb Hitachi Deskstar 180GXP	38.78 42.67 48.57 63.64	45.56 50.14 57.06 74.77		As Int	sus A7V8X-X (DDR M/Board) LAN us A7M8K-D IDOR M/Board I Norse2 / DUAL LAN / 1384 / SATA leb D845GLVA (Skt 478) VGA/SND/LAN, OEM Version SI 6533-XG-L (Skt 478) - VGA/SND/LAN SI MS-6378 (SDRAM M/Board) On-Board VGA / LAN	43.36 77.74 52.79 42.55 35.65 75.56	50.94 91.34 62.02 50.00 41.89 88.78	
	80Gb W/Digital WD800B 80Gb W/Digital WD800JB (8MB Cache) 120Gb W/Digital WD200JB (8MB Cache) 200Gb W/Digital WD200JB (8MB Cache) 40Gb Samsung HDD 5400RPM	61.88 74.69 142.87 38.24 45.33	62.71 72.70 87.76 167.87 44.93		M M XI XI	LANCED DOR Moore hove (July LAY 1974) SAN BER	75.56 90.51 42.55 51.18 ONUNE	106.34 50.00 60.13	
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	Windows 95 Keyboard Black Windows Keyboard Cherry R56000 Keyboard PS/2 Mouse Genius Cornfy KB-06X PS/2 (Black)	4.50 4.73 12.49 2.95 5.00	5.29 5.55 14.67 3.47 5.87)	HHH	ewlett Packard Deskjet 3550 ewlett Packard Deskjet 3650 ewlett Packard Deskjet 5150 ewlett Packard Deskjet 6122 ewlett Packard LaserJet 1005w ewlett Packard LaserJet 1150	48.55 69.84 116.64 125.86 184.45 213.67	57.05 82.06 137.05 147.89 216.73 251.06	_
NAME AND POST OF PERSONS	Genius Cornfy KB-06X PS/2 (Black) Genius TwinTouch Wireless Metallic PS/2 Genius Wireless InvinTouch PS/2 AGHz Genius EasyMouse Pro PS/2 Genius EasyMouse Pro PS/2 Genius Netscroll Optical PS/2 Genius Netscroll Optical PS/2 Genius Netscroll Optical PS/2 Genius RF Wireless PowerScroll PS/2	23.65 40.15 3.95 5.47 7.22 6.28 8.71	27.79 47.18 4.64 6.42 8.49 7.38 10.23		H	lewlett Packard LaserJet 1300 lewlett Packard LaserJet 2300 pson Stylus C44	376.50 34.45 49.64 71.07 123.20	442.38 40.48 58.33 83.50	1
-	Cellink Wireless Optical Mini Travel Mouse Microsoft Internet Keyboard & Intellimouse Bundle Microsoft Natural Natimidia Keybard & Wheel Mouse Optical Bundle Microsoft Mouse PS/2	19.24 14.46 20.10 3.43 7.98 24.63 28.60	22.60 16.99 23.62 4.03 9.37 28.94 33.61	Edit.	100	pson Stylus Co2 pson Stylus Cb2 amsung ML1440 amsung ML1450 reative WebCamPro reative WebCamPro getech Quickcam Messenger ogitech Quickcam Messenger ogitech Quickcam Moson ogitech Guickcam Moson ogitech Guickcam Moson	163.90 28.91 42.72 27.30 32.22 50.60	192.58 33.97 50.20 32.08 37.86 59.46	
A	Microsoft intellimouse Po/2 Microsoft Intellimouse Optical PS/2 Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer Logitech Deluxe Accoss Logitech Internet Navigator (PS/2 & USB) Logitech Cordess Desktop Optical Logitech Pilot Wheel Mouse	28.60 11.75 18.75 71.88 7.66	33.61 13.81 22.03 84.45 9.00	TEARS OF THE PARTY	PSU 8		24.60 30.25 ONLINE Ex Vat	28.90 35.54 ONLINE Inc Vat	1700000
	Logitech Pilot Wheel Mouse Logitech Cordiss Mouse NEW Logitech Pilot Wheel Mouse Optical Logitech Cordiss TrackMan Wheel Logitech Cordiss Mouseman Optical Logitech Cordiss Mouseman Optical	14.59 26.00 32.89	17.14 30.55 38.65		3 N 3 3	00W ATX TUV Power Supply lexus 3000 300W PSU, Quiet Model 50W ATX TUV PSU 50W ATX PFC-350A Morex PSU 50W Enermax Multispeed PSU (EG365P) 25W ATX PSU HEC-425WF-PTL 60W Enhance ENS- 0246 PSU	14.38 47.80 14.38 15.00 34.65	16.89 56.17 16.89 17.63 40.71 39.42	0:
y gur	MODEMS 56K Speedcom+ Rockwell Int PCI 56K Genius Internal GM55PCI-LA 56K Genius External GM56E-V2	ONLINE Ex Vat 8.80 11.58 22.91	ONLINE Inc Vat 10.34 13.61 26.92		SOFT	WARE	33.55 59.95 ONLINE Ex Vat	70.44 ONLINE Inc Vat	
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	15° Proview KX562NS 17° Proview KX72NS CPT 19° Proview PX98PNS 15° Proview HG-862 (LCD) 15° Proview LCD KT-573 (Silver) 15° Proview LCD KT-578 (Beige) NEW 15° Proview LCD MA-782 (Silver) NEW 15° Proview LCD MA-782 (Silver)	95.00 165.00 159.00 175.00	111.63 193.88 186.83 186.83 205.63 280.83	9	SOUN	Recovery Genius 21st student License Products Available - Please Ask for Details IDCARDS	28.05 CALL ONLINE Ex Vat 6.66	ONLINE Inc Vat	
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3	17" GTX EXYTUP 19" CTX EX951F 17" CTX PR705F 17" TFT CTX S7000 17" TFT CTX S7000 (Black) 15" TFT CTX S7000 (SWAR)	119.00 102.00 249.00 254.00	119.85 292.58 298.45	2	ST BUT	Sound Blaster Audigy 2 Platinum eX Sound Blaster Extigy /ideologic Sonic Explosion OEM reecom Beatman MP3 / WMA Player	140.80 108.46 29.99 62.55	165.44 127.44 35.23 73.50	
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Y	15" VM 1352 (LS502U G) 17" VM 1403 (LS704U G) 17" VM 1403 - Black (LS704UBK) 19" VM 1451 (LS902UT G) 21" VM 506 (MS103DT) 17" VM Pro 1413 (LM704UT A) 17" VM Pro 1413 (LM704UT A)	68.00 78.00 78.00 107.00 373.00	79.90 91.65 91.65 125.73 438.28			Genius SP-G06 (120W PMPO) Sound Blaster SBS230 OEM speakers Creative Inspire 2.1 RTL (in Sub) Creative Inspire 3.1 4400 OEM Creative Inspire 5.1 5100 OEM Creative Inspire 5.1 Digital 5500 (Rtl)	6.98 6.45 28.85 27.91 36.85	7.57 33.90 32.79 43.30	
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EASY STORAGE

Sony merge the vault and stick

Joining the ranks of the Sony personal storage product range is the Micro Vault with Memory Stick PRO. It's a cracking name, we thought, which neatly sums up the marriage of Sony's USB flash memory drive with a slot on the side that acts

as a Memory Stick PRO adapter. The memory of the product is 128MB, although a Memory Stick PRO (it's their idea to capitalise the word pro, in case you're wondering) can add 1GB if you want to splash out a bit more. No idea on pricing yet, but expect a release in October.

LIKE RETRO **GAME MUSIC?**

New concert announced

If you reminisce over the quality of in-game music from the computer games of yesteryear, then the likes of Rob Hubbard and Martin Galway will be attending Back In Time Live at the Brighton Centre on 13th September (10am to 6pm). In the evening, there is a one-off concert with Rob Hubbard playing some of his music, with his backing group Press Play On Tape (no, really). In the day, there's an

exhibition going on, with games. competitions, synth hardware and C64 music exhibited. Plus, the chance to prove your skills at Sensible Soccer! Micro Mart readers who book by mentioning the magazine name will get a free ticket for the exhibition if they book for the concert. Tickets at

www.c64audio.com/theshop/pages/ tickets.htm or by phoning 0208-464-2295 (have your credit card details handy).

NEWS COMPILED BY: SIMON BREW, ROB MCLAUGHLIN, LINDA PURNELL

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BIDDING ADIEU

Where does Championship Manager go next?

lt's been announced that the long term relationship between Sports Interactive and Eidos is to come to

end, which throws up some interesting questions for the future of the Championship Manager series of games. Sports Interactive have worked with Domark, and then Eidos (who bought Domark up) for every one of the CM games to date, but the parting of the ways

leaves the rights to the name with Eidos. The code and the database will remain the property of Sports Interactive.

The two will work together one more time, on Championship Manager Season 03/04 due out later this year, but then SI will be left with the guts of the game, but not the name. It looks likely that they will ultimately end up in competition with their own creation...



A LIGHTER LOOK AT COMPUTING



"I was a pampered IT Exec until the website crashed, spare 12 quid for a cappuccino with extra chocolate and double whipped cream?"

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YOUR LETTERS

STAR LETTER After reading the article 'How to build a PC in a beer keg' (issue 762) by Mark Pickavance, I was inspired to... well have a look at the attached picture... yeah it's a CD rack! P.S. Love the mad Inspired, Matt. Absolutely inspired. Can inspired, Mate. Advances, anyone else make something computer related out of a Stella container (although feel free to opt for your brand of choice)?

REFRIGERATOR JOB

Hands up all the readers who like me are bewildered by two successive months of front covers and articles devoted to supercooling? Fine for people wanting to experiment with leading edge technology but to what purpose, especially as it involves a high risk of a trashed PC?. Overclocking by manipulating motherboard settings to obtain a few extra revs for dubious benefit is vastly different from doing a refrigerator job costing the price of a new PC and requiring plumbing and engineering work outside the capability of most of the magazine's subscribers.

Since Micro Mart is willing to devote more than a little space to this subject which can only have an interest to a minor of its readership will the magazine actually tell us of it's advantages to the average computer fiddler like myself. Go faster is fine but what does it actually do apart from giving nanosecond boot-ups?. Will the magazine convert me to this trend by publishing a table of the actual

benefits these relatively modest speed increases will have in everyday computing to justify what can be obtained cheaper my upgrading to a newer gofaster CPLI?

Processor manufacturers design and produce faster CPUs to keep themselves in a job as opposed to meeting an demand for them. Their clever trick is to convince us that we can't live without them and we are therefore in a tail-wag-thedog situation. Go on somebody convince me I wrong and make a convert of me.

David Raird F-mail

The simple benefits to water cooling usually boil down to noise and keeping the temperature a bit lower. Will it make a huge difference to the performance of your PC? No, that's highly unlikely. However, we can't help feeling that it's one of the more interesting developments in PC building of late (and given the number of requests from people interested in some coverage of water cooling, we can't be alone there), and that's why we've devoted two articles to it over the past months. Still, that's our brief water cooling spurt over for the time being - we'll be following more traditional pursuits over the coming issues...!

FRIENDLY CALL

In response to letter buy Alistair Hughes, I was on the NTL dialup for a long while before I switched to broadband. It used to be completely free of any charges for NTL telephone customers. Since then they changed it to £5 per month for NTL line customers who were previously on their completely free connection, £10 per month for new NTL customers and £15 per month for BT customers. Just thought I would let everyone know as this connection was great especially for those not in broadband areas as it is as he says unlimited. I was surprised not to have a queue on dialling; it is a quick and fantastic deal. But for those in broadband areas they do a 128k broadband access for only £17.99, so is there any point in using normal dialup? I am on a 600k package

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which is fast and I think it's the best deal, as I get quick download speeds when downloading Linux ISO images.

Also, to put out the rumours that NTL put a cap on downloads to 1GB per day, this rumour was blown out of proportion. I have been in contact with NTL directors and they have notified me they have put a LIMIT on the system at 1GB per day. That does not mean you cannot download more, far from it. What they do is if you repeatedly exceed the limit for 3 days in a row you get a friendly call from an advisor to discuss you usage to see if it is justified. Mainly to keep up the quality of service to other users, so hope this clarifies some points about the best deals around.

Gavin Milward F-mail

EXTORTIONATE

I've just read your article regarding piracy, which I found interesting and pretty unbiased. Personally, I find that I'd rather have the real thing, but it is often too expensive - but hearing that you could download a whole album for £8 sounds reasonable. If a CD cost that much off the shelf. then I'd happily buy music, but being a poor student, it is often the case that I cannot afford it and therefore might consider seeking "alternative methods". Also, computer games are a huge rip off - perhaps it says something about the situation when myself and a few friends wanted a copy of UT2003. Unfortunately, we had to split the price between three of us, simply because we couldn't afford it individually. If I had a proper source of income, then I would happily pay for games, but as it stands, I don't, and prices are extortionate for games.

If games cost about £15 then we could afford to buy many more, but £35?! It is a similar case with DVD films. But enough about me, keep up the brilliant work with the mag!

Flamekebab E-mail

Interesting timing for this letter, seeing as one of the major American music companies have announced a big cut in the price of their music CDs. Will it make any difference to the growing rates of piracy? Time will tell....

THIS WEEK'S COLUMNIST: ROBERT MCLAUGHLIN

ROB SAYS



The Internet is superb. It's a vast repository for nearly anything you would ever want to know. News, sports, history and even nudie ladies can all be found there. And for us film fans, it is a godsend. We get to know everything we want to know about our favourite films. directors or stars. Most of the main studios have fantastic websites, as do distributors, and a lot of smaller independent production companies. And there are unique web films from people like BMW and even old TV episodes, or brand new episodes straight from the USA. But, as with everything, there is a downside. In our constant hunt for new and exclusive film related goodies, are we ruining our cinematic experience?

I confess, I am as bad as the next film fan. I cannot wait for anything, whether it is a shot from the new Lord Of The Rings film, Thunderbird 2 from the new movie or Doctor Octopus from Spiderman 2. I want to see them and so much more NOW!

That is one of the problems. As the web grows, it provides access to all these people wanting footage of new films, and inevitably there will be those trying to accommodate that need. Which brings me to the crux of my problem - the phenomenon of leaks. What I mean by that is the leaking of images, scripts and plots of forthcoming films... people cannot wait for the official

press release and this in turn has created hordes of amateur photographers (no not that kind) haunting film lots and New York streets. looking for that exclusive shot. Sometimes they hit gold, such as the shots last year of Spiderman. But more than likely we get 'exclusive' shots of exciting things such as road signs, half a car, a bit of pavement or a figure so blurred it could be anyone, hitting message boards and fan sites.

But then, are the studios just as bad? The trend has hit them too, as eager PR people leak info onto the net before rabid fans. But sometimes these can cause more problems than they stop. Stopping rampant speculation is one thing, but it opens up a whole new can of worms. Once we, the fans, have the shot, it is in our nature to pick every little detail from it, and then extrapolate what the rest of the film will be like just from this one image. Take for example, the furor surrounding the Spiderman film last year. A few shots and rumours on the web had the whole of the internet on fire. There were fans threatening to boycott the film if Peter Parker had a slight variant in his spidery powers ,or other such things that while important to diehard fans, make little difference to the cinema experience overall.

So, should we be patient little fans? Well it's not in our nature is it, but personally I feel that sometimes knowing too much about a project does spoil it and one of the greatest pleasures in life is to walk through your local multiplex doors and go into a film completely unaware of the contents. That being said, the temptation for me is to go off and trawl the fans sites looking for Star Wars Episode 3 spoilers. You see, you can never really stop a true geek trying.

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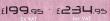
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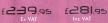


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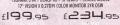
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ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR

It's the biggest videogames trade fair in Europe, but what was on show for the PC? Micro Mart visits the ECTS...

Let's be honest - the European Computer Trade Show (ECTS) isn't what it used to be. Increasingly overshadowed by the larger, Los Angeles-based E3 event earlier in the year, the London show is no longer used to announce blockbusting new titles, though as a showcase for forthcoming games, it still performs a useful function.

This year's games are (for the most part) looking good, but lack of originality is becoming a serious problem. For example, how many first-person shooters do we need this side of Christmas? How many times can we listen to a sparkly-eyed PR person rave about their game's Capture the Flag, Deathmatch and Team Battle online modes before our eyes glaze over?

But enough of this cynicism. Let's take a look at a fistful of the best PC games the show had to offer, whether they're blindingly unoriginal or not...

SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY

Atari, June 2004

Set in the near future, Shadow Ops: Red Mercury is a gritty, real-world first-person shooter where you play an elite Delta Force operative handpicked by the National Security Agency to pursue a top-secret nuclear explosive about to be sold to terrorists. The game uses the Unreal engine, though the focus here is on single-player story-based action across around 20 globespanning missions.

The game throws various challenges your way, such as hostage rescue, demolition and bodyguarding. You fight alongside (and sometimes against) international special forces from the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, France and Germany. Multiplayer gaming is catered for - look out for Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, Plant the Bomb, Capture the Flag and Escort. No surprises there, then..



SILENT HILL 3

Konami, Late 2003



Okay, it's not a radical departure from previous survival horror outings, but at least it gives us a break from all those first-person shooters. Trapped in an inhospitable world, Heather is forced to fight for her life. Grotesque apparitions and lumpen shapes shadow her every move, while an army of grotesque creatures lurk in dark corners and rooms. Armed with whatever she can find, she must fend off their advances while solving the mysteries that will gradually piece together why she is trapped in this hellish, insane world.

Konami claims Silent Hill 3 represents a huge advance for the groundbreaking horror series'. From what we saw at the show, we wouldn't go that far - it's a seguel with significantly-improved aesthetics rather than a 'huge advance'. However, the improvements are indeed significant, with unusual camera angles, eerie sound effects and haunting musical stings.

LORDS OF EVERQUEST

Ubi Soft, Winter 2003

Lords of EverQuest is a real-time strategy genre that takes place 10,000 years in EverQuest's past. A sort of medieval Command & Conquer, if you will (and not the first one, either). Look out for large armies fighting in real-time. Ubi Soft claims the game offers 75 hours of single-player gaming, as well as catering for up to 12 players battling it out online or over a LAN. Unlike the EverQuest MMORPG, there's no subscription fee for online gaming.

The game features over 60 unit. types spread over three distinct factions. Expect hundreds of artefacts and magical items to add to the units too. None of this is particularly original, but the game is developed by Rapid Eye Entertainment, creators of the Might and Magic and Heroes of Might and Magic series, so it should prove more than a dodgy cash-in. Our brief play on the game would certainly bear this out.



SPECIAL GARDED AND ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR

BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON

THQ, November 2003

The Revolution-developed Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon is an early exception to the uniformity rule. This third game marks a significant change of direction for the Broken Sword saga, a brave move considering the cult following it enjoys.

The Sleeping Dragon's main departure from the point-and-click graphic adventuring offered by Shadow of the Templars and The Broken Mirror is that you now have direct control over your character. In a move pioneered by the Game Boy Advance's Broken Sword offering, the pointerand-icons approach is abandoned. Instead of clicking an area of the map and watching your character walk to it, you control him directly as you



would in a third-person action game. The environments are fully 3D too. It's still very much an adventure - don't expect a Tomb Raider offering. The game tests your brainpower, not your joypad skills. You can't miss jumps when moving from A to B or fall if you stand too close to a drop.

The last version of the game we saw looked a little awkward when in motion - the characters seemed to hover above the ground, and never looked part of their environments. We're glad to say this problem has



been solved, and the animations beefed up too. The characters turn their heads to look at objects that might be of interest, which you can pick up at the push of a button.

Naturally, the most important game element here is the storvline, but we won't spoil it for you. Rest assured the new 3D approach offers a more cinematic, Hollywood-style feel, and the game's all the better for it. Purists. have no fear. This is a true Broken Sword epic, not an uneasy action adventure compromise.

THE ROOTS

Cenega, Winter 2003

Tannhauser Gate, the talent behind massively multiplayer online role-playing game Mimesis Online, has turned its expertise to the home PC format with The Roots, a hybrid of a classic role play coupled with fast-paced action-adventure. The complex and multi-threaded storvline is set in the vast land of Lorath, where the Hero discovers an ancient evil has awoken.

Styled in a third-person perspective within a rich and dynamically changing world, the land of Lorath is divided into some 24 regions during which you meet over 120 non-playing characters with over 50 abilities. Use over 400 different items and 70 spells to fight off up to 100 monsters and human aggressors on over 70 hattle arenas.

The Roots technology features a transparent RPG system. Development of a character's statistics reflect the character's activities. Players can assign

special abilities, spells and equipment to their characters. The battle system uses speciallydesigned arenas to reflect the freeroaming environment, where combat rules are similar to those of Japanese



PRINCE OF PERSIA: SANDS OF TIME

Ubi Soft, 21st November 2003

Anyone who remembers the original Prince of Persia will rave about the animation on the main character. In its day it was truly groundbreaking, offering a range of beautifully-fluid moves without ever looking awkward. Our brief time with the new update demonstrates this attitude is still at the heart of the game, and it's now supported with some stunning environments and locations.

Ubi Soft's Montreal studio has done much to turn the eponymous prince into a plausible character, and not just an avatar for the player. Starting the game as a young and idealistic youth, as it progresses he gains in strength and experience, but also becomes hardened and more cynical. It's claimed that the physical and psychological evolution of the main man is at the heart of the game, and if well executed, it could put a whole new perspective on the action adventure

Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time drew huge crowds at the show. Its

visuals are truly breathtaking, with fluid combat moves, fantastic lighting and particle effects and great character models. If the aesthetics don't overshadow the game's overall design, Ubi could be onto a real winner here.



Specialfeature

UNREAL **TOURNAMENT 2004**

Atari, 21st November 2003

Unreal Tournament has long been considered the greatest multiplayer firstperson blasting experience, and the 2004 edition looks to expand the franchise still further. There's new modes, features. vehicles and arenas as well as everything that was included in the 2003 game. Up to 32 players can compete online. Classic modes such as Capture the Flag. Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, Bombing Run and Double Domination are there, as well as all the new maps, mutators and game types such as Mutant, Last Man Standing and Invasion from the free downloadable bonus packs

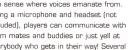
An all new Onslaught Mode pits opposing teams against each other across massive terrain maps in a challenge to capture and hold key points. Land, space and air vehicles play a major role, as flying and driving machines transport combatants to the front and serve as mobile platforms to launch devastating attacks. Look out buggies, tanks, hovercraft, aircraft and more.





Voice chat is also catered for over both LAN and internet, with 3D audio (on supported sound cards) so players can sense where voices emanate from. Using a microphone and headset (not included), players can communicate with team mates and buddies or just vell at everybody who gets in their way! Several settings are provided to allow users to customise their voice chat experience.

The game includes 20 never-before-





seen maps for the existing game types, featuring tons of new textures, new static meshes and new music. Atari promises a field day for mod makers! Also included are new maps from Digital Extremes designed specifically to appeal to hardcore Unreal Tournament players. In total, Unreal Tournament 2004 ships with more never-before-seen maps than the entire number of maps that shipped with Unreal Tournament 2003.

TERMINATOR 3: WAR OF THE MACHINES

Atari, 14th November 2003

Don't let the sales figures fool you. Atari's last big film license of 2003. Enter the Matrix, was a terrible game. Hopefully the company formerly known as Infogrames can redeem itself with Terminator 3: War of the Machines, a promising-looking first-person shooter.



Eight playable character classes are available for SkyNet and Tech Com forces. Humans have the advantage of cunning and stealth while SkyNet eniovs the advantage in sheer brute force. Up to 32 players can compete online, or you can take the role of Arnie himself in the one-player mode. Environments are taken from Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines, and include downtown Los Angeles, a ruined ocean harbour, devastated



highways, Tech Com and SkyNet bases, crumbling factories and more.

From what we saw at the show. Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines looks a decent enough game, though it lacks the attention to detail of Half-Life 2 and the heart-in-mouth mayhem of Unreal Tournament, And its release date is sandwiched between them. Unlike Enter the Matrix, we can't see it doing the business at the tills.



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Technology

HALF-LIFE 2

Is this the most eagerly-anticipated PC title ever? It's certainly one that's persuading many of you to consider an upgrade...

we're not a games mag and never will be, we had to take a look at the long-awaited and hotty-anticipated Half-Life 2. You see, if all goes according to plan, Valve's first-person shooter could set new standards for PC games. So what makes it so advanced?

Let's take a peep under the hood...

We had to do it. Even though

The original Half-Life is generally regarded as one of the greatest PC games of all time, despite a few things being left out due to restraints imposed by time and the game engine itself. Never a team to rest on its laurels, as soon as it was finished, a group of programmers was set aside to work (in secret) on a brand-new game engine built specifically for Half-Life 2. This engine, called Source, was designed to answer many of the limitations of the original game and provide the most realistic gaming environment ever.

THE GUTS

At the heart of the Source game engine is a new face-acting technology designed to make non-player characters seem more expressive. The first game pioneered lipsync by having its denizens move their mouths in a manner dictated by the .wav file supplying the voice. This is being built upon and added to. The team has also focussed on non-verbal communication in Half-Life 2, with characters being able to convey thoughts, emotions and feelings without even speaking. Valve recruited a researcher who had already catalogued 40 key human facial expressions, assessing how the features portray a range of emotions. The team cut this down to 20-25 faces and incorporated them into the Source engine. Emotions can even be

combined to portray mixed feelings, eg. nervous anger.

All modern shooters use rag-doll effects to portray fallen foes. This is intended to allow someone you've just shot to fall to the ground in a realistic, physics-based and above all, unscripted manner. Trouble is, it doesn't always work out that way. In too many games, stricken enemies either fall too stiffly, acting as if

rigour mortis had already set in, or roll and flop like their sinews disappeared the moment the bullets struck home. It's a difficult balance, but one which the Valve team believe they've got right. Joints are given their own properties and don't behave randomly when robbed



of motion capture, resulting in a subtle yet realistic demise.

The environments have also had a makeover, with more than the graphics being improved. Solid surfaces now have subtle properties built into them, such as sound, weight and solidity. Why? Well, if you were

THE PLOT THICKENS

Valve is keeping very tight-lipped about the game's plot. All we know for sure is that Gordan Freeman is back, and the game takes place some time after the Black Mess incident recounted in the first offering. How long after? What's happened since? Alas, that's for the gamer to find out during the game - Valve certainly aren't belling. You're still in City 17, though, and the alien invasion is still going on G-Man is back, and he's still your nemesis. Look out too for Barney and your mentor. Or Kleiner. And remember Eli Vance, the black scientist in the first offering? He's back too (albeit missing a leg), and his daughter Alyx proves to be one of the most important non-player characters in the game.





HALF-LIFE 2 <\..... Special Gealure

sitting in a tent, could you hear what's going on outside it? Of course you could. How about if you were in a shed? Or a garage? Or a cave hewn into solid granite? In each of these circumstances you'd hear something, but the exact sounds depend on your location. The game uses textures' physical properties to deliver the same effects, which also makes building models for use in the levels a lot easier.

Although (unsurprisingly) a large group of artists are working on the game, they haven't each been assigned to specific level designers and given their own sections to deal with. Valve felt that far too often in games a change of environment means a change in graphical style, as the open countryside created by one group of artists gives way to the semi-urban area built by another. To avoid falling into this trap, the art assets are pooled and used by all the level designers, creating a more consistent game world.

IMPROVEMENTS

A drawback the original Half-Life shared with most first-person shooters is that there was only a set number of character models, meaning many enemies had to be repeated. Valve promises a radical overhaul in the sequel. Here every character has his or her own head, adding much to the game's atmosphere. When you walk around City 17, you come across all sorts of people going about their daily lives, and for once they don't look like they've been built from standard parts, LEGO-style. It does much to create a living, breathing world, adding atmosphere to graphical excellence. The police officers (or Combine Soldiers, if you prefer) are an exception to this rule. They tend to look alike as they're all in uniforms replete with gas masks, though this is intentional - there's no need to put a human face on agents of the deliberatelyfaceless City government.

Of course, the mod community will want to get to work on creating their own levels as soon as possible, and Half-Life 2 does nothing to make their lives difficult. As mentioned earlier, models are made up of textures with many of their physical properties already present, and the buildings are pretty open-ended. You can

BREATHING WORLD

One thing Valve is keen to offer in Half-Life 2 is a believable gaming environment, a world which feels natural and organic rather than appearing to have been built purely for the game. It's a philosophy they've carried over from a philosophy they've carried over from the first game, where Black Mesa resembled a working office. If you abused the microwave, it exploded. Trying to open locked cubicles in the may so upen tacked cubicles in the toilets brought protests from inside. It's little touches like this that ramp up the atmosphere and help you lose yourself in the game. We're promised plenty more in the sequel too.







expand and contract them like a 3D version of a window on your desktop, turning a bungalow into a three-story house, a narrow warehouse into a gaping aircraft hanger.

The most recent release date we've been given for Half-Life 2 is 30th September, but given just how cagy publisher Vivendi Universal Interactive is being about the title, this could easily slip. The hype and expectations surrounding the title means it has an incredible amount to live up to, and only time will tell whether it succeeds. Let's face it, though - would you bet your mortgage on it being a disappointment?





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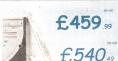


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MY FIRST NETWORK

Micro Mart reader Donald Campbell decided to bite the bullet and finally set up a home network. And here's

Reading all the articles about
Windows XP and being told how
easy it was to set up a home
network With XP it was only a matter of

network With XP it was only a matter of time before I started getting ideas of how I would set up a small network. My first step was to hook two computers together with a crossover cable, plugging them in and running the networking wizard in XP and using my XP CD on the other ME machine. It really was that simple. This kept me happy for a few weeks making backups for each machine and storing them on the respective computers.

This proved a very worthwhile exercise on its own because I subsequently suffered a large system failure and lost everything on my XP machine. But I had all the required backups on my other computer to allow me to copy all my relevant data back to the XP machine and allow me to carry on from where I had left off the day before. Had I been relying on CDs or such like, it would have cost me at least another day and no guarantee that I would even find all the CDs.

(I'm talking from past experience, of similar happenings).

Some months later I read an article in Micro Mart by Mark Pickavance, issue 738, on how he set up his "Multimedia PC Network". This to my mind was a very impressive setup and, as I then thought far beyond anything I could attempt to setup in my home. The main reason for this train of thought was the expense involved and my own very humble knowledge of the subject. But I decided to try my variation on the theme.

ON WITH THE JOB

The first item I picked up was a 5 port 10/100 base T switch for £26 with which I got a free 2m cable. I then got a special RJ45 crimping tool for £19.99 and a bag of 25 RJ45 connectors for £9.99. This enabled me to connect the three computers I



had together in my den. I wanted them all together as I experimented, without having to dash about from different rooms to reboot or change settings, as this was purely an experiment. This was all very simple using the XP CD on the other two computers, one using ME and the other using 98SE. Everything went well for a few days until only the 98 & ME machines would talk to each other leaving poor XP on his own.

I tried everything I could think of including running the network wizard on all the computers and reinstalling XP. As a last resort I went out to get a new crossover cable, as I cut my first one up to make patch cables, and ended up buying a network starter kit for £29.99 that had a 10/100 base T switch, two

PCI net cards and two 2m patch cables. On returning home I set about hooking up two computers at a time to check everything was all right, using the crossover cable.

Having determined that it was not the computer's fault I changed the switch, what do you know, everything was well again. I just did not believe that my first switch was faulty, so I reconnected it and all was well. Very puzzled I later learned that my son had 'hot swapped' his computer which meant the switch needed to be reset, by shutting down all the computers and disconnecting the switch from the mains and reconnecting it again and rebooting the network. A few days later it happened again! After redoing



everything mentioned above, this time it turned out to be a faulty patch lead that was promptly fixed by giving the RJ45 connectors a good squeeze with my crimping tool.

Now as I mentioned earlier, I had bought a starter kit which meant I had two more PCI cards, this resulted in a P200 & a P100 from the spares box. This is where the fun began. The XP CD does not work with Windows 95, as in keeping with the Microsoft EULA I only had a copy of 95b & 95c operating systems left. Undaunted I started reading the 95 help files to find out how to setup these two machines. It involved going to Control Panel and selecting the Network Icon, clicking add and installing the various protocols etc.

Which ones did I need? Well, I opened

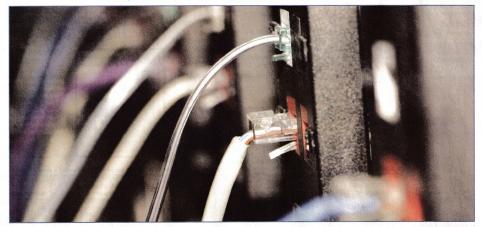
the network properties on the 98 computer and added the same components listed to my two 95 computers and everything worked first time. I now have five computers networked in my den. The XP computer for work and play, the ME for DVDs, the 985E for MP3s and then both 95s for system backups just in case one of them dies I keep a copy on each. They can all share the same printer and Internet connection, but not all at the same time as I only have a dialup connection. It is really good fun trying to surf today's net using IE3.

THE NEXT PLAN

What next? Well the plan is to put a switch in the attic to feed the three

upstairs bedrooms instead of having a server. Plus the fact it means all the computers can be used. The second switch, in the den and linked to the attic, can then feed the kitchen computer and the den. As the TV in the living room is on the other side of the wall from the kitchen computer I only need a short cable from the computer to the widescreen TV to play DVD movies (cuts out the noise), plus then I can look at the addition of a further gaming computer for LAN games. Everyone will then be able to watch TV, play MP3s and surf the net from their own computers.

In conclusion if I can do it so can you. It's like watching your children grow, teething problems and all. Take it one step at a time.





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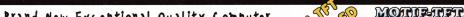
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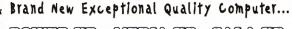
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Connect 3D packages its range of Radeon graphics cards in small basic cardboard boxes that are light years away from the glitzy packaging used by manufacturers such as Asus, Chaintech and MSI, There can be little doubt that this packaging saves on costs, but it also lowers your expectations, which is just as well as you get very little inside the box.

Mind you that's not a complaint as this is the cheapest graphics card in the group. It undercuts the PNY FX5200 Ultra by £10, and it's the cheapest Radeon card by a long chalk. The card itself is very basic to look at, however it has all the features that you need with a VGA port, a DVI-I port and an S-Video output. Connect 3D includes a short, rigid S-Video to coaxial adapter and also a coaxial extension lead that is about one and a half metres long. That makes it easy to use your TV as a display for your PC if you fancy watching DVDs in some comfort.

There is no software in the package, apart from drivers, which helps to explain the low price. ATI chose to make the Radeon 9600 chip its first 0.13-micron part, where Nvidia used this new process on its ill-fated FX5800. The smaller fabrication process allows ATI to specify a passive heatsink for the 9600 in its



reference design, and it also means that the card doesn't need an additional power connector, unlike so many designs that we see these days.

While many manufacturers will add a cosmetic fan that is completely unnecessary, we appreciate the quiet of a passive heatsink, so long as the card keeps working correctly even when it's working hard. The 4ns Samsung memory is the older, more basic type that you find on memory modules and has no heatsinks so we suggest you think long and hard before you try to overclock it to its theoretical maximum speed of 500MHz.

Out of the box this card performs

surprisingly well for its price, but as our test results show it doesn't really have the power to support high quality settings such as Anti-aliasing and Anisotropic filtering. It compares very favourably with the FX5200 Ultra, and in the context of this group it's a decent performer, but if you want a decent frame rate you'll need to choose your settings carefully.

While the Connect 3D card is good value we'd suggest you spend more money for a faster card.

QUALITY: 5

VALUE: 7 OVERALL: 6



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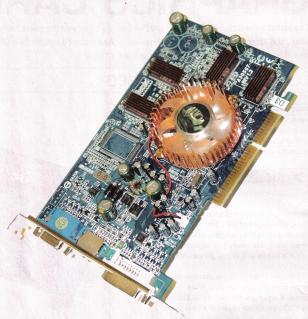
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In our Connect 3D review we suggested that you would be well advised to spend more money to get better performance, and the Hercules is certainly more expensive so it could well be a contender in this group.

Well, frankly, no we don't think it is. Despite the extra £45 cost of the Hercules over the Connect 3D, you get precious little extra for your money. Granted the packaging and the card itself look far more impressive, but that's just window dressing for what is essentially a very basic Radeon 9600 graphics card. The most significant difference is that Hercules has used 256MB of graphics memory, rather than the 128MB used by most other manufacturers. The extra memory would account for a chunk of the cost of the Hercules but the problem is that the extra memory offers little practical benefit. That's because graphics memory is used to store the frames as they are being compiled. You need more memory as the frames become more complex (and take up more space) and as the, frame rates rise. That simply isn't the case with a Radeon 9600, although you would notice the difference with a chip like the Radeon 9800.

Our testing shows a small theoretical benefit of 256MB memory over 128MB, but it's only some five per cent on a basic setting and rises to ten per cent as you crank up FSAA and AA, by which time the frame rate is so low that it's all a little irrelevant anyway.

This should come as little surprise as the idea of 256MB of memory on a



DESPITE THE EXTRA £45 COST OF THE HERCULES OVER THE CONNECT 3D, YOU GET PRECIOUS LITTLE EXTRA FOR YOUR MONEY

graphics card would have seemed quite extreme only six months ago and two years ago it would have seemed like pure fantasy. In fact two years it would have been impossible to package the chips on the card, let alone to raise the mortgage to pay for them.

Although the box is more impressive than that supplied by Connect 3D, it includes little extra. There is no software and Hercules has included a TV-Out cable that splits to offer you

both S-Video and coaxial connections. Most manufacturers simply offer you two cables, which achieves the same end.

Cosmetically this is an attractive graphics card, and the copper coloured heatsinks certainly look the part, but it offers very poor value for money.

GHALITY: 5 VALUE: 4

OVERALL: 4







MSI FX5600U-VTD128

PRICE: £175

MANUFACTURER: MSI

TELEPHONE NUMBER: 020 8813 6688

WEBSITE: WWW.MSI.COM.TW

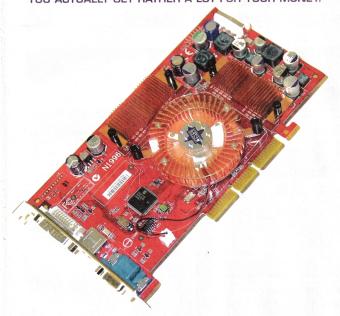
The most expensive graphics card in this group is the MSI FX5600U-VTD128, and it

also happens to be the only card that uses the Nvidia FX5600U chip. This chip replaces the GeForce4 Ti family and is essentially half of the FX5800 chip, as it uses four pixel pipelines

rather than the eight found in FX5800. Note the extra power connector on the end of the card.

The FX5600 Ultra is fabricated on a O.13-micon process and is fully DirectX 9 compliant so it has quite a lot in common with the ATi 9600 family. Although the FX5600 Ultra uses the same 325MHz core speed as the ATi 9600, it has much faster memory and its performance is very similar to the 9600 Pro, which runs both its core and memory even faster.

IF MSI WAS SELLING THIS CARD PURELY ON PERFORMANCE IT WOULD BE IN DEEP TROUBLE. BUT YOU ACTUALLY GET RATHER A LOT FOR YOUR MONEY.



If MSI was selling this card purely on performance it would be in deep trouble, but you actually get rather a lot for your money. This is the only card in the group that uses the S-Video port for video in as well as video out (VIVO). There is a regular S-Video cable and also an adapter that connects to the port, which then offers you four ports for coaxial or S-Video input and output.

As the card is very capable for gaming and also has VIVO, MSI has gone to town with the software package which comes in two packs of CDs. There's a photo album application. InterVideo WinDVD Creator Plus for making movies, an MSI DVD player, and a couple of system utilities for recovering data and making back-ups which is a little unusual for a graphics card package.

There also a foreign language learning package and a selection of games. The important ones are Tom Clancy Ghost Recon, Duke Nukem Manhattan Project and Elder Scrolls III Morrowind. While you may not be swept off your feet by that lot you're bound to find some of it is worth having, and the package certainly has a value to the customer. MSI also include a DVI to VGA adapter, which is handy if you have two analogue monitors.

This graphics card gives you plenty of scope for increasing resolution or FSAA while still delivering a decent frame rate. You may find that the latest games are too demanding to allow you to turn on all the eve candy, but in the main the FX5600U will deliver. Note that it 'only' has 128MB of memory which makes the Hercules look even more silly.

QUALITY: 8

VALUE: 7



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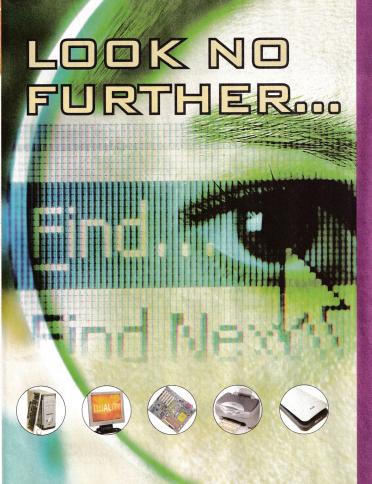
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PNY VERTO FX5200 ULTRA

PRICE: £105

MANUFACTURER: PNY

TELEPHONE NUMBER: 01728 224220 WEBSITE: WWW.PNY.CO.UK



PNY has taken over where German company Elsa left off, and is Nvidia's partner

for workstation graphics cards. The Verto series is the PNY range of desktop cards, and this FX5200 Ultra is a budget gaming design, and it

replaces the old MX series. It is based on the FX5600 chip but has fewer features and is fabricated on a 0.15micron process, which makes it a bit of an oddball chip. It uses the same 325MHz core speed as the Radeon 9600 and FX5600 Ultra and it has 325MHz DDR memory which runs at an effective speed of 650MHz, which is the fastest in this group by far, yet it is the slowest card in our tests. All that speed requires a Molex power

THE VERTO SERIES IS THE PNY RANGE OF DESKTOP CARDS, AND THIS FX5200 ULTRA IS A BUDGET GAMING DESIGN. AND IT REPLACES THE OLD MX SERIES.



connector, even though the card does relatively little work.

We've seen Nvidia seament markets with a series of chips before and in an ideal world gamers on a budget may settle for an FX5200 Ultra. Happily we have the choice of the Radeon 9600 which delivers about 20 per cent more performance for the same price. For the record the basic FX5200 runs far slower than the FX5200 Ultra and is simply appalling.

To its credit PNY has realised that it doesn't have much chance of selling many Verto FX5200 Ultra unless they're as cheap as possible, so they have come up with a fairly basic package. The box has a Borg-type character glowering at you, which should stand out on the shelves. The card is quite attractive with a purple PCB and an aluminium heatsink on the FX5200 Ultra chip and it also to the memory chips. The Molex power connector is on the edge of the card, rather than on the end, and you get the usual power adapter cable. The S-Video to coaxial adapter is a cable 200mm in length, which is easier to use than a short, rigid connector of the type used by Connect 3D. You also get a DVI to VGA adapter and an S-Video extension cable 1.5metres in length. Once again you get Elder Scrolls III Morrowind, but PNY also includes the Tribunal expansion pack and the TES Construction kit so you can modify the game.

That doesn't add a lot of value but at least the package is complete. Unfortunately nothing can change the fact that this is a slow graphics card and you'd be better off with a Radeon 9600.

QUALITY: 4

VALUE: 6 OVERALL: 5



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SAPPHIRE ATI ANTIS 9600 PRO

PRICE: £145

MANUFACTURER: SAPPHIRE TECHNOLOGY **TELEPHONE NUMBER:** 01793 423830 WEBSITE: WWW.SAPPHIRETECH.COM

Our final graphics card is the Sapphire Atlantis 9600 Pro. As the name suggests the

Sapphire has a certain amount in common with the two Radeon 9600 contenders from Connect 3D and Hercules. The difference between the 9600 and 9600 Pro is simply a matter of faster core and memory speeds, and the result is that the 9600 Pro is 20 to 25 per cent faster in all our tests. That's a useful increase, and it means that the 9600 Pro and the FX5600 Ultra are competing head-to-head, although the FX5600 Ultra does just have the edge on performance.

As the 9600 Pro is a pumped up version of the Radeon 9600 it comes as no surprise that the graphics card is quite small. It is significantly smaller than the MSI card. The Sapphire has no extra power connector and only a small. round active heatsink on the graphics chip. It is quite likely that the fan isn't strictly necessary, particularly as the square BGA memory chips don't have heatsinks, and it tends to be the memory that limits the speed of a graphics card, rather than the core speed. Sapphire includes a copy of its Redline utility in the package, should you fancy overclocking your card, but of course there are plenty of utilities available, such as Powerstrip, which will, work on all these cards.

Sapphire has supplied a very similar package to PNY, so the S-Video to coaxial adapter is a cable 150mm in length, there's a DVI to VGA adapter. a coaxial extension cable and an S-Video extension cable 1.5metres in length. There are two decent pieces of software, Cyberlink PowerDVD XP 4.0 and Soldier of Fortune Double Helix. In fact only MSI includes more in its package.

Although MSII charges £30 more for its card we feel it offers better value for money. If you don't need the Video In function and have all the software that you need then you could save yourself a reasonable amount of money and choose the Sapphire instead.

Our tests show that the FX5600 Ultra has the edge on the Radeon 9600 Pro, particularly if you turn on high quality settings, but the margin isn't huge as both chips slow down significantly as the workload increases. The Sapphire is a relatively cheap way into DirectX 9 gaming and is well worth consideration.

AS THE 9600 PRO IS A PUMPED UP VERSION OF THE RADEON 9600 IT COMES AS NO SURPRISE THAT THE GRAPHICS CARD IS QUITE SMALL.



QUALITY: 7 VALUE: 7 OVERALL: 7





SO WHAT'S BEST?

We tested the graphics cards on a Gigabyte GA-7NNXP motherboard with an Nforce2 chipset, running an XP2600+ processor on a 333FSB plus 1GB of PC3200 memory. All five cards support AGP 8x and require a modern chipset to get the full benefit from them. We ran 3DMark 2003 at a

variety of resolutions and quality settings, and also used the new Gun Metal benchmark (test 2) to stress the DirectX 8.1 and 9.0a parts of the cards. It was quite a close battle between the different graphics chips and the results bear close scrutiny.

Make	Connect3D	Hercules	MSI	PNY	Sapphire
Model	Radeon 9600	3D Prophet 9600	FX5600U-VTD128	Verto FX5200 Ultra	Atlantis 9600 Pro
Online Price inc VAT	£95	£140	£175	£105	£145
Graphics chip	Radeon 9600	Radeon 9600	FX5600 Ultra	FX5200 Ultra	Radeon 9600 Pro
Memory	128MB	256MB	128MB	128MB	128MB
AGP support	8x	8x	8x	8x	8x
Driver	Catalyst 3.60	Catalyst 3.60	Detonator 45.23	Detonator 45.23	Catalyst 3.60
DirectX support	DirectX 9.0b	DirectX 9.0b	DirectX 9.0b	DirectX 9.0b	DirectX 9.0b
Core speed	325MHz	325MHz	325MHz	325MHz	400MHz
Memory speed	400MHz	400MHz	550MHz	650MHz	600MHz
Video in/Video out	No/Yes	No/Yes	Yes/Yes	No/Yes	No/Yes
Monitor ouputs	VGA, DVH	VGA, DVI-I	VGA, DVH	VGA, DVI-I	VGA, DVH
3D Mark 2003					
1024x768 no FSAA	1833	932	2482	1572	2537
1024x768 FSAA 4x	1033	1076	1569	771	1433
1024x768 FSAA 4x, AF 4x	925	966	1396	724	1289
1600x1200 no FSAA, no AF	915	954	1392	829	1299
1600x1200 FSAA 4x	81	500	665	358	541
1600x1200 FSAA 4x, AF 4x	350	390	594	331	484
Gun Metal test 2 1024x768 FSAA 4x. no AA	12.42	13.88	18.3	9.77	17.82

MSI FX5600U-VTD128



EDITOR'S CHOICE

The only FX5600 Ultra card in the group, and also the most expensive card on test, however the combination of decent performance, Video In/Video Out and an extensive software package makes the MSI



SAPPHIRE ATLANTIS 9600 PRO



HIGHLY COMMENDED

Atlantis 9600 Pro

good value.

Sapphire opted for the Radeon 9600 Pro chip, rather than the Radeon 9600, and the combination of gaming power plus a couple of pieces of software makes the





a winner.

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MANUFACTURER: MINOLTA

WEBSITE: WVWW.MINOLTA.COM

REVIEWER: JOE LAVERY

REQUIRED SPEC: PENTIUM II 400 +,

100 MB HD SPACE, USB 2 PORT,

WINDOWS 98/ME/NT/2000/XP



Digital cameras come in all shapes and sizes, but as a general rule the larger

cameras produce better pictures. Simply because in the majority of cases a larger camera has a larger lens and the manufacturers have room to fit in more goodies than they might on a smaller unit. So this latest model from Minolta seems to buck the system totally, with a performance and specification that's very hard to accept from such a diminutive piece of equipment.

The Dimage Xt is an upgrade from their previous Dimage X model that received high praise from the photographic press when it was released just over a year ago. This new camera has an increased resolution, even smaller size and sports one of the fastest start-ups of any camera on the market. It produces outstanding quality images for such a small unit, reaching 2048 x 1536 from its 3.2 megapixel CCD. These show none of the problems normally associated with miniature cameras, there are no parallax problems with the lens, the 3 times optical zoom works extremely well and the design doesn't cause any undue camera shake.

While we're on the subject the zoom is an outstanding piece of engineering. In more traditional cameras the lens projects from the front of the camera and in many cases will extend further as

you bring the zoom into play. Whereas in the Minolta Dimage Xt the lens doesn't project at all, they've cleverly designed a prism that sits behind the lens and deflects the image through 90 degrees inside the camera casing. So when you push the zoom button the lens slides down inside the camera, totally encased and keeping the camera perfectly flat. Once you reach the limit of the optical zoom you have the option of continuing with another 4 times digital zoom but like most digital options, it merely replicates pixels and is more of a gimmick than any

Without wishing to harp on, this camera is the perfect pocket size, it's actually smaller than a packet of cigarettes but really is nicely made. There's a high resolution colour display on the back, with a row of menu buttons beneath and a rotating mode switch immediately above. It's of all metal construction with a conventional optical viewfinder and naturally a built-in flash unit. Although it's small it's not difficult to use, as the controls are positioned to fall naturally under your right thumb, with your index finger sitting comfortably on the shutter release at the top right corner.

The package includes a rechargeable lithium/ion battery, together with a charging station that accepts both the camera or just a battery separately. The camera uses SD flash cards and Minolta provide a 16MB to get you started, although they don't provide any sort of





carrying case. However you do get all the necessary software drivers and leads to download your images to your PC, or in slideshow fashion to your TV.

Finally like many modern digital cameras the Dimage Xt will also capture short video clips, (depending on the size of your SD media) and has the facility to audio comment any images you capture.

QUALITY: 9		
VALUE: 8	100	
OVERALL: 8		



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STUDIO **MOVIEBOX USB**

PRICE: £125 (STREET PRICE) MANUFACTURER: PINNACLE SYSTEMS WEBSITE: WWW.PINNACLESYS.COM

REVIEWER: SIMON BREW

REQUIRED SPEC: USB CONNECTION

Simple video editing solutions are far more commonplace for PC users now than ever before (and coming shortly we've got a group test devoted to them), although in our experience, it's digital users who get a better crack of the whip, rather than those with analogue video equipment. Pinnacle's Moviebox USB is thus a refreshing beast, making the entire process of capturing, manipulating and outputting video footage really quite straightforward. And the device we tested is purely for analogue video, which can sometimes be

a bit more fiddly than its digital counterpart (a DV version of the product is also available). Not so much here though, we're pleased to report.

The first thing of note is the hardware itself, which is a box with a footprint just larger than a CD case. Clearly the beneficiary of a labour of love in the design room (thanks to a link up with F.A. Porsche), it has on one of its edges an array of input connections, and on another edge the output connections. The inclusion of composite and S-video cables in the box will rightly lead you to conclude that they are supported. The device requires its own power supply, and the version we tested hooked up to our test PC via a USB cable

Sadly, said test PC didn't like this at first, failing to pick up the hardware, but on our second test machine there wasn't even a murmur of complaint. The likelihood, in this case, is that the fault lay with our computer.

Included in the package is a copy of Pinnacle's excellent Studio 8 video editing software. This has long been a favourite in the Micro Mart office, as it's very easy to use, and very easy to get good results

from. It also talks to the hardware with consummate ease, once you've pointed in the right direction. Then you just need to hook up your video source, be it camcorder, VCR or whatever, and you're ready to capture footage.

The Moviebox USB isn't the cheapest solution for capturing analogue footage, but it's hard to argue that it isn't a complete one. Pinnacle base their business around video products such as these, and the sheer user-friendliness of the Moviebox USB is ample testament to their unquestioned expertise in this area. A terrific product.

QUALITY: 9 VALUE: 8 **OVERALL:** 9







SHANGHAI: THE SECOND DYNASTY

MANUFACTURER: XPLOSIV

WEBSITE: WWW.XPLOSIV.NET

REVIEWER: SIMON BREW REQUIRED SPEC: P166 PROCESSOR. 32MB RAM, 110MB HARD DISK SPACE

WINDOWS 95 OR GREATER



As one of the premium puzzle game franchises on the PC, the Shanghai series

has rightly built up a strong and loyal following. However, many of you are still untouched by the cerebral genius of the game, which - as the best puzzle games do - builds on a verv simple concept.

Based on Mah-Jongg, the idea is simple. You need to match identical tiles in any given puzzle, but you can only match tiles that don't have others on both sides of it. It's exceptionally simple

to get into, and this highly polished title features various variants on the basic theme, including multi-player options.

For £4.99, Shanghai: The Second Dynasty is a genuine steal. If you have even a passing interest in puzzle games, you really should try it.

QUALITY: 9 VALUE: 9 **OVERALL:** 9

WINDOWS XP PROFESSIONAL THE ULTIMATE USER'S GUIDE (SECOND EDITION)

PRICE: £30.99

PUBLISHER: PARAGLYPH PRESS

ISBN: 1-932111-83-2

REVIEWER: GORDON HULMES



One of the big advantages of XP is the user friendly and task-oriented method of

working. Although a radical departure from the classic Windows method, most people who have used it will say they prefer it. From the way the operating system automatically detects new hardware and software, the simplicity of creating a network and the context sensitive menus within folders, it all adds up to probably the most easy to use Windows operating system yet. So why would you need a 700+ page book explaining how to use it?

For the average home user, running XP Home edition, they probably would not. For the PC professional, network administrator or enthusiast who has paid the extra cash for XP Professional Edition, there is a lot to be gained. True, XP's help system is excellent and backed up by Microsoft's online resources you can find out just about anything you need. To gain a full

understanding of the operating system though, a book like this is necessary.

Aimed at an intermediate level of user, it is not a tutorial of XP as such but a detailed guide to its many features. Having said that, everything from simply organising files, working with multiple applications and customising the desktop and folders to more complex topics, more relevant to a corporate environment, such as work groups, access rights, disk mirroring and so on are covered. The author is an MSCF and a Microsoft Certified Trainer and also writes for Microsoft's Expert column on their Web site. Every step is clearly stepped through with every key-press listed and backed up with clear screenshots and diagrams where applicable. Business users will appreciate the coverage of security and encryption including XP's Smart Card support and network administrators have all the information they need in extremely comprehensive section on networks (both home/small office) and corporate including details on Remote Assistance, Remote Desktop, disk quotas, group policies etc.

Just about anyone with a basic understanding of computers will be able to use this book although some of the more advanced tasks, although explained to



Windows XP Professional

The Ultimate User's Guide Second Edition

individual key-press detail may be a little daunting for some. However, this is the nature and complexity of XP and not a failing of the book. The target readership, as stated previously, should find this a useful and informative guide, being suitable for learning XP Professional in detail or as an adhoc reference guide. This second edition includes updated chapters on security, troubleshooting and tweaking and customisation.

QUALITY: 8

VALUE: 8

OVERALL: 8

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DUNGEON KEEPER 2

PRICE: £4.99

MANUFACTURER: SOLD OUT

WEBSITE: WWW.SOLD-OUT.CO.UK

REVIEWER: PHIL KAVANAGH

REQUIRED SPEC: MINIMUM SPEC: P166MMX, 32MB RAM, NO NEED FOR 3D

ACCELERATION (SOFTWARE 3D)



Lord Pubert Champion of the realm, was dragged kicking and screaming before my fetid

throne by my minions. "Execute him!" I ordered. I smiled smugly to myself; there would be no rescue for him...

Are you tired of being cast in the role of the goody goody hero? Ever wanted to wipe the smug grin off their point eared faces? You have? Excellent! This is the game for you! Dungeon Keeper 2 casts you as the overlord of an evil dungeon empire, you use your minions to create and staff your realm and then kick seven shades out of the heroes and other evil rulers who seek to take over your realm.

Whilst somewhat dated now, the low system specs and the tongue in cheek humour cannot help but make it appeal to those with a slightly more twisted nature. And at such a bargain price as this you cannot help but be tempted to the dark side Hee hee hee



QUALITY: 8 VALUE: 9

OVERALL: 8

DISCSAFE VERSION 2

PRICE: 29.95 EUR

MANUFACTURER: E-PROMO

TELEPHONE NUMBER:

+49 1805 34724968

WEBSITE:

HTTP://WWW.DISCSAFE.COM/

REVIEWER: MARK PICKAVANCE

REQUIRED SPEC: PENTIUM CPU. 64 MB RAM, WINDOWS 98/ME/NT/2000 OR XP. CDR OR DVD-R IF YOU WISH TO BACKUP TO THIS MEDIA



I have a terrible admission to make. I don't back my computer up. There, I said it!

That's not to say that I don't have a way of restoring my work and e-mail, I do. But my machine is just too big to backup entirely, which I'm sure is an issue many of us face today. I don't have an answer, so here's a review instead!

DiscSafe 2 is - as you might have guessed - a backup application. There aren't any technological wonders here. You select what it is you want to protect, how you would like to back it up and finally, when you want to do that. Simple! The backup can be made locally to the hard drive, over the network or to either a CDR or DVD-R drive. Once you have chosen your method for potential salvation then DiscSafe will go off and perform the backup as requested.

When backups are made the operation is logged in the system, and you can use this list of successful backups to initiate a restore. So what we have here is an

uncomplicated, yet effective means of keeping vital files from disappearing should your hard drive lunch itself.

There is only one snag really, which there usually is. If like me you use Windows XP you get a perfectly serviceable backup tool free with XP, which apart from the CD writing bit does everything else that this application does. In fact the XP one was written by VERITAS for Microsoft, so it's not a chump piece of code from Pedmond

So where does that leave DiscSafe? Well, the CD-R or DVD-R backup is useful as it spans disks and avoids the extra operation using the XP backup would require to get it on disk. Beyond that there isn't much to say. It comes with an equally uninspiring label editing application which is not a patch on the one with Nero.

One annoyance is that it is installed as a demo version, with a 14 day lifespan. To make it the full version you are required to register, which I think is a bit heavy handed. While it's nice for software houses to have your details, I don't think it should be a prerequisite for using their software. Paying should be enough.

For the money, I think this product is decidedly 'thin'. I'd recommend anyone who wants this functionality to spend an extra £20 and get Nero 6 instead.

QUALITY: 5

VALUE: 4 OVERALL: 5





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PACKARD BELL USB NIGHT GLOW KEYBOARD

PRICE: £39.99

MANUFACTURER: PACKARD BELL

WERSITE

HTTP://WWW.PACKARDBELL.CO.UK

REVIEWER: PHIL KAVANAGH REQUIRED SPEC: USB PORT

Have you ever sat hunched over your keyboard late at night? No lights on, squinting

to see the keys on your keyboard as you make yet another typo... The humble keyboard is something many of us take for granted. It's there and we simply get on with it... People however are looking for more stylish and functional peripherals these days. Which is where Packard Bells USB Night Glow keyboard comes in.

The keyboard itself is silver with white keys, has riser legs to alter the angle of the keyboard and connects via a USB connection. It's smaller than a standard keyboard and is pretty much the same as a laptop keyboard in feel and layout.

measuring 29 cm wide by 13cm deep. Across the top are lights to show when caps lock, number lock and scroll lock are switched on, plus buttons to turn the back light off, put the PC in sleep mode and to switch your PC off.

So how does it look? Well the keys are backlit with a soft blue glow that does actually work. Without any other lighting the keys are easily seen, of course for those who can touch type that would not be an issue on the first place. But for people like me it's handy for making sure I don't make any more typos whilst banging away in the dark. The keys are somewhat smaller than on a standard keyboard which in itself can take some getting used to - so if you are a small person like me it's a blessing, but if you have paws the size of the editor you will hate this keyboard with a passion. If you like your gadgets and feel the urge to sit in the dark at your computer though then this is a worthy purchase.





QUALITY: 8 VALUE: 7 OVERALL: 8

Q-TEC 540U USB 2 DRVE BAY HUB

PRICE: £16 +VAT

MANUFACTURER: Q-TEC

WERSITE: W/W/W DTEC INFO

REVIEWER: MARK PICKAVANCE

REQUIRED SPEC: FREE USB PORT

Not all PC cases have front mounted USB unfortunately, which can be annoying if you need to keep plugging USB devices in.

The simplest solution is to use either an unused 5.25 or 3.5 inch drive bay to allow access to those USB ports. The 540U by Q-TEC is designed to do exactly that, using a four port powered hub it can distribute USB 2 through any drive bay.

Installation is the same as any drive. except you are just mounting a plastic housing into which the hub is built. The 3.5 inch beige box comes with a sleeve which enables it to fill a 5.25 inch bay of required. Two cables run from the hub inside the PC, one to provide it with power, via a floppy style power connector. A converter is supplied which converts a standard Molex power connector to floppy type if you haven't got a spare one.

The other connection is the USB cable which runs out through a modified backplane plate and then into any of your rear facing USB ports. I actually thought this was quite poor, as they should have given you a cable capable of using a motherboard USB

header. This would have made for a much neater solution. But alas, they didn't,

That small annoyance aside, the hub works fine and can handle any type of device as it is fully powered. You don't get any software, but then you don't need any.

Just in case anyone gets confused, this hub won't give your PC USB 2 if it doesn't already have that capability. It just distributes what you already have, so if you only have USB 1.1 then it becomes a USB 1.1 hub.

This item might be useful if you have a case that doesn't have front USB ports, and is beige.

QUALITY: 6

VALUE: 6

OVERALL: 6



MYSTIFY CLAW

PRICE: AROUND £48 (STREET PRICE)

MANUFACTURER: TERRATEC
WEBSITE: WWW.TERRATEC.COM

REVIEWER: JON FRYER



The Mystify Claw is to the keyboard what a trackball is to the mouse, only with less

buttons. Presumably aimed at the dedicated FPS player the "claw" (ooh - scary) has 10 buttons that can be configured for directional movement, re-loading, weapon changing, activating objects and jumping (in fact any keyboard input), leaving your right hand free for other activities. Like mouseaiming. And nothing else.

The purpose then must be to provide the player with a more comfortable and user-friendly control device. To some extent that works inherently as you can configure

the same buttons to do pretty much the same actions in all your favourite games - no more getting the "crouch" and "use" keys mixed up between sessions of Wolfenstein and Medal of Honor. Although of course you could simply re-define all your games to use the same keys, thus nullifying one of the claw's features.

So, if it's not especially more convenient is it, then, more comfortable? At first yes. It takes getting used to but after a while you get the hang of it. Personally I found that once I instinctively got all the right controls I ended up playing faster and more recklessly than if I was just using keys. This is where I started getting problems. After a while I could feel strain in fourth and fifth fingers and no amount of movement or adjusting made any difference. Either I need to see my doctor or you should definitely have regular breaks whilst using this device. In fact you should definitely have regular breaks whilst playing games anyway so maybe that was my fault.

Whilst it lasted it was quite good as a novelty though I'm not convinced that there is any significant benefit over using the trusty keyboard, particularly for the price. Furthermore my desk is quite small and I don't need the clutter.

QUALITY: 7

VALUE: 6

OVERALL: 6



HITMAN: CODENAME: 47

PRICE: £4.99

MANUFACTURER: SOLD OUT

WEBSITE: WWW.SOLD-OUT.CO.UK

REVIEWER: SIMON BREW

REQUIRED SPEC: 300MHZ PENTIUM II, 64MB RAM, 400MB HARD DISK SPACE, DIRECT X 7.0, WINDOWS 95 OR GREATER



Go back and read all the reviews that came out when Hitman II came out. Without

fail, all of them will have referred to the improvements that needed to be made over the first game. The reason? That whilst the original had some great ideas behind it, it was fundamentally flawed and little fun to play.

And so now we warmly welcome back said original, hiding away under a £4.99 price tag, and its one of those cases where the price still can't hide the problems. Sure, the production values of the game are strong, and when it hangs together as you undertake your Hitman duties, there are some quite exciting moments. But, sadly, the game is unfair, the Al is really poor and rather than being an action strategy title, too often there is only one real way through a level and it's more like a puzzle game as you work out what that way is.

In all, a disappointing title, that amounts to far less than the sum of its parts. If you're flush with fivers, then by all means find out for yourself, but Sold Out will sell you much better games than this for exactly the same price.



QUALITY: 4 VALUE: 6

OVERALL: 5

O COMPUTERS

DARKENED SKYE

PRICE: £19.99

MANUFACTURER: OXYGEN INTERACTIVE

WEBSITE: WWW.DXYGENINT.COM

REVIEWER: JON FRYER

REQUIRED SPEC: 350MHZ CPU, 64MB RAM, 8MB GRAPHICS CARD, 400MB HARD DISK SPACE, WINDOWS 98 OR GREATER

Or "Skittles: The Game of the Confectionary" to give it the title that the marketing bods would surely have called this if they could have got away with it. The story begins when a shepherd finds a magic, brightly coloured, small oval disc with the letter "S" on it. I wonder what that could be? Picking up said disc causes an evil wizard to open a portal and send particularly brainless creatures to kill you.

Most games that I shall generously describe as "not good" suffer in one or two key areas, be it sub-standard graphics, poor controls, absent gameplay or mindnumbing predictability. Unfortunately this overblown advertisement gets a big Family Fortunes X in every category.

The design of the game is so bad that your first impression is that it can't be this bad. Surely there's some control I pressed accidentally that took the interface away? Oh no - it's supposed to be like this! The first thing to do is wander through a pointless maze without any real desire to find the way through (shades of Simon the Sorcerer 3D.)





Next up - the graphics. I'm sorry but this isn't 1998 and it hasn't been for some time. The only motivation I have for attacking the monsters is so I don't have

their badly depicted and laughably animated shapes polluting my monitor.

Which brings us nicely into gameplay. What's on offer here is actually a reminder of how much gameplay (well, in some games) has evolved over the past five

years. Words like irksome, aimless, irritating and childish would perhaps be too harsh if you didn't consider the asking price. When you think about how

much a game costs it doesn't take genius to conclude that anything less than "very good" is an intolerable waste of time.

Oh, and the music is annoving too. Taste the rainbow? Taste this....

QUALITY: 3

VALUE: 2

OVERALL: 3

SHOGUN: WARLORDS **EDITION**

PRICE: £4.99

MANUFACTURER: SOLD OUT

WEBSITE: WWW.SOLD-OUT.CO.UK REVIEWER: PHIL KAVANAGH

REQUIRED SPEC: 233MHZ

PROCESSOR WINDOWS 95 OR GREATER, 32MB RAM, 500MB HARD

DISK SPACE

The Daimvo surveyed his loyal troops around him, the early morning mist

obscured the far side of the river, silently the massed ranks of his opponents army marched into view, this was total war.

When first released, this game was hailed as one of the best strategy games ever. This stands true to today. Set in feudal Japan you plays as one of the major clans of the country and through force and subterfuge you aim to conquer all of Japan. Each turn you raise armies, develop your regions and wage war against the other Daimyos. Troop movement and development is carried out on a board game style display, whilst the battles are carried out in fabulous real-time 3D action.

Whilst Medieval Total War has since been released which is a huge improvement in terms of gameplay and graphics this game is still excellent in its own right. And at this price this is a must have purchase for all strategy game fans. Follow the teachings of Sun Tzu and lead your clan into honour and victory!

QUALITY: 9 VALUE: 10 OVERALL: 9

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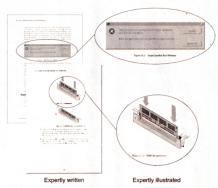


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Tyan Tiger MPX (AMD MP)	£149.00	£175.08
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	Starbook P4m 2.0Ghz/256/40
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FREQUENTLY_ASKED_QUESTIONS

I WANT TO SELL MY HARD DRIVE, BUT I AM WORRIED THAT THE BUYER MAY BE ABLE TO RECOVER MY PERSONAL DATA. IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO?

First of all I would double check that the hard drive has been formatted before the sale takes place. This will ensure that the data cannot be recovered by simply putting the

hard drive into a new system. For most people this is what they do before they sell their hard drive.

their hard drive.

Unfortunately, it is possible to recover data even if a file has been permanently deletted, because when files are deletted from a hard drive the data remains on the disk, and only the records of the data's location on the hard drive are lost. The next time data has to be written to the hard drive, the hard drive uses a space on the disk where it has no record of data being held so it can use the space that was once occupied by the old data.

As the data remains on the disk if means that even with a hard drive that

has been formatted the data can be recovered. However, this requires specialist equipment and skills so the new owner of your hard drive would have to pay someone to do it and it costs a lot of money, so it is highly unlikely that the new owner of your hard drive will go though that much trouble to try and recover any of your data. However, if you are still paranoid, there is software available that will write data over the top of deleted data so that it is harder to recover. However it still does not make it impossible for an expert to recover the data if they are that determined, it only makes it harder.

The process of overwriting deleted data is known as "shredding". There are many data shredders available via the internet, some of which are free. You will be able to find many by doing a simple search on



your favourite search engine. Personally I use "Privacy Eraser Pro", a demo of which can be downloaded from

http://www.privacyeraser.com/. I like to use this one, because as well as having a file shredder, it has many other options to remove personal data from your system.

Always virus scan your downloads!

I HAVE LOST INTERNET EXPLORER FROM MY SYSTEM, HOW CAN I GET IT BACK?

You probably still have Internet Explorer on your system, but for some reason it may no longer be your default browser. If you suspect this to be the case, then click "Start" > "Settings" > "Control Panel". Then locate the "Internet Options" button, and double click it (Note: If the "Internet Options" button is not present, you may not have Internet Explorer installed. If so, skip to the next paragraph). Then go to the "Programs" tab and check the box labelled "Internet Explorer should check to see whether it is the default browser" before finally clicking "OK". Next click "Start" > "Programs" > "Internet Explorer" and you should be asked whether or not you want Internet Explorer to be your default browser. To stop this from happening

again, you should uninstall any other browsers that you have on your system.

If you really have managed to lose Internet Explorer and you have broadband, it may be worth downloading it from the

rereal Security Privacy Confert Connections Programs AdviInternet programs

You can specify which program Vindows automatically uses
for each Internet service.

HTML editor Microsoft FrortiPage

E-mail: Microsoft Dudook

Newergoup: Microsoft Dudook

Newergoup: Microsoft Dudook

Peered Microsoft Dudook

Contact fast: Microsoft Dudook

Contact fast: Microsoft Dudook

Peered Microsoft Dudook

Contact fast: Microsoft Dudook

Peered Veb Settings...

You can reset Internet Explores to the default home and earch pages.

internet (http://www.microsoft.com /windows/ie/) so that you can get the latest version, but understandably you will not be able to do this if you do not have an alternate browser installed on your system.

1	Internet Explorer 6 sp1
10	Internet Explorer 6 Service Pack 1 (SP1) sets a new stare Explorer is leading the way on the Web. Technology Overview Desminad Nam Order the CD (U.S. and Ganada only) Moridmide Dominlands
Top Sto	Specific actions for Blaster worm Check the Microsoft.com Security site to keep up to date on the late
9	Internet Explorer 6 Security and Privacy Essentials Get tips and learn how to step through the security and privacy feat
	August 2003, Cumulative Patch for Internet Explorer (8229) Help protect your Windows®-based systems from newly identified I



Have you got a technical problem that you need an answer to? Why not ask our resident technical expert. Adam Anderson?

Each week Adam will be answering your queries and adding comment of his own. He deals with general hardware and software problems (although if you have a specific problem with your current PC, please send that to Jason D'Allison), and can also advise on the likes of upgrades and building your own machine.

Unfortunately, he cannot give personal replies to your questions, but he will endeavour to answer as many as possible in this section. You can write to him at:

Adam Anderson Micro Mart 1st Floor, Edward House, 92/93 Edward Street, Birmingham, B1 2RA.

Alternatively you can email him at: adam@micromart.co.uk

Please try to keep your queries brief and limit them to just one question per letter. Note that any queries that Adam doesn't have the space to answer may end up in our Questions and Answers page later on in this section.

However, he endeavours to cover as many queries as possible every week across these pages.

ASK_ADAM

Let's open with some reader replies:

REMOVING ARROWS

Paul Waddingham asked how to get rid of the shortcut arrows and you were not sure what the answer is. Here is the answer for you. Go to www.freshdevices.com and download Fresh UI, in this program is an option to remove the arrows. I've used it with no problem. The program is freeware (limited trial) and if you register by email, freshdevices send you a registration number which you use to remove the limited trial.

Andrew Halson

And R Slezas suggested Iconaid Version 3.2.2 from www.sillysot.com

I'm not sure if either of these will work as Paul had been using TweakUI successfully until it went wrong, so it is quite possible that an alternative package will suffer the same problem. Still, nothing ventured, nothing gained.

ICON QUESTION

I've just read the letter 'Icon Question' in issue 763 - where Windows places the icons incorrectly after safe-mode or something like that. There is a program to save and restore the desktop icon layout, and it works on Windows NT based systems and 98/Me. It's called layout.zip and can be downloaded from www.pcmag.com/article2 /0.4149.600496,00.asp

Alex Sutton

The link on that site takes you here www.pcnineoneone.com/tweaks/layout.zip so all I can say is, give it a whirl. Here's another suggestion:

ANSWER AND QUESTION

I use a Windows 98SE set-up which requires regular 'safe' starts and realignment of Desktop icons - and I use a shareware utility called 'EzDesk' by Melissa Nguyen, which works seamlessly. This came from a cover disc some time ago, but you could try nguyen@compuserve.com. The company seems to be 'EzWare Technology' in Pomona, CA - and the registration fee is \$15.

On another tack, Adam, I do a lot of offshore sailing/racing and am using IT more and more on board for the acquisition and analysis of up-to-date met forecast data; navigation and strong wind warnings, wind field predictions and other stuff I can get from sites on the WWW, and some top-end marine charting and navigation software is in the post to me.

I've lately been using an Orange/Nokia GSM PCMCIA phone card to connect an ordinary laptop when in range - which works well, but is vulnerable in the bouncing-about environment of a cruising or racing sailboat - and this has led to several friends asking about a 'small format' PC being installed in a more secure position, with a TFT screen set up on the bulkhead/wall over the chart table.

Capabilities could be quite restricted - 2GHz CPU, 512MB Ram, straightforward integrated graphics w/sound, specific connectivity (e.g. no printer) to take inputs from GPS, radar, Navtex and HF receivers, CD-ROM, PCMCIA, USB2, 10-20GB HDD - by today's PC standards, with little need for big heat' processing, so passive cooling would be a target. I reckon that a flexi rubber WiFi keyboard with 'nipple' or 'rollerball' pointing device is in the frame. Low power consumption would be a target, with laptop-type LiOn battery backup,

I'M NOT SURE IF EITHER OF THESE WILL WORK AS PAUL HAD BEEN USING TWEAKUI SUCCESSFULLY UNTIL IT WENT WRONG



IF YOU INTEND CONNECTING A USB 2.0 DEVICE TO YOUR HUB THEN YES, YOU DO NEED TO UPGRADE IT.

although one would expect 12.5V DC nominal from the boat's domestic batteries to be available.

Bill Bailey

A small form factor PC such as a Shuttle should do the job nicely, but in principle it is exactly the same as a notebook. Most modern notebooks have a TV-Out and a VSA port so you could use a remote monitor while the notebook is safely tucked away. A notebook also has an advantage in a hostile environment as it has a battery, which acts as a UPS if the power dips or fails.

Three answers from Paul Pattinson, all relating to issue 763

MORE ANSWERS

Take a look at www.nonags.com and use the search for Icon Restore. Scroll down the pages and you will eventually find it. Right click on your desktop and make sure to take the tick out of Auto Arrange. Once installed place icons anywhere on the screen and right click on My Computer. There are 2 new entries "SAVE Desktop Icon Layout" and the other being "RESTORE Desktop Icon Layout". Choose SAVE Icon layout option. If your icons get messed around just right click on My Computer and select the RESTORE option.

Alternative location is http://home.epix.net/~ttaylor/icon_restore.html this being the makers site and it's free. At the bottom of the page he makes reference to the software not working properly with Windows XP but I have had no problems with XP Pro. I use a 17" flat panel at 1200 X 1024 but my mother in law changes it to 800 x 600 to play games when she comes round (must be going blind, bless). When resizing the screen the icons go everywhere but using Restore everything goes back just how I like it.

Paul also mentions Fresh UI from www.freshdevice.com as above. And then we get to a contentious issue.:

Reply to William Stanton USB CABLES. This site http://www.pccables.com/cables/usb_cables.html explains that there is no difference between USB 1.1 and USB 2 cables.

That's not entirely correct. A USB 2.0 cable is backwards compatible with USB 1.1, but if you have an old USB 1.1 cable I would be most surprised if it worked correctly. The problem is there is no identification mark or visible difference between the two standards.

Here's a question on similar lines:

WHAT HUB?

I have just bought a new computer which has USB2 ports as standard. I have both USB1 and USB2 devices connected via a Belkin USB 4 port hub which I have had for a couple of years (before USB 2 was available) Do I need to change it?

Is there such thing as a USB 2 hub, or are hubs suitable for both types of connections?

Jim Simmonds

Belkin lists a couple of USB 2.0 four port hubs, including model F5U224. If you intend connecting a USB 2.0 device to your hub then yes, you do need to upgrade it. If all your devices are USB 1,1 then there's no need.

Would you believe that another reader had information on icons?

MORE ICONS!

An item under Tweaking Icons from Paul Waddingham. You could have told him the very simple way of getting rid of those pesky arrows (even for the uninitiated) is to go into the registry under hkey classes root. Inkfile and piffile, or even do a search. Just

remove the value "is shortcut"

And if you are even braver and also want to get rid of another annoying item - The "shortcut to" text - just go to hkgurrent

user/software/microsoft/windows/cur rentversion/explorer and look for or add a regbinary named "link" and either amend or insert to read 00 00 00 which is of course - no shortcut text

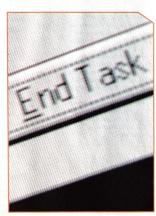
Rick Ellis-Calcott

DVD AUTHORING

For my birthday I am getting a DVD-R recorder, I will want to use it partly for backing up my DVD movies as they often get scratched by my younger brother, what software should I use? In your review of "Movies on CD and DVD 2.0" you said it could handle anything does that include .vob? Also does it let you choose worse quality for more storage space?

Rob

Any retail DVD writer will be packaged with all the software that you need, so I suggest you start with that. While a number of drives will have Roxio and Nero software that will be familiar from CD writing, my personal favourite is called B's DVD, and it usually comes with B's Recorder Gold5 and B's CLIP5.





Introducing Jason
D'Allison, another member
of Micro Mart's panel of
experts. Jason's expertise
is in troubleshooting
problems with your
existing PC, so if you
need his help, then write
to him at:

Jason D'Allison Micro Mart Trinity Publications 1st Floor Edward House 92/93 Edward Street Birmingham B1 2RA

Jason can also be contacted by e-mail at: jason@micromart.co.uk.

It's the same contact details if you want to get your joke featured in his Wit of the Week slot.

Whilst we try and cover as many problems as we can (hence the fact that Ask Jason now runs to twice its original size), we regret that Jason cannot answer your questions personally. Nonetheless, he'll cover as many as he possibly can through these pages.

Note that any queries that Jason doesn't have the space to answer may end up in our Questions and Answers page later on in this section.

Please try and to keep to one question per letter, and include details of your PC's specifications (including OS).

ASK_JASON

PAQ UP YOUR TROUBLES

I've just acquired an old Compaq PC. However, when powering up, it starts to count the memory and then just stops. On investigation, I found that the CMOS jumper was placed over pins two and three (the 'clear' position), not over pins one and two (the 'normal' position). This leads me to believe the CMOS memory has become corrupted. If so, is there any way to correct it?

Bob Kelly, Ntlworld

Putting the CMOS jumper over the wrong pins might stop a PC from booting, but it won't corrupt the CMOS memory. After all, the CMOS memory just contains BIDS parameters that can be changed and erased at will. Therefore, Bob, the source of your problem lies elsewhere.

Your best bet is to strip the PC down. Disconnect all non-essential components, leaving just the memory, the graphics card, and the processor (together with its heatsink and fan). Does the PC boot now? If it does, add back the hardware piece by piece. Eventually you'll find the cause of all the trouble. However, if the PC still hangs even after stripping it down, try to experiment with different memory. And if that makes no difference, I'm afraid the motherboard's stuffed.

FRONT-SIDE FUSS

I'm about to upgrade my trusty 800MHz
Pentium III and I thought I'd do it myself! I've
been reading your comments about the
latest AMD processors and I'd like your
recommendations. The early Barton chips
seem to be highly regarded, but the
DDR400-FSB jobs appear to be a waste of
time. Therefore, which of the DDR333-FSB
models are worth buying?

Pete Fleming, Ntlworld

4-4-1	Speed	FSB	Cost (inc. VAT	
Model	speed	Lab	Cost (IIIc. VAI	
2500+	1,833MHz	DDR333	£69.49	
2600+	1,917MHz	DDR333	Not yet on sale	
2800+	2,083MHz	DDR333	£115.58	
3000+	2,167MHz	DDR333	£172.75	
3000+	2,100MHz	DDR400	£212.00	
3200+	2,200MHz	DDR400	£358.32	

I don't have anything against a DDR400 front-side bus - indeed, faster is definitely better. What I dislike about the later Barton-core Athlons, and in particular the DDR400-FSB variants, is that their ratings are exaggerated and their prices inflated. You can see from the table of typical costs I've drawn up that the Barton chips above the 2800+ offer very poor value - and there are Pentium 4s available for the same money that perform significantly quicker.

Having said all that, Pete, the 2500+ is a bargain - an excellent chip at an excellent price. And if you need a bit more comph, the 2800+ is good value, too. It costs only about £46 more than the 2500+ yet offers an extra 250MHz in performance! As for the 3000+ and 3200+, well, in my opinion they should be given a very wide birth. I like to think I know when I'm being ripped off.

LOTS OF WATTS

I'm very close to building my first PC and I've got the jitters! The hardware I'll be using is as follows: an Athlon XP 2600+, an Asus A7V8X motherboard, 512Mb of Kingston HyperX DDR-SDRAM, a 40Gb disk (mine), a 120Gb disk (my son's), a card reader, a floppy drive, a DVD-ROM drive, a CD rewriter, a DVD rewriter, and a 128Mb Radeon 9200 graphics card. I've also got a case with a 400W PSU, and here's my question: will it be powerful enough? Thank you in advance for your expertise.

Ron, Blueyonder

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The difficulty in answering this question, Ron, is that not all 4DOW PSUs are born equal - the power available on the +3.3V, +5V, and +12V rails tends to vary wildly from model to model. Of most importance for a modern PC is the power available on the +12V rail, and to calculate that for your own PSU, make a note of the ratings on the sticker affixed to the casing and use the following formula.

Power (watts) = current (amps) x voltage (volts)

As an example, if the maximum draw on the +12V rail were 15A, a typical figure for a generic 400W PSU, the maximum output on that line would be 180W (calculated as 15 x 12). A good rule of thumb, however, is to treat only 80% of any maximum output as actually sustainable. Using the top 20% of available power on any voltage line often puts the PSU under stress. If you're lucky, such a situation might simply result in unstable voltages, causing the PC to regularly crash. If you're unlucky. though, the PSU could blow, taking with it the motherboard and possibly some of the attached devices. Ouch! In our example, then, the maximum sustainable power would be 144W (calculated as (180 ~ 100) x 80).

So what are the +12V requirements of your particular setup, Ron? Well, let's take a look. The total might surprise you.

XP 2600+ =	69W
Processor fan =	3W
Motherboard =	5W
Hard drive 1 =	25W
Hard drive 2 =	25W
Optical drive 1 =	15W
Optical drive 2 =	15W
Optical drive 3 =	15W
TOTAL =	172W

You can see that a typical 400W PSU would not be powerful enough on the +12V rail to feed that little lot. If you work it out, a current of 18A, not 15A,

would be necessary, providing a maximum power of 216W and a sustainable power of 172.8W. Of course, you'll probably never need to run all your optical drives at full tilt simultaneously, so perhaps you could get away with a slightly lower output. Even so, I hope the example here has given you an insight into what to look for in a modern PSU.

Strictly speaking, of course, you should also consider the +3.3V and +5V requirements of the hardware you plan to install. However, overloading the +3.3V and +5V rails on a PSU nowadays is normally only a possibility when using a monster graphics card, the type requiring power not only from the AGP slot but also from an additional connector. Your Radeon 9200 isn't one of those.

DUAL DUEL

When is the KT880 Athlon chipset likely to become available?

Tim Williams, Pipex

VIA hasn't yet made an official announcement regarding the KT880, but motherboards using it are expected to appear at the end of this month. With support for dual-channel memory, the new chipset is clearly targeted as a direct competitor to nVidia's nForce2

Ultra 400, but has it arrived too late? After all, the Athlon 64 is also scheduled for launch at the end of t his month...

MODEM MUDDLE

For about a year I've been hooked up to the Internet via ADSL. However, I recently undertook a fresh install of Windows, and when I came to load the driver for the modem, I found I'd lost the CD! The modem is a PCI device that uses the Conexant AccessRunner chipset, but it's unbranded, so I thought I'd be able to download the driver from Conexant's Website. But how wrong I was! Now, if Conexant doesn't supply the driver, who on earth does?

Seb, Lichfield

That's a damned good question, Seb. Conexant, a multinational organisation with enormous resources, seems unable to provide end-users with the AccessRunner software. That being the case, why does the company allow the AccessRunner chipset to be used on unbranded products? It's a scanda!!

But all is not lost. Getting the AccessRunner software is a matter of tracking down a manufacturer that actually makes a branded AccessRunner modem. That's not as easy as it sounds, but one such company is Dynamode. You can download the goods from here:

http://www.dynamode.net/drivers.htm.



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ASK GORDON

CHEAP FLASH

I want to add flash animation to my website but can't justify buying Macromedia flash. Is there a freeware/shareware equivalent?

Andy Pope

Yes there are but probably better than these are some of the budget priced commercial offerings. The file format used by Macromedia Flash, SWF, to deliver graphics, animation and sound to your browser has been available for some time to developers. There is even a site full of resources for programmers who want to produce SWF files - www.openswf.org

The big advantage of Flash is that it allows fast (if well written) animations that most web users can see. As you might expect, quality varies considerably and few match the original for functionality. However, if you are prepared to spend a little cash, have a look at SWISH 2 (Inttp://www.swishzone.com). It costs \$49.95 or there is a lite version for just \$19.95. They also have ready-made customisable sites for sale.

STOP THE CHANGING

I have a web site that shows images with text details alongside. Everything looks OK with a text size of small or smaller but with a text size of medium or above, the text expands the table's height and the image moves down so it is centralised (vertically). Is there a way to stop the user changing the text size and/or keep the image at the top of the cell?

Phil

Both are possible. However, there is some debete at the moment as to whether the Web designer has a right to freedom of design or whether they should cater for visually impaired users. I won't get into that debate here but would advise against fixing the size of text (which is done in a style sheet by specifying text of a specific physical size -10pt or 10px etc rather than simply size 1 etc.) I would suggest specifying a relative size such as size 1, size 2 etc and let the user adjust the text size to suit them. This brings us on to keeping the image at the top of the cell. This is done by adding the property valign='top' or the stylesheet

property vertical-align:top. The valign property is very useful but is not very well supported by Web design packages so you will probably have to add it to the HTML manually.

FRACTIONS AND CURRENCY

On my website, I want to show fractions as 1/2 and 3/4 instead of 0.5, 0.75. Is this possible. Also how do I show foreign currency symbols?

L Moss

If you are limiting yourself to the commonly used fractions, e.g. the ones you state, as opposed to 15/72(!!), there is a simple way and it is the same for your foreign currency symbols.

Special characters - those that can't be entered from the keyboard - can be entered in HTML either by their number code or their special name. Not all special characters have a name so you will have to use their number in this case. As an example:

Mnemonic	Code	Symbo
¼ &	#188;	1/4
½ &	#189;	1/2
¾ &	#190;	3/4
¥	¥	Y
¢	¢	¢
Seuro:	€:	€

There are lots of other useful special characters, such as the degrees symbol (° °), copyright (© ½) and so on. There are also special formatting codes like the non-breaking space (&160;), which HTML does not attempt to compress down to one space, as it does with standard 'white space' (spaces and tabs). Unfortunately, if you want more complex fractions like 5/12 you will have to resort a combination of superscript / subscript. For example:

⁵/₁₂

There are lots of special character references on the Web, here is one of them...

http://www.mindflip.com/inet/web/htmlchars.html



By popular demand, a new expert joins the Micro Mart panel. Gordon Hulmes has been writing for the magazine for several years already, and his areas of expertise include the Internet, web page creation and programming in general.

If you have any questions in any of these areas that you'd like Gordon to tackle, then simply write to him at:

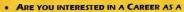
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Alternatively you can e-mail your questions to: gordon@micromart.co.uk

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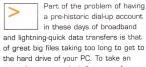
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PG 88

SIMPLE TIPS

Brad Jackson this week turns his attention to Download Managers.



example, once you install a copy of Microsoft Windows Me or XP on a virgin computer, the updates, patches and fixes

can take hours to download.

This might not be a problem, particularly if you are signed up to an ISP such as AOL, but should you be a customer of popular favourites Freeserve or Tesconet, then you have to face the wrath of the 2-hour cut-off. This policy was enacted in order to (apparently) reduce the amount of "connect-andforget" behaviour on the part of a section of the customer-base. Whether it has had the desired effect or not is debatable, however, the effect on the ordinary customer is that everything has to be checked against time. You can hurriedly connect to the Internet, get straight to the download page in question and start things off, but if the "Time Remaining" indicator shows anything above 2 hours, you are stuck. With the majority of Windows downloads, so long as you remain on the page and reconnect without disturbing anything, oftentimes the download will pick up from where it left off - to the relief of the panicking download-pilot. Other download sites can sometimes be relied upon to restart a broken download, but it is particularly frustrating if you have just downloaded your 2-hours-worth of data only to find upon reconnection that you have to start all over again - essentially precluding you from ever actually reaching the end of the download.

One light to guide you out of this darkness is the Download Manager. This is a (usually) small application that not only enables one to pick up a broken download,

but generally have a shot-of-adrenaline effect on the download - making the transfer to your computer much faster than without it. I have used a few different download managers (can you guess what type of Internet connection I have?) and have found that they are all rather similar in use and effectiveness.

The best place to go looking for a good download manager is via the software sites, such as www.cnet.com and Tucows (www.tucows.com). Just in case you are not familiar, these are sites that serve as shop-fronts for thousands of software developers (from the huge monsters such as Microsoft to the little single-man, I-do-it-for-the-love-of-it outfits based in the study or bedroom) to display their wares. The software on offer ranges from free-to-all to shareware to full-blown products, and you might therefore need to dig deep to find what you want at the price you are prepared to pay.

I would advise, stress, almost implore, anvone considering downloading a product from such sites to exercise care and diligence. I don't want to put anyone off, but in amongst the good stuff lurks the evil - you could be about to install spyware, adware, even totally-brokencomputerware. Do your homework. Cnet.com is my favourite download site, as it welcomes opinions and feedback from previous-downloaders - both good and bad. Therefore, when considering a product. I read ALL the comments before allowing the data hard-drive space. Beware five or six comments praising the product to the skies posted just after the software was added to the site - these could be from undercover agents of the company or creators. Also, don't forget that you don't have to stick with one product - if you get sick of it, uninstall it and get hold of another one!



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QUESTIONS_&_ANSWERS

CRASHES

Q

My son has bought Grand Theft Auto III & Vice City. The games have loaded okay, but

after 25 minutes and sometimes an hour the game crashes & restarts the system. The Screen goes white with the active desktop recovery shield.

I have a 2.0GHz AMD Athlon processor on an Asus A7N266 motherboard with onboard sound & graphics which is 32MB (Nvidia GeForce). The memory is 256 DDR, and I have a 48x16x48 CD writer. Our system appears to meet the minimum requirements but can't understand why it crashes so often. I suspect I may need a separate graphics card up to 64MB.

Tony Wall

WHICH MOTHERBOARD

ASUS A7N8

I'd recommend getting an Nforce 2 motherboard such as the MSI K7N2-L Delta or

ASUS A7N8X but at the same time I'd upgrade your Geforce2 Pro to something like a Geforce FX5600 or an ATI Radeon 9600. You should be able to manage both for about £150 (from somewhere like EBuyer) and if you don't bother with the video card upgrade you're not going to see huge differences from your old system.

Paul

BEING USED

In response to Adam Darby's problems with AVI files not deleting - here are a couple of tips that may resolve his problems:

1. In Explorer, Windows Media Player can open an AVI file for preview. If this

preview is cued up and ready to play, XP will report the file in use. Instead of highlighting the file and trying to delete try right click deleting.

2. What Anti-Virus Software do you have installed? Certain Anti-Virus packages use the AVI format for their virus definitions - AVG I think is one of them.

Cheers and regards to Louis - hope he is doing well.

Shavne Gardener

This has happened to me many times over the years, and only within the last couple of weeks did I come across a foolproof method that works every time! Click on start and then on run. In the open dialog box type in "notepad." Once notepad has started, go to file and then open, after changing the files of type dialog box to all files, browse to the location of the files click on one and press delete. Works every time.

The Man

DRIVER IRQL



I had a similar problem to the reader who was unable to install Windows XP because

during installation the PC would crash with a stop error "driver_irql_not_less_ or equal".

The motherboard is a Gigabyte GA-5AA, ALI chipset and the PC also has a K6-2 500 processor. The problem related to the BIOS and recognition of the AGP card. With an AGP 1.0 card the install ran smoothly. After a BIOS flash update I was able to use the AGP 2.0 card that had caused the problem previously.

Whilst this may not be the exact cause it may be worth updating the bios on your motherboard. Failing that,

If you've got a query you want to put direct to other readers, this is the place to do it! You might also find that where our experts draw a blank, you'll find your question on this page. And if you can help out with any of the questions here, please write in too! Our address is:

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Or you can e-mail us: experts@micromart.co.uk

googling the error message returns over 1000 references so there may be a resolution in there.

Michael Boshier

DNS ERRORS



In reply to K Walker issue 762 page 91 headed "DNS ERRORS". If Mr Walker is using

Windows XP Home/Pro and a dial up or broadband connection then he does not need DNS (domain name system) and needs to disable it (not delete it).

To do this go to Control panel, Administrative tools, Services, then highlight DNS right click and then click on properties next go to Start-up type click on the arrow and select disable.

At this point it might be a good idea to check the rest of the services and see which one he can change from automatic to manual which will speed up his computer.

If at a later stage he can always go back and change it back to the default setting. Hope this helps.

Cliff Brumfield

TUTORIAL_FIVE HANDY EXCEL TIPS

A bit of a change for our tutorial spot this week, as Simon Brew goes through some tips and tricks that can help you get the most out of Excel.

There's an old cliché that gets wheeled out when people start talking about Microsoft Office,

namely that 80% of the users only use 20% of the features. When you dig into it, of course, there's good reason for this. If those 20% of the features do the job you need them to do, then very often there's little reason to dig any deeper. However, whilst these ten tips aren't going to get you running sophisticated accounts models for ICI, or anything like that, here's hoping at least they offer some use to you when working your way around Excel.

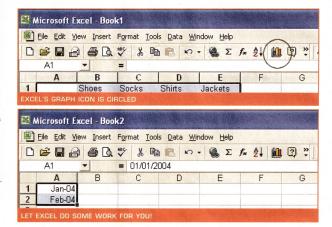
1. DRAWING GRAPHS

Chances are that most of you are already familiar with this, but if you haven't yet explored the graph drawing tool in Excel, it's really easy to use. Have a look at the example we've put together here. In the main window we've got a chart outlining sales of shoes, socks, shirts and jackets for a year (er, it was the best we could do). Now look at the row of icons, and near the top right of our screenshot, you'll notice we've circled one. What you have to do to activate the chart wizard is highlight all the cells in your table, then click on the button we've circled.

This then launches the graph wizard that does a lot of the hard work for you. It offers you a choice of graphs to draw, and - helpfully - allows you to preview what they will turn out like

2. SAVE YOURSELF SOME TYPING

If you've got to type a long list of sequential numbers or dates, then Excel has a handy



tool to save you a bit of leg work. In our example here, we've got to type out the months of the next three years. It's not a houge job, granted, but when our leziness genes kick in, we can't help looking for a shortcut. In this case, what we've done is type in the first two or three in the sequence. Then, highlight those cells. Now, see that little notch in the bottom right corner of the selected area? Move the mouse cursor over it, and the cursor turns into a cross. At this point, click and hold the left mouse button down, and drag the frame down. When you let go, Excel will have continued the sequence for you.

3.DECIMAL POINTS

If you're using Excel to make calculations that can run to plenty of decimal points, then you may want the program to limit

its results to a set number of decimal places. For instance, instead of 2.53799090, you may want to simply round the number to 2.54. Excel will do this for you, and again, you need to start off by selecting the cells you want this rule to apply to. If you want to apply this to a whole column, then a quick way to select it in its entirety is to click the column header (e.g. if you want to apply the rule to all of Column B, then click on the B). Once you've done this, on the top toolbar click on Format, then select Cells from the drop down menu. The Format Cells menu will appear, and you need to click on Number from the list that will appear. This will generate a window that allows you to set the number of decimal places you want to use. Once you've made your choice, click OK and that's that.

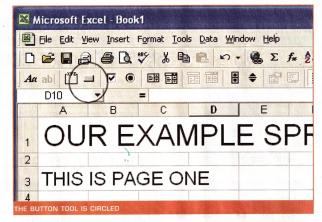
4. MULTIPLE SHEETS

Again, this is one that many of you already know, but we've also found it's something that surprisingly many of you aren't familiar with. If you're producing multiple spreadsheets on a related topic (e.g. your household accounts, with a separate spreadsheet for expenditure and income), then Excel works in Workbooks. What this means is that one Excel file can contain lots of individual spreadsheets. When working in Excel, have a look at the tabs at the bottom of the screen, that default to reading Sheet 1, Sheet 2, Sheet 3 and so on. If you click on one of those tabs, you'll jump to a different spreadsheet, but all within the same workbook. If you want to change the names of the sheets to something easier to remember, then right click on the tab you want to alter, and Rename is an option that appears on the menu that pops up. Also, by right clicking on a tab, options to add more spreadsheets and to delete them entire appear. Bear in mind that it's possible to end up with a file that is megabytes in size, if your workbook contains lots and lots of spreadsheets!

5. REGULAR JOBS

Fed up of doing the same thing over and over again in Excel? Then you could record a macro to do it. For example, if you have a workbook with four spreadsheets in it, and you find it a bit of a bind to jump from sheet to sheet, then you could create a cover page, with buttons that can jump you to exactly where you need to go. To do that, you need one of those aforementioned macros, which actually equates to a series of instructions.

In our example, we have a three sheet workbook, containing Sheet1, Sheet 2 and Sheet3. On Sheet1, we're going to create a simple menu to allow you to jump to any of the other sheets. First things first, we've got to draw the buttons, which when clicked will trigger our macro. The first thing you need to do is make sure that you have the Forms toolbar displayed. To check this, click View at the top of the screen, select Toolbars from the drop down menu and ensure that Forms has a tick by it. Now look at our screenshot, and you'll see we've gone and circled another



button; note that it won't necessarily appear in exactly the same place on your PC, as it depends how you've got your copy of Excel configured.

Once you've found the button, then click it! This will allow you to draw a box on the main spreadsheet itself; just click where you want the box to start, keep the left mouse button depressed and drag the mouse until you've got the box you want you can change it later, so don't worry if you don't get it right first time! Once you let go of the mouse button, this will then throw up a window asking you to Assign a Macro. We don't have a macro yet, so we need to record one. Click on the Record button. You'll then be asked to name your macro, and you can also assign a shortcut key that will activate it without you needing to click on the button we're making. Do that if you want, but when vou're ready, click OK.

What Excel is now doing is recording your actions. You should also notice that a Stop button has appeared in a floating window. Excel will continue recording your actions until you hit that stop button. Interestingly, this isn't just restricted to actions within Excel. Should you choose to launch Internet Explorer, then that will be recorded. Should you open a specific Word document, that too will be recorded. It's possible to record macros specifically to jump to certain places in certain documents, therefore. In our case

here, all we want is a macro that will jump to cell A1 on Sheet2. So, once we hit OK, we use the tabs at the bottom to move to Sheet2, select cell A1 and then click Stop. Once you've done that, you'll find that your button works straightaway go back and try it!

To edit the text on the button, hold the CTRL key and click on it; then select the text and type in something more appropriate, as we've done in our example (you can play with different fonts, sizes and formatting too in the normal way if you wish).

Macros are easily one of the most powerful tools in the Excel armoury, and it's really worth having a play and seeing what you can do. We've built up the document we use to plan Micro Mart using Macros, and now in one workbook we can plan a year's worth of issues, jumping backwards and forwards using the various buttons we've created. One final tip: if you're looking to do something like that, and want a button to jump you back to the first page, once you've set it up and recorded the macro, then you can copy and paste the button to other sheets. Hold CTRL and click on the edge of the button, and the copy option will appear.

These tips were prepared on Excel 2000 and Excel XP. However, the principals of them apply to many earlier versions of the program too.



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AMIGA MART

Sven Harvey introduces you to another missed opportunity - Factor 5's Turrican 3.

The game Turrican was a surprise success on the C64 and the Amiga version was a classic. The reviews for Turrican 2 were nothing less than glowing, and the publishers, Rainbow Arts (now THG) and their UK partners (Renegade by this point, following Rainbow Arts split from US Gold) wanted to make the most of the Turrican franchise. Turrican 3 was commissioned and Factor 5 started on the very ambitious project to create a worthy successor to Turrican 2 that would surpass it in every way.

The initial previews of the game in late 1992 in the various Amiga mags whetted our appetites, but by this point the worldwide success of the game consoles was starting to bite, and Factor 5 were getting involved with Nintendo, especially after their bad experience with the Megadrive versions of Turnican through Accolade.

The development hell continued as Factor 5 understandably had to make difficult business decisions and as 1993 progressed SNES work and initial progress towards Project Reality (the Nintendo 64) had to take priority as the possible rewards from that and their various contracts with Nintendo were



worth much more than the relatively modest aspirations of a game that would only ever sell in good numbers in Germany and the UK. Things got worse. Though a good deal of progress had been made on the game, Rainbow Arts and Renegade were desperate to get the game out, and get Factor 5 working on an upgraded version for Commodore's new baby. The game was finally released into the market as the CD32 was making its debut, and was actually quite an achievement, with 15 big levels, and loads of music tracks plus all the usual Turrican features, but it simply wasn't finished.

Whether the game bypassed the usual quality assurance tests due to the demands of Rainbow Arts and Renegade is unknown to me, but it was obvious from the "finished" article, that the game was in fact still a work in progress.

Level designs hadn't been tidied - you could guide the Turrican suited Bren McGuine straight through walls where the collision detection hadn't been set up, the music wasn't up to the excellent standard of Turrican 2 and the sound effects didn't seem to have been fully readied. Overall it just didn't seem complete, and the magazine reviewers were also less than impressed.

But it didn't end there. There was supposed to be a version of the CD32. It was suggested that Factor 5 were much more interested in this after the success of the (incredibly rare) CDTV version of Turnican 2 in Germany and really wanted to play with the CD32. An AGA enhanced version of the game, this time completed we were assured by Renegade, would include a full CD Audio soundtrack and proper intro video sequences and the like.

Simultaneously Renegade's other hot property, Graftgold's Undium 2, was also supposed to be getting a CD32 make-over, and the mags and Amigans alike simply couldn't wait.

1993 transformed into 1994, and the sales figures for the CD32 suggested that Commodore had got a big hit on their hands

with sales since the launch in September 1993 in the UK and Europe suggested that Commodore International had finally laid their financial daemons to rest and started to build toward the future, or at least that was what we thought here in the UK.

The fact was that Commodore UK was doing well, very very well. The only problem was that it was the only part of Commodore that was doing that well. Commodore Germany was at least turning a profit but all of the other worldwide divisions were losing money fast, and with Ali and Gould in charge at Commodore International, possibly doing the things that they were alleged to be doing, and money disappearing left right and centre it seemed Commodore couldn't last, and the company field for Chapter 11 in April 1994.

David Pleasance and Colin Proudfoot at Commodore UK kept a brave face on things and they announced their intention to bid for the whole company in a management buy-out, and get the CD32 and A1200 back into the high street as fast as possible. However it wasn't that simple. Commodore International and Commodore Bectronics were a administrative nightmare and it took a year for the liquidators to get the company to a stage where a sell-off could take place.

However it only took a month or so of the situation to make publishers and developers concerned and projects such as the CD32 versions of Turnican 3 and Unidium 2 along with many others across the market were put on hold, and eventually just petered out. By Christmas 1994 it was clear that these would never be released, whilst the still confident Commodore UK started whispering about the mythical CD64 with Hombre and PA RISC technology.

Its unknown to me as to whether any work was actually done on the CD32 version of Turrican 3, which is a total shame as it was due not only to solve the problems with the original floppy release but also enhance it to a stage where it may have actually been a better product than Turrican 2. However it would seem, we will never know...

LINUX_MART

Another week, another book review as Martin Curran happily plays the bookworm while the rest of the country suffers boil-in-the-bag travel horrors.

I must be getting a little ahead of myself. I'm writing this just before the weekend of the Bank Holiday and I'm almost feeling smug. A little rain has fallen (surprisingly), but otherwise it looks like being uncomfortably hot for all the poor sods forced to venture

out this holiday weekend.

Fortunately I've managed to neatly sidestep any Bank Holiday commitments. Technically this is called 'hiding'. At least I won't have to suffer the life-affirming travel thrills endured by thousands of other sullen adults and a plague of rabid children exhibiting all the charm of runny nosed rottweilers on heat. It's still far too hot to be writing reviews, or anything else. Nevertheless, on with the show.

EVOLUTION IN REVERSE

Where can you get this week's and last week's books from? (If you happen to be motivated that way). Well, I'll leave that as an exercise for the reader.

Did I really just say that? You know, whenever I see an author use that line I always have an uncontrollable urge to reach for a high powered rifle. It's appallingly lazy, perverse and plain arrogant. But in the case of the two books I've covered I think it's justified (besides, see the links and ISBN numbers).

So order them from Amazon, or if you prefer - upset the snotty so-and-so in your local bookshop by putting some custom their way. Equally, use your local library. If you can ignore the clatter of computer keyboards and the din of kids hyped on junk food administered by vacant parents using the whole bloody place as a free creche.

I remember the good old days when Libraries were in beautiful buildings with cathedral-like atmospheres, and were operated by fearsome Librarians with looks that the Medusa would've shrunk from. Then the only noise heard was the odd tramp barking and wheezing in a dark corner, because it was too cold for the poor bugger outside (remember winters?).

But the book Martin, the book. Okay, the book then. What we have this week is another title concerning the venerable Red Hat, the King-Of-Linux-Branding. Being Linux of course, and a computer book to boot (groan), it comes with the actual OS the title claims to get you up to speed on. Try that with Windows.

FUNKY FEDORA

TITLE: RED HAT LINUX B FOR DUMMIES
PUBLISHER: WILEY PUBLISHING
ISBN: 0764516817
PRICE: FAR TOO MUCH, PROBABLY
(AROUND £22.50 LIST. OUCH)
LINK: HTTP://WWW.DUMMIES.COM
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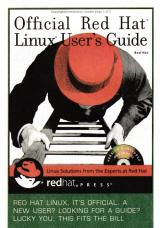
When it comes to this title "official headgear must be worn at all times". This is really the closest thing you're going to get to an official guide outside of boxed sets (something Red Hat no longer intend to pursue), and such boxed manuals invariably concentrate on installation setups and the blindingly obvious for the most part. As does the following title of course, but only in part.

Like last week's "Dummies" book it has a nice emphasis on 'getting things done'. This official Red Hat title has a much cleaner presentation though and seems less chaotic in its whole approach. Style wise it's a world away from the "Dummies" title. It clearly has no truck with the "Idiot's Guide" books either, or "Complete Idiot's" guides, if you want to be anal about it.

The presentation and style of this title, even though aimed at a beginner, is of a professional, no-nonsense approach with a little pretension thrown in for good measure.

Other books in the Red Hat Press series, cover the 'advanced' stuff, and if this title is anything to go by should be well worth exploring. In some ways 'Official Red Hat Linux User's Guide' is eerily reminiscent of a verbose, and far more useful version, of those old 'operating guides' that used to ship with Amiga and Apple hardware. You know the kind. A good number of pages with screenshots and lots of white space explaining very simple procedures. This flavour perhaps comes from the book being compiled by "Red Hat's own documentation team".

On the other hand a chapter like "Shell Prompt Basics" is one of the best introductions to controlling Linux via text commands that I've ever read. In general





similar ground to the Dummy book is covered, albeit in a sober, urbane, and frankly dull style. Happily, it is free of the psychotic "humour" which makes you think the Dummy titles are wrapped in a shade of jaundice rather than yellow.

What's covered? Identifying system requirements, the usual install rigmarole, setting up and configuring a network. A chapter on OpenOffice.org (strictly

speaking that is now its name, not just its web site). Naturally the GNOME desktop receives the bulk of the GUI coverage. To its credit KDE and its applications are touched upon, unlike the Dummy book.

Good coverage on using Mozilla and the GIMP, etc. Even though such walk-throughs will seem blindingly obvious to many, it's easy to forget how lost you can feel when you first start tinkering with Linux, so you can hardly fault the book for being so painstakingly simple in places.

The two CDs included are Red Hat Linux 8 "Publisher's Edition". With these, the book itself, an open mind (and a good chunk of time) you're set to go. Just leave that Windows mind-set at home if you embark on this journey. You'll have much more fun.

As mentioned there are other titles in the Red Hat Press range. If they are as good as this one they should be well worth a read. Be warned that this title is really aimed at beginners or at least pretty new users. Thanks to its "Additional References" and the odd "Appendix" entry you can be sure that even experienced Linux users will pick the odd nugget up.

Linux is like that, if you're that way inclined the learning never really stops.

Equally feel free to be lazy, no one says you have to learn it all. This point needs

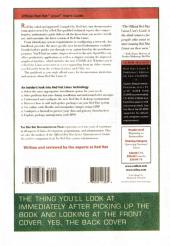
emphasising as the vast edifice of Linux knowledge is there on a need to know basis. Not everyone wants or needs to be boasting about the new route they've just climbed. Even Linux is just a tool.

In conclusion this is a recommended title, whether you're exploring version 8 or 9 of Red Hat. Those new to Linux can use it to flatten that initially intimidating learning curve.

Much of what I said last week applies to this title too. Clear, task based outlines, only more screenshots this time around. For this price they really should've been in colour. On a mundane level it's a nice book to fondle! With a semi-swanky (I said swanky) art paper cover. Even with the-actual-OS-with-the-book, the price is still inflated. The pricing of most computer books is pretty sick really.

I look forward to reviewing more Linux goodies. But I wouldn't hold your breath. My record for timely reviews has been sepalling recently that it's unlikely I'll be sent anything for review ever again.

Still, at least the house is tidy again (what am I saying, I've started, and I can now see the carpet in places). Who knows, next month I may get around to reviewing a SuSE Linux 6.4 boxed set or a Linux Mandrake 5.3 CD that I found wrapped in an ominous pile of crumbling bandages.



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RETRO MART

More news from the Retro scene, rounded up by Shaun Bebbington.

SINCLAIR NEWS

NORWICH TO HOST SHOW

On November 1st 2003, Tarquin Mills is to host his first Sincliar ZX and SAM Coupe show in the city of Norwich. He is providing admission free to all, and would like to make the event a regular one in the retro calendar. The show will start at 10am through to 4pm and will be held at the Scout hut in Rowington Road. Tarquin is looking for volunteers and exhibitors, so check out the home page at http://homepage.ntlworld.com/speccyverse/orsam.htm

■ NEW SPECTRUM ADVENTURE FROM ZXF

Colin Woodcock has published his own adventure game Blink for the ZX Spectrum, which is available to play via a Java emulator on his home page http://www.zxf.cib.net. or if you prefer to use a real Spectrum, then it is also available for a mere £1.99p + 99p postage costs. In releasing this game, Colin has set up the software label ZXIF, which is to release other interactive fiction titles (that's text and graphical adventures to you and I). Whilst you're visiting the ZXF home page, don't forget to check out the latest issue of ZXF. It's a great read, but I'm still having problems with printing it correctly, as I can't seem to get the pages to fold properly.

■ MORE SPECTRUM MODS

Ever wanted to use a 3.5" on a Spectrum +3? Or perhaps add a composite video out? Well, with a little technical knowledge, the ZX-Zone will tell you how. The site (at http://www.secarica.ro/html/zx_zone.html) also contains information about the CP/M Plus operating system, as well as



THE IDE64 V3.1 HARD DISK DRIVE AND CD-ROM CONTROLLER FOR THE COMMODORE 64

downloads and plenty of other useful pages pertaining to the Spectrum (+3 mostly).

COMMODORE NEWS

■ NEW IDE-DOS RELEASED

The IDE64 is currently the fastest storage device available for the C64, and most people will be happy with the way it works already, however the Singular Crew have released into the public domain v0.9x (beta), which has improved support for JiffyDOS, speeded up the load/save routines to over 70Kbps in many cases, and tweaked many of the other features such as the built-in monitor. Check out the home pages at http://www.volny.cz/dundera/,

http://www.volny.cz/dundera/, http://singularcrew.hu/ and the FTP site at ftp://c64.rulez.org/pub/c64 /IDE64/source/

RETRO REPLAY RE-LAUNCHED

The popular clone of the Action Replay cartridge, the Retro Replay, is now to return

to production from mid-September. The problem has been that mass production does not work with most hardware for retro machines, but recently Jens Schonfeld has received enough support to ensure the device's survival. Jens is also launching a 10MBit-networking card for the Retro Replay, which will be initially supported by the operating system Contiki. More information is available from http://mc64.org/ and http://www.dunkels.com/adam/contiki/for Contiki

RETRO OPINIONS

As I'm writing this piece. I'm looking forward to attending the Back in Time live event in Brighton. With news of the Spectrum and Sam show announced above, and news of other shows that have reached me, it feels that the retro community is gradually becoming more and more lively. And once again I'm anticipating one or two commercial outfits to muscle in and drain what little profits there are. This is how the C64 community sees Ironstone Partners and Tulip Computers, with a knee-jerk reaction of "who do they think that are?" As for their big plans, we are still waiting, but if implemented in the right way then they could provide a model for others to follow on other platforms.

The retro market is still delicately balanced. There are areas of profitability, which are usually filled by dedicated companies and backed by user groups, but other than rare items and collectibles usually traded over eBay, there is yet to be enough people who are interested enough to spend their hard earned cash. At the moment, it feels like there are bigger things to come, but many including myself like things as they are now, and will one day look back and see this time as a golden age for our beloved machines. Let's hope commercialisation doesn't ruin that.

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SYSTEM_BUILDER

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, Louis Turfrey decided that it was time he released the moths from his wallet.



For a long time now, I have been running my hard disk at the edge of its capacity.

Therefore, my system has been running at well below its potential performance threshold. Therefore, for quite a while now, I have been looking for a low cost, low performance means by which I could back up a lot of data.

The problem has been that although hard disks are offering better value for money that ever before, the large format ones have been well out of my financial range for quite a while. Let's face it, 120 gigabyte hard disks are still selling for around £70 plus the postage.

So imagine my surprise when, cruising through Ebuyer, I discovered the Samsung SV1204H hard disk. A full 120 Gigabytes of unformatted space, running at 5400 RPM with an access time of approximately 8.9 m/s, for only £59 plus postage. I thought this was a mistake, because as well as the lower price, there was a three-year warranty included as standard. Granted this warranty is probably with Samsung and not the supplier, but it builds confidence in the drive.





Never one to make a snap decision on the performance and reliability of a PC component, I decided to check around the internet a little bit - just to be cautious. The drive is not that new, having been around since at least last September (2002), and as such there was quite a bit of useful information to be found. Toms Hardware ran a full review on the drive last September, which can be found at the following link:

http://www.tomshardware.com/storage/20020920/index.html.

The consensus was that the drive was incredibly quiet, produced a low temperature output, and performed adequately. The low volume and temperatures are what I need, (I work in a cupboard), and the performance isn't needed, as I would only be backing up documents, images and a few home made videos. This sounded like the best deal that I had come across in a while and so I made the jump and ordered it.

Here it is worth mentioning that you might want to read the article over at Toms Hardware, as it gives a list of the performance specifications for the unit.

Okay, at 5400 RPM, it isn't going to break



any world speed records, but even I was surprised how nimble it was once it had started up.

Toms Hardware noted that it was capable of a maximum throughput of 39600 KB/s, which is no mean feat for a 5400-RPM disk using the ATA 100 interface. By using an ATA133 connection, on an ASUS A7V8X-X with PC2700 DDR, Windows XP Pro, three 80 Gigabyte IBM hard drives, and an AMD XP2400+ CPU, I was able to get a performance figure of 42330 KB/s from SiSoft Sandra. This impressed me immensely, and the quiet operation of this unit has continued to impress me as time has gone by.

Therefore, for the moment, this is going to drop into my recommended folder, and I will give constant updates on how it copes with my growing file load as time goes by.

AND NOW, THE ENCORE

As usual, if you have any questions or comments on this column, then please feel free to contact me at the following Email address louis@micromart.co.uk

Just in case any of you wondered why a system builder and if writer, would want an extra 120 gigabytes of storage space, why not do a search of my name on Google - just for fun and have a laugh at my expense.

OVERCLOCKING

This month Mark Pickavance finds himself entranced by CORSAIR, the uncrowned kings of high performance memory.

Last month I reviewed OCZ Gold 3700DDR. By way of a comparison this month I bring you CORSAIR XMS TWINX 4000DDR. A couple of weeks ago CORSAIR very kindly invited me to a seminar they were holding for RAM distributors and old hacks, like my good self. The 'Meet the RAM Guy' seminar centred around a presentation by Robert Pearce, Application Specialist with Corsain Memory, in which he discussed future memory products for both the Intel and AMD platforms.

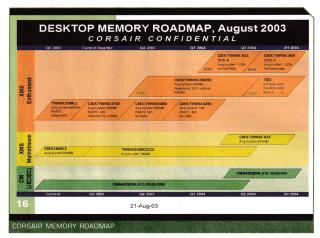
I found the talk an informative insight into a company with a very high reputation amongst the overclocking community in general. CORSAIR employs just 120 people in a single plant where over 6,000 DIMMS a day are made and individually tested. The 'cottage industry' nature of this operation belies a strict product control and evaluation cycle, which has put CORSAIR at the top of the memory food chain.

Having just received a pair of 4000DDR modules from them, I was amazed to discover that their latest roadmap included 4250DDR, 'within a month or so'.

The CORSAIR memory roadmap also contained a few other interesting things ofnote, so I got permission to reproduce it for you here.

As you can see the INTEL RAM future has already been defined as DDR II, which CORSAIR felt was unjustified by the performance requirements. They see the primary reason for using DDR II is to separate its product line from AMD, something most people agreed with.

Robert Pearce said, 'we haven't finished with what can be done with DDR, there's plenty of bandwidth left so DDR II isn't really needed just yet'. Whatever INTEL chooses then CORSAIR will very likely to produce it, as they have always previously done. Requirements for the next generation of AMD products seemed less



certain. From the information CORSAIR gave me it seems AMD are going to do something that won't exactly light any fires with the overclocking world.

The requested memory for the Athlon 64 is DDR, so good so far. But annoyingly its registered DDR, which effectively means that it cannot be overclocked! CORSAIR sees this as a major mistake on AMD's part, and I can't help but agree with them. Unless the Athlon 64 has significant overclocking potential in other areas, or someone does a raw DDR or DDR II chipset for the Athlon 64 then it isn't going to find any favour with enthusiasts. Considering the track record of support AMD has from overclockers in general, this is something of a snub. And a decision AMD might well regret down the line. As you might imagine this 'nugget' caused something of a stir, and a good deal of discussion about INTEL vs. AMD. Enough about the future, I'm sure most people want to know what the DDR4000's like are capable of right now!

CORSAIR TWINX 1GB DDR 4000

Like many high performance packages this RAM is supplied as a matched memory pair. They are made together, ship together and run together.

The XMS 4000 are attractively styled with black heat spreaders. Not as sexy as the gold OCZ DIMMs, but very nice all the same. CORSAIR tells me that the spreaders are just for show, as they only reduce temperature by a couple of degrees and have zero effect on performance. They use them more to protect the chips when they are being handled after production.

These TwinX packs come with two identical DIMMS in 265MB, 512MB or 1GB sizes. Mine are 512Mb sticks, giving a total of 1GB, but size isn't everything -

Specialists

speed is. Having been impressed by 3700DDR, I shuddered at exactly what 4000DDR might be capable of.

Recently I've come to a disturbing conclusion about AMD motherboards and high performance RAM. The upshot is that it doesn't exploit it in the manner that INTEL hardware can. While numbers with AMD hardware using both an nForce and VIA chipset motherboard are impressive. that's only when compared with other AMD boards, Compared with INTEL 865PE or 875 boards the dual channel aspects appear totally submerged by other issues. They also seem more stable when you try to approach the point at which the memory shows its real potential. It was for this reason that I chose a P4 motherboard, the AOPEN AX4SPE MAX, to use for testing. I decided that it was a little excessive punting straight for the 500MHz setting. I mean that's nuts, isn't it?

Using documentation which CORSAIR provided I noticed that it was possible to try two totally different approaches to cranking this RAM. In the first method you set the memory a 3-4-4-8 and see how far the front side bus will go. Alternatively you set it to 400MHz and see how low the latency can get by using aggressive settings. To answer the second part first, at 400MHz this memory will function at 2-3-2-5 with complete stability on both AMD and INTEL hardware.

To aid in this overclocking test I borrowed an unlocked the P4c 3.0GHz (800MHz), which could be easily cranked using the AOpen motherboard. The standard voltage setting for this DIMM is 2.7v, which took memory all the way to 500MHz. Going beyond that required a bit more juice. Increasing to 3v made the most improvement in stability, more than that appeared to do nothing.

The final scores on the doors? Well at 3v these DIMMS will do 532MHz easily, in fact I brought the latency settings down a bit and it still worked! This voltage could reduce the life of the RAM considerably, so you might want to be more conservative.

This was running the FSB at 266MHz, which translates into 1066MHz when QUAD pumped, and returned SiSoft Sandra 2003 scores around the 6050 mark for both Integer and Float. Those are bia, bia numbers.



I'm still working on a full set of results which I'll post next month, so you can see high latency vs. high MHz. The best thing about this RAM isn't that it goes faster than 500MHz. No, it's that it will also run at 400MHz with the latency nailed to the floor. Because these chips have the ability for such a massive range or performance you can tune them to your particular situation, which is perfect for overclocking. Annovingly for AMD enthusiasts you really need an 800MHz P4 rig (i865 or i875) to exploit

the potential here. While my Athlon XP nForce Ultra 400 worked in dual channel mode, it made very little difference to the overall system performance. In the P4's bandwidth jumped dramatically between single and dual results. Another issue for AMD boards was the DDR voltage maxed out at 2.6v leaving me with a top speed of 488MHz, and no way to improve that. This is by far the quickest memory I've seen so far, there's only one problem. It's the price tag of £330 a gigabyte for these babies.

INTEL AND OVERCLOCKING?

Here's a quiz. Who said, 'Operating a processor faster than it was designed (overclocking) can cause permanent damage to the processor, and possibly other system components including the motherboard. '?

the motherboard, F If you said, 'Intel' then well done! These words came directly from their website.

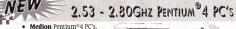
Ok, a tougher one. Who said, This easy-to-use console dynamically displays temperatures, speed, and usage percentages, allowing you to verify system stability and check performance

gains without rebooting into the BIOS'?
Err, strangely Intel again. This time talking about the new overclocking software they are about to release called 'Intel Desktop Control Centre'. So having taken the official view that Overclocking is a 'bad' thing it appears to have softened that position to it's only 'good' when we say it is. New software, new market, new Intel. If you are interested then you can find out all' about Desktop Control Centre here: http://www.intel.com/design/motherbd/software/dcc/index.htm



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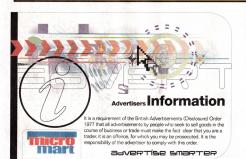
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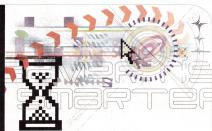
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- A print out of any web site information
- Details of charges for postage and packing delivery times.

Information the seller must give you before you order - prior information

The supplier must give you the following information in a clear, understandable way:

- Their name and (if you have to pay in advance) their address
- The main characteristics of the goods or services
- The price, including VAT and any other taxes
- The cost of delivery (if there is one)
- ✓ How long the offer or the price will remain valid
- How you can pay
- The delivery arrangements (normally within 30 days unless you agree otherwise)
- That you have a right to cancel the order
- The minimum period you are tied into a contract for an ongoing service (some mobile phone contacts, for example, often insist on a one-year minimum agreement)
- If they are using premium rate telephone, fax or internet charges
- That they will supply you with a substitute if what you have ordered isn't available. If they do this, you should be told that they would meet the cost of returning the goods, if you decide that you do not want them.

IF THE TRADER GOES BUST

The bad news:

If a trader goes out of business and you haven't received your goods - but you've already paid for them - there is a risk you might lose your money, unless you paid by credit card.

NORMAL STATUTORY RIGHTS

If you receive faulty goods

- If there is something wrong with what you buy, tell the supplier as soon as possible. Do this via e-mail or phone and let them know why you are complaining.
- Keep a written note of a phone conversation
- Keep a copy of any e-mail exchange.

Please note that:

- If you sign an acceptance note when you receive the goods, this does not mean you have signed away your right to reject them.
- Allowing the seller to try to put faulty goods right also does not affect your rights. If the repair fails you still have the right to reject the goods.
- You should not be charged anything, including the cost of returnin goods, if they are faulty.

If you are not happy with the service:

If you're buying a service, it should be carried out:

- With reasonable care and skill
- within a reasonable time particularly if you have not agreed a completion date.

CALL OUR SALES HOTLINE Weekdays 9:30am-7.00pm & Saturday 10.00am - 6.00pm

Modula EL Series

- On-Board VGA, Sound, 56.6 Fax/Modem & 10/100 Lan

 - 128Mb DDR Ram 3.5" Floppy Disk Drive 40Gb Hard Disk Drive ATX Midi Tower Case

Keyboard, Mouse & Speakers 52x CD-Rom Drive 1 Year Collect & Return Warranty

	exc.VAT	inc.VAT
AMD Duron 1300Mhz	£199.00	£233.83
AMD Athlon XP2200+	£225.00	£264.38
AMD Athlon XP2400+	£235.00	£276.13
Intel Celeron 2200Mhz	£229.00	£269.08
Intel Celeron 2400Mhz	£239.00	£280.83
Intel Pentium4 2400Mhz	£299.00	£351.33
Intel Pentium4 2600Mhz	£319.00	£374.83

Modula ML Series

256Mb DDR Ram 40Gb 7200rpm Hard Drive GeForce4 64Mb Graphics Card 17" SVGA Colour Monitor

17 SVSA Colloct Monitor 3.5" Floppy Drive 52x CD Rewriter & Software 56K PCI Hardware Fax/Modem 24-bit Stereo Sound 0n-Board 10/100 Lan 1 Year Collect & Return Warranty

AMD Duron 1300Mhz AMD Athlon XP2200+ AMD Athlon XP2400+ AMD Athlon XP2600+ Intel Celeron 2200Mhz Intel Pentium4 2400Mhz

Intel Pentium4 2800Mhz



£305.00 £358.38 £329.00 £386.58 £345.00 £405.38 £385.00 £452.38 £339.00 £398.33 £409.00 £480.58 £489.00 £574.58

Modula Pro Series

256Mb DDR Ram

40Gb 7200rpm Hard Drive 16x DVD (48x CD)

Tox DVD (48X CD) 52X CD Rewriter inc.S/W Keyboard,Mouse & Speakers GeForce4 64Mb Graphics ATX Super Midi Tower Case

56k Hardware Fax.Modem 3.5" Floppy Disk Drive 350 Watt Power Supply 0n-Board 10/100 Lan 17" .25mm Naturally Flat

Screen Monitor 1 Year Collect & Return

	ex
Intel Pentium4 2400Mhz	£
Intel Pentium4 2800Mhz	£
Intel Pentium4 3000Mhz	26
AMD Athlon XP2200+	£4
AMD Athlon XP2400+	£
AMD Athlon XP2600+	24
AMD Athlon XP2800+	£

17" Flat Screen to 15.1" TFT

c.VAT inc.VAT 189.00 £574.58 559.00 £656.83 649.00 £762.58 £480.58 109 00 £492.33 419.00 459.00 £539.33 509.00 £598.08

Modula Ultra Series



Available in Black or White

56Mb DDR Ram 80Gb 7200rpm Hard Drive 16x DVD (48x CD-Rom) 52x CD Rewriter & Software GeForce4 Ti4200 128Mb Graphics Card (8x AGP) 15.1" NEC TFT Flat Panel

3.5" Floppy Disk Drive Keyboard, Mouse & Speakers 56k Hardware Fax/Modem 24-bit Stereo Sound 1 Year Collect & Return Warranty

AMD Athlon XP2400+ AMD Athlon XP2600+ AMD Athlon XP2800+ AMD Athlon XP3000+ Intel Pentium4 2.6Ghz Intel Pentium4 2.8Ghz Intel Pentium4 3.0Ghz exc.VAT inc.VAT £609.00 £715.58 £639.00 £750.83 £675.00 £793.13 £719.00 £844.83 £679.00 £797.83 £735.00 £863.63 £819.00 £962.33

Optional Microsoft Software

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Windows	Millenium	
Windows	2000 Pro	
Windows	XP Home Ed	
Windows	XP Pro Ed	
Office XP	Pro inc.Publisher	
Office XP	Small Bus. Ed.	
Office XP	Academic	
		_

exc.VAT inc.VAT £69.00 £81.08 £75.00 £88.13 £109.00 £128.08 £69.00 £81.08 £109.00 £128.08 £239.00 £280.83 £159.00 £186.83 £89.00 £104.58

Popular Upgrade Options

Up to 256Mb Ram (EL Series)	£8.00	£9.40
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15" to 15.1" TFT Flat Panel	£134.00	£157.45

Add a Videologic ZXR-200 Speaker System to your Modula PC system for only* £26.00 exc. VAT

£30.55 inc. VAT

*Only applicable when purchased with a new Modula PC system



£109.00 £128.08

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- AMD Athlon XP2000+ Processo 256Mb Ram (expandable to 1Gb)
- CD-RW/DVD Combo Drive
 20Gb Hard Disk Drive
- 14" TFT Display 56k Modem & 10/100 Lan
- Windows XP Home Edition 2 Years Collect & Return W
- £579.00 exc.VAT £680.33 inc.VAT
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EVO

NX9005

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- CD-RW/DVD Combo Drive
- 120Gb Hard Disk Drive
 17" SXGA TFT Display
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 Windows XP Home Edition
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 - £1299.00 exc.VAT £1526.33 inc.VAT

acer Aspire 1315LC



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 CD-RW/DVD Combo Drive 40Gb Hard Disk Drive
- 15" TFT Display 56k Modem & 10/100 Lan
- Windows XP Home Edition
 2 Years Collect & Return Warranty
 - £649.00 exc.VAT
 - £762.58 inc.VAT

acei Travelmate 230XC



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- 14" TFT Display 56k Modem & 10/100 Lan
- Windows XP Pro Edition 2 Years Collect & Return Warranty
 - £659.00 exc.VAT £774.33 inc.VAT

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- Intel Celeron 2000 Processor 256Mb Ram (expandable to 1Gb) CD-RW/DVD Combo Drive
- 30Gb Hard Disk Drive 15" TFT Display 56k Modem & 10/100 Lan Windows XP Pro Edition
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 - £669.00 exc.VAT £786.07 inc.VAT

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- 20Gb Hard Disk Drive
- 14" TFT Display
 56k Modem & 10/100 Lan
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- 30Gb Hard Disk Drive
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 Windows XP Home Edition
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RL SUPPLIES LTD



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AMD Opteron 242 Retail Box with Heatsink/Fan			



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Cooler Master Skt.A (Speed Adjustable, to 2800+	£9.95	£11.6
Akasa Skt.A with Blue LED's (Up to XP2800+)	£11.95	£14.0
Pentium4 478-pin (Copper Base.up to 3.5Ghz)	£8.95	£10.5
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Black Sagittarius - Clear Perspex Front - 400W		
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56.6K PCI Hardware Fax/Modern (Connexant)	£8.90	£10.45
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56.6K External USB Fax/Modem	£16.95	£19.91
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40Gb 5400rpm UDMA100 Hard Disk Drive	£39.95	£46.94
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60Gb 7200rpm UDMA100 Hard Disk Drive		
80Gb 7200rpm UDMA100 Hard Disk Drive		
120Gb 5400rpm UDMA100 Hard Disk Drive		
120Gb 7200rpm UDMA100 Hard Disk Drive	£86.95	£78.67
160Gb 7200rpm UDMA100 Hard Disk Drive	£87.00 .	£102.23
200Gb 7200rpm UDMA100 Hard Disk Drive		
250Gb 7200rpm UDMA100 Hard Disk Drive		
40Gb 7200rpm Hard Disk Drive, 8Mb Buffer		
60Gb 7200rpm Hard Disk Drive, 8Mb Buffer	£54.95 .	£64.57

			Type		Snd		ATA	Firewire	VGA	Sp	Slot	Ver.	VAT	VAT
AMD Duron/Athlon Motherboards			**		15									
Asrock K7VT2	VIA KT266A	266	DDR/SDR	2/2	Y	Υ	N	N	N	4x	5	2.0	£29.95	£35.19
Asrock K7VM2	VIA KM266	266	DDR/SDR	2/2	Y	Y	N.	N	Y	4x	3	2.0	£33.95	£39.89
Asrock K7S8X	SIS746FX	333		3	Y	Y	N	N	N	8x	6	2.0	£32.95	£38.72
Asus A7N8X Deluxe	nForce2	333		3	Y	Y(2)	Y	Y	N	8x	5	2.0	£81.50	£95.76
Asus A7V8X/GLAN/1394/SATA		333			Ÿ	1 Gio		Ý	N	8x	6	2.0	£76.95	£90.42
Asus A7V8X-X		333	DDR400	3	Ý	Y	N	N	N	8x	6	2.0	£41.95	£49.29
Abit KD7		333	DDR400	4	Y	N .	N	N	N	8x	6	2.0	\$46.95	£55.17
				4	Y	IN .								
Abit KD7-Raid		333		4	Y	N	N	N	N	8x	6	2.0	£55.00	£64.63
Abit AT7 Max2-Raid	VIA KT400	333		4	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	8x	5	2.0	£88.00	£103.40
Elite K7S6A	SiS745	266		3	Y	Y	N	N	N	4x	5	1.1	£28.00	£32.90
Gigabyte GA-7DXE	AMD 760	266		3	Υ .	N	N	N	N	4x	5	1.1	£37.95	£44.59
Gigabyte GA-7VA	VIA KT400	333		3	Y	N	N	N	N	8x	5	2.0	£47.95	£56.34
Gigabyte GA-7VAX-A	VIA KT400A	333	DDR400	3	Y	N	N	N	N	8x	5	2.0	£54.95	£64.57
Gigabyte GA-7VAXP	VIA KT400	333	DDR400	3	Υ	Υ	N	Y	N	8x	5	2.0	£71.95	£84.54
Gigabyte GA-7VAXP Ultra	VIA KT400	333	DDR400	3	V 1	Y	Y	Y	N	8x	5	2.0	£76.95	£90.42
		266	DDR266	2	Ý	Y	N	N	Y	4x	3	2.0	£44.95	£52.82
Microstar K7N2 Delta-L	nForce2	400	DDR400	3	Y	Y	N	N	N	8x	5	2.0	£56.95	£66.92
Microstar K7N2 Delta-ILSR		400		3	Ÿ	Ý	Y	Ÿ	N	8x	5	2.0	£76.50	£89.89
Microstar KM2M Combo-L	VIA KM266	266	DDR/SDR	2/2	Ý	Ÿ	N	N	Y	4x	3	2.0	£39.95	£46.94
Microstar KT2 Combo-L		266	DDR/SDR		Y	Y	N	N	N	4x	6	2.0	£33.95	£39.89
					Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		5	2.0		
	nForce2	333				Y.				8x			£89.95	£105.69
Microstar K7N2G-L		333	DDR400		Υ	Y	N	N	Υ	8x	5	2.0	£69.95	£82.19
Tyan Tiger S2466N-Dual Athlon MP	AMD760MPX	266	DDR266	4	N .	Υ	N	N	N	4x	6	1.1	£158.00	£185.65
AMD Opteron Motherboards	6.67		1		200									
Microstar K8D-Master-F (Dual CPU)		400	DDR400	6	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	8x	5	2.0	£319.00	£374.83
Intel Pentium 4	Mac St.													
Motherboards			1		100									100
Asrock P4I45D	Intel 845D	533	DDR/SDR	2/2	Y	Y	N	N	N	4x	5	2.0	£34.95	€41.07
Asrock GE Pro-HT (Hyperthreading)		533	DDR/SDR	2/2	Ý	Ý	N	N	Ÿ	4x	3	2.0	£31.95	£37.54
Asus P4S8X-X/Lan	SiS648+963	533			Ý	Ý	N	N	N	8x	6	2.0	£44.00	£51.70
Asus P4G8X Deluxe	Intel E7205	533	DDR266		Ý	1Gia	Y	Ϋ́	N	8x	5	2.0	£106.95	£125.67
Asus P4PE/GL/F/SATA/GD	Intel 845PE	533				1Gig		Ý	N	8x	6	2.0		£82.19
Asus P4S533-X				4	Y	Y	1.	N			6	2.0	£69.95	
Asus P45533-A Asus P4T533-C	SiS645DX	533 533	DDR333		Y		N		N	4x		2.0	£39.95	£46.94
			RDRAM	2	Y	N_	N	N	N	4x	5	2.0	£79.95	£93.94
Gigabyte GA-8KNXP Ultra		800			Y	1Gig	Y	N	N	8x	5	2.0	£236.95	£278.42
Gigabyte GA-8KNXP		800	DDR400		Υ	1Gig	Y	Y	N	8x	5	2.0	£139.95	£164.44
Gigabyte GA-8IK1100		800			Υ	Y	Y	Υ .	N	8x	5	2.0	£94.00	£110.45
Gigabyte GA-8PENXP		800	DDR400	6	Υ.	1Gig	Y	Y	N	8x	5	2.0	£124.95	£146.82
Gigabyte GA-8IG1000	Intel 865G	800	DDR400		Y	N	Y	N	Y	8x	5	2.0	£48.95	£57.52
Gigabyte GA-8IG1000 Pro	Intel 865G	800	DDR400	4	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	8x	5	2.0	£83.95	£98.64
Gigabyte GA-8IP900		533	DDR333	4	Ÿ	N	Y	N	N	8x	5	2.0	£call	£call
Gigabyte GA-8INXP		533	DDR266		Ÿ	Y	Ý	N	N	8x	5	2.0	£131.95	£155.04
Gigabyte GA-SINXP1394	SiS655+963	533	DDR400	4		1Gia		Y	N	8x	5	2.0	£104.95	£123.32
Gigabyte GA-8SQ800		533	DDR400		Ý	N	N	ly.	N	8x	5	2.0	£58.95	£69.27
Gigabyte GA-8SQ800 Ultra		533	DDR400		Ϋ́	Y	Y	Y			5	2.0		
	515655+963	533			Y .	Ϋ́Υ			N	8x	5	2.0	£83.95	£98.64
Gigabyte GA-8ST800-L		533					N	N	N	4x	5	2.0	£44.50	£52.29
Gigabyte GA-8SIMLH-P		533		2	Y	Υ	N	N	Υ	4x	3	2.0	£48.95	£57.52
Microstar 6533XG-L	SiS651+962L	533	DDR333				N	N	Y	4x	3	2.0	£44.50	£52.29
Microstar 645 Combo-L		533	DDR/SDR	2/2	Y	Y	N	N	N	4x	6	2.0	£39.95	£46.94
Microstar 845PE Max3-SR	Intel 845PE	800		3	Y	1 Gig	Y	Y	N	8x	6	2.0	£71.95	£84.54
Microstar 875P Neo-FIS2R	Intel 875P	800	DDR400			1 Gia		lý .	N	8x	5	2.0		£151.52

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1900 7 2000 r Herd Disk Dine, 48 b Dalfe				
1900 7 2000 r Herd Disk Dine, 48 b Dalfe	120Gb 7200rpm Hard Disk Drive, 8Mb Buffer	£73.95	£86.89	
2003 720/pm Hed Disk One, 84b Duller _ 141.55_165 6 5005 720/pm Hed Disk One, 84b Duller _ 1685 5_222 6 5005 720/pm Hed Disk One, 84b Duller _ 1685 5_222 6 5005 Sereil AH- Hed Tohe, 720/pm, 84b Duller (75.65_5) 8 5005 Sereil AH- Div 720/pm, 84b Duller (75.65_5) 8 5005 Sereil AH- Div 720/pm, 84b Duller (75.65_5) 8 5005 Sereil AH- Div 720/pm, 84b Duller (75.65_5) 8 5005 Sereil AH- Div 720/pm, 84b Duller (75.65_5) 8 5005 Sereil AH- Div 720/pm, 84b Duller (75.65_5) 8 5005 Sereil AH- Div 720/pm, 84b Duller (75.65_5) 8 5005 Sereil AH- Div 720/pm, 84b Duller (75.65_5) 8 5005 Sereil BH SEP Dive Fix Chimere _ 105.65_5 8 5006 Sereil BH SEP Dive Fix Chimere _ 105.65_5 8 5006 Sereil BH SEP Dive Fix Chimere _ 105.65_5 8 5006 Sereil BH SEP Dive Fix Chimere _ 105.65_5 8 5006 Sereil BH SEP Dive Fix Chimere _ 105.65_5 8 5006 Sereil BH SEP Dive Fix Chimere _ 105.65_5 8 5006 Diverse USE 2D Pive Fix Chi	160Gb 7200rpm Hard Disk Drive, 8Mb Buffer	£106.95	£125.67	
2500 7000m Hed Dis One, 849 Buller 1895. 5. 229 600 Serui Alf AHD Poi, 200m; Alb Gulfer 1955. 590, 1000 Serui Alf AHD 700mm Alb Dufer 1955. 590, 2000 Serui Alf AHD 700mm Alb Dufer 1955. 590, 500 Serui Alf AHD 700mm Alb Dufer 1955. 590, 500 Serui Alf AHD 1000mm Alb Dufer 1955. 590, 500 Serui Alf AHD 1000mm Alb Dufer 1950. 1950. 1950 Serui AHD 1950 Serui AHD Serui AH	200Gb 7200rpm Hard Disk Drive, 8Mb Buffer	£141.95	£166.79	
80% Serial/AR-hed Dive, 200mm, 80b Buffer (1915. 90.45 Serial AR-hed Divery 200mm, 80b Buffer (1915. 90.45 Serial AR-hD (200mm) 90b Buffer (1915. 90.45 Seri	250Gb 7200rpm Hard Disk Drive, 8Mb Buffer	£188.95	£222.02	
1200S serial ARH DOJ. 200mm, Mib Enther (3455 593				
25005 Serial ARI-HDD, 7200pm, 8Mb Enthr. 25985 5, 2855. 05 7860 SARI HOU 2000pm, 8Mb Enthr. 25985 5, 2855. Serial ARI-HDD Reft House Provin August Calle. 1030 4, 2855. Serial ARI-HDD Reft House Provin August Calle. 1030 4, 2855. Serial ARI-HDD Reft HDD Cashy (JUMN 103) 500 500 500 500 500 500 500 500 500 50	120Gh Serial ATA HDD 7200mm 8Mh Buffer	684.95	699.82	
\(\text{MO 3T 65.0 SATA HCD \text{1000 t000 pm 846 b after \text{.9850.0 L155} \) \(\text{51.0 t000 pm 846 b after \text{.9850.0 L155} \) \(.9850.0 sc) \text{.9850.0 sc) \text{.9950.0	250Gh Serial ATA HDD 7200mm 8Mh Buffer	£259.95	£305.44	
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Liard, HR-M Remotable (HD Clasty) (LDMA (15)(19)00. Economy Remotable (HD Clasty) (LDMA (15)(19)00. 505. 1000h Dream (JD ZP) Drive in CShimere. 500. 1000h Dream (JD ZP) Drive in CShimere. 500. 1000h Dream (JD ZP) Drive in CShimere. 500. 1000h Dream (JD ZP) Drive in CShimere. 1005. 1005. 1006. 1006. 1007. 1006. 1007. 1006. 1007. 1006. 1007. 1006. 1007. 1006. 1007. 100				
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100h Dirental DE ZIP Dine in Schwee 800 9,22 500h Esterall SSZ P Dine in Schwee 83,05 8,13 5,61 500h Dirental DE ZIP Dine in Schwee 90 525 6,57 500h Esteral USE ZIP Dine in Schwee 95 5,77 700h Esteral USE ZIP Dine in Schwee 95 5,77 700h Esteral USE ZIP Dine in Schwee 95 5,117 700h Esteral USE ZIP Dine in Schwee 99 5,117 700h Esteral USE ZIP Dine in Schwee 90 5,117 700h Esteral USE ZIP Dine in Schwee 99 5,117 700h Esteral USE ZIP Dine in Schwee 90 6,100 70 70 70 700h Esteral USE ZIP Dine in Schwee 90 6,100 70	LairLi nino nellovalie nob caudy (oblina is	DILIBUU.	122.00	
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REGIONAL FOCUS

THIS ISSUE: WEST MIDLANDS

And so a very warm welcome to this, the second in our occasional series of Regional Focus pieces. For the Micro Mart team, this one is a little bit closer to home too, as we're looking this week at firms from the West Midlands area (after our jaunt down to the Tottenham Court Road in issue 762). The idea of these regional focuses is to look at specific parts of the country and, if you're in that area, give you an idea of what firms are trading close to you.

So the West Midlands then, which as well as having Micro Mart Towers slap bang in the centre of Birmingham, offers a veritable feast of computer companies spread right across the region. There's a really health mix too, with the prices of the big computer superstores being soundly walloped in some case by the vibrant and healthy independents who operate across the region.

Certainly, when putting this focus together, what we found on our travels was a number of active computer companies where we least expected to see them. It's all the more satisfying that we found some great deals too, and were suitably grateful that we'd left our credit cards in the office. Phew.

Anyway, across the next four pages, we'll be taking the chance to introduce you to some of the firms who we encountered, and we'll be telling you a bit about them too. As with our trip to the Tottenham Court Road, we really enjoyed our trip around the West Midlands, and we're now actively searching for the target destination for our next. regional focus. If there's somewhere that you'd like us to cover, then drop us a line to the usual address, or e-mail us at editorial@micromart.co.uk. And without further ado....





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IN FOCUS...OUTER ERDINGTON MICROS

A family business, set up in 1998,
Outer Endington Micros attracts a broad
selection of personal and business users to their
store. The firm pride themselves on stocking most PC related
components, and on the occasions where they don't, items can

Outer Erdington Micro's
The Option September 1997

normally be ordered in for next day delivery. Since 1999, they have also been members of the AMD reseller programme.

Customers keep returning to the company, often praising the speed at which Outer Erdington Micros are able to turn around repairs and upgrades to computers. Further attractions are the long opening hours, off road parking and the friendly staff that the company employ. As they say themselves on their website: "We do things a little different to most we don't just sell you something because we can. We give an opinion as to your need to buy that extra piece of kit."

ADDRESS	113 GRAVELLY HILL NORTH BIRMINGHAM B23 6BJ
WEBSITE	WWW.OEMICROS.CO.UK
TELEPHONE	0121-384-4007 0121-374-3644

IN FOCUS...PCDOK



PCDOK are suppliers and manufactures of high quality PC systems, and are located in Birmingham. They provide fast competitive repairs and upgrades.

Furthermore, their customers benefit from expert advice, quality assembly and upgradeable components. Other companies charge up to 300% on labour costs compared to them.

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specifications and quality of their custom manufactured PCs to the highest level. They ensure all their PC systems are fully future upgradeable, and their team is available to assist with any technical advice. Visit them online at www.pcdok.co.uk for the latest pricelists, products and special offers or call 0121 55 44 333 erangements. They also stock and supply CD/DVD duplicators, all the latest region one English and Asian DVD titles and low cost Printer Inks/CD/DVD media. Open 10.30-6.00pm Mon-Sat.

ADDRESS	123 HOLYHEAD ROAD BIRMINGHAM B21 OHH
WEBSITE	WWW.PCDOK.CO.UK
TELEPHONE	0121-55-44-333

IN FOCUS...FOUR OAKS COMPUTER CENTRE

Based in the midst of Sutton Coldfield, Four Oaks Computer Centre celebrate their second birthday this month (they're an expansion of their sister company, Tamworth Computer Centre Ltd., who are now in their eighth year of trading).

They offer PC sales, repairs and upgrades, along with networking, consumables, peripherals and cabling, dealing with both on-site call outs and in-store repairs as and where



necessary. Their after sales service is a big strength, and their aim is to efficiently turn around repairs. Plus they always look to having a wide range of stock at affordable prices. With a team of helpful, friendly and experienced staff, there's also on-hand advice and guidance when you need it. And that applies whether you're a small/medium sized business, looking to set up a home office or a home user.

ADDRESS	7 MERE GREEN ROAD, FOUR OAKS, SUTTON COLDFIELD B75 5BL
TELEPHONE	0121-323-2500





COMPUTER CLUBS

Do you run, or are you a member of a computer club? Would you like your club to get a free listing in Micro Mart? In a future issue we're printing a directory of the nation's computer clubs, so to make sure yours in included, send us your club name, brief details and contacts to Club Listings at the usual address. Or you can e-mail them over to editorial@micromart.co.uk with Clubs in the subject header.



IN FOCUS...ZODIAC COMPUTERS

Selling a full range of computer systems and components, Zodiac Computers started trading back in 1999 from the back of a shop to keep overheads low. Since then, thanks to the high level of



service they offer, which in turn generated more custom, they have relocated to their current premises, whilst continuing to maintain their competitive pricing and quality service. The firm started when its owner grew frustrated at the pricing and service offered by

SouthBirmingham-located computer shops. Recently, their CD and DVD range has expanded, and the firm believe that they have the largest selection of CD and DVD media in Birmingham, at the best prices. They also offer a repair, maintenance and upgrade service, and are planning to set up an e-commerce website shortly so they can supply nationally.

ADDRESS	28 PERSHORE ROAD SOUTH, COTTERIDGE, B'HAM B23 3EJ
WEBSITE	WWW.ZODIAC COMPUTING.CO.UK
TELEPHONE	0207-636-7408

IN FOCUS...DISCOUNT COMPUTER WAREHOUSE



The Discount Computer Warehouse was started by two computer enthusiasts who became fed up with the no service culture of the internet e-tailers and the extortionate prices of the high street chains.

Their aim has been to provide quality components at competitive prices. They pride themselves on their dedication to their customers. You will not find any re-stocking charges, credit card charges or charges for fixing problems that they caused in the first place!



They began trading in 2002, offering a wide variety of computer
components and systems at extremely competitive prices. Since
then their trade has continued to grow at a healthy pace.

This month, they intend to launch their new website (www.discount-computer-warehouse.com), featuring online ordering. Subsequent releases of the website over the next couple of months will have many new and exciting features which they hope will delight their customers.

WEBSITE	WWW.DISCOUNT- COMPUTER- WAREHOUSE.COM
TELEPHONE	0845-230-1099

IN FOCUS...WESTMINSTER COMPUTERS

Don't be fooled by the name - Westminster Computers operate from the Dudley area of the West Midlands, where they offer a range of computer related products and services. As you can see from their



advert, they sell competitively priced PCs (fully specced, including screen and operating system), and will custom-make systems to your requirements.

Also, they offer a computer repair service on top of that, and they can help you with your component purchases too.

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SEPTEMBER 18TH 2003

SHOW CALENDAR



CHECK OUT OUR WEEKLY LISTING OF I.T. EVENTS, EXHIBITIONS AND FAIRS PLEASE CONFIRM TIMES AND DATES WITH ORGANISERS AS THESE ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Every Wednesday ADVANCE COMPUTER FAIRS Wigan Mill at the Pier, Wigan Tel: 01744 601139

Every Saturday 2 Fantastic Venues BRITISH COMPUTER FAIRS The UCL Windeyer Building, Cleveland St, Huntley St Students Union, off Torrington Place Both venues off Tottenham Court Rd, Central London Tel: 01943 602 784

Every Saturday
NORTHERN COMPUTER MARKETS
Bowlers Exhibition Centre
Manchester
Tel: 01706 299902

Every Saturday HOUNSLOW COMPUTER FAIRS Montague Hall Montague Road Just for Hounslow High Street Tel: 020 8527 4239 Mob: 07951 213 902

Every Saturday & Sunday THREE GEM Carpenters & Dockland Centre 98 Gibbins Rd, Stratford London Tel. 202 8534 7347 Mob: 07958 428 447

Every Sunday
BRITISH COMPUTER FAIRS
Busy Brick Lane Fair
Old Truman Brewery
Between Spitalfields & Columbia Road
Flower Market
Tei: 01943 817 300

7 days QUEENSWAY COMPUTER FAIR Inside Queensway Market , London Tel: 0208 903 0388 Every 2nd & 4th Sunday INTERLINK FAIRS National Sports Centre CRYSTAL PALACE SE19 Tel: 07904 021944

Every 2nd & 4th Sunday WEMBLEY COMPUTER FAIRS Wembley Venue 2nd Door to Wembley Park Station -Jubilee Line Tsl: 2028 450 0950 Last Saturday of every Month MAJOR COMPUTER AUCTIONEERS West Sussex Tel: 01342 717445

Every Saturday and Tuesday Evenings TRAFFORD EXHIBITION CENTRE Tel: 0161 865 0707

Various Dates 21st CENTURY FAIRS Brownhills, Nr Lichfield Tel: 01623 627 848

First Saturday every Month TECH AUCTIONS LTD Computer Auction (PE19) Tel: 01480 473570

SEPTEMBER 13TH

ADVANCE COMPUTER FAIRS Lytham St Annes High School, Lytham Tel: 01744 601 139

COMPUTE UK Marconi Sports Club, Chelmesford Tel: 01328 856272

BEACOMP COMPUTER FAIRS Crawley Leisure Centre, Crawley Tel: 01342 718 699

BRITISH COMPUTER FAIRS Central London (2 Venues) UCL Windeyer Building & Huntley St Tel: 01943 602 784

NORTHERN COMPUTER MARKETS Bowlers Exhibition Centre, Manchester Tel: 01706 29990

NORTHERN COMPUTER MARKETS Derby County FC, Derby Tel: 01706 29990

NORTHERN COMPUTER MARKETS Leeds United FC, Leeds Tel: 01706 29990

SEPTEMBER 14TH

ADVANCE COMPUTER FAIRS Sutton Leisure Centre, St Helens Tel: 01744 601 139

TECHNOFAIR COMPUTER FAIRS Ditton Community Centre, Aylesford Tel: 01622 734 255

EXCEL COMPUTER FAIRS Municipal Hall, Albert Rd 01253 721 070 BRITISH COMPUTER FAIRS Bracknell Sports Ctr, Bracknell Tel: 01943 602 784

NORTHERN COMPUTER MARKETS Hillsborough Leisure Centre, Sheffield Tel: 01706 29990

BRITISH COMPUTER FAIRS Gatwick Manor Hotel, Crawley Tel: 01943 602 784

NORTHERN COMPUTER MARKETS Woodfird Leisure, Hull Tel: 01706 29990

WEMBLEY COMPUTER FAIRS Wembley Venue 2nd Door to Wembley Park Station - Jubilee Line Tel: 0208 450 0950

SEPTEMBER 14TH

NORTHERN COMPUTER MARKETS Harvey Hadden Sports Ctr, Nottingham Tel: 01706 29990

NORTHERN COMPUTER MARKETS Fenton Manor, Stoke Tel: 01706 29990

TECHNOFAIR COMPUTER FAIRS White Oak Leisure Centre, Swanley Tel: 01622 734 255

SEPTEMBER 15TH

ADVANCE COMPUTER FAIRS The Dome, Morcambe Tel: 01744 601 139

SEPTEMBER 16TH

NORTHERN COMPUTER MARKETS Wolverhampton Racecourse, Wolverhampton (EVENING) Tel: 01706 29990

ADVANCE COMPUTER FAIRS Floral Hall, Southport Tel: 01744 601 139

SEPTEMBER 17TH

NORTHERN COMPUTER MARKETS Doncaster Racecourse, Doncaster (EVENING) Tel: 01706 29990

ADVANCE COMPUTER FAIRS Mill at the Pier, Wigan Tel: 01744 601 139



Buildings 6, 7, 8, Barns Court Ind. Est., Turners Hill Rd, Crawley Down, West Sussex, RH10 4HQ

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BEACOMP Computer Fairs

SATURDAY 13th Sept

Crawley Leisure Centre, Halsett Avenue, CRAWLEY

SUNDAY 21st Sept

Worthing Leisure Centre, Saftsbury Avenue, GORING

SATURDAY 27th Sept

Brighton Racecourse, Freshfield Road, BRIGHTON

nge of new and used hardware and software etc at highly competitive Open 10am - 4pm Admission £2 adults, £1 OAPs and under 16's Enquiries/stand sales:- BEACOMP 01342 718699

www.beacomp.com

British Computer Fairs ONDO

UCL Windeyer Building, UCL Huntley Street

SATURDAY 13th Sept

BRACKNE

Bracknell Sports Centre

SUNDAY 14th Sept

Gatwick Manor Hotel SUNDAY 14th Sept

ALL FAIRS OPEN 10am - Admission charges range from £1.50 - £2.50 depending on location. Accompanied children Free. Concessions apply

See website for details Information Line - 01943 602784 Fax Line - 01943 602803 For Trader bookings phone: 01943 817300 FOR ALL ADVANCE DATES SEE OUR WEBSITE

britishcomputerfairs.com

THE NORTHS Bowlers Exhibition Centre, Trafford Pk (J9, M6

MANCHESTER 13th Sept 13th Sept DERRY Sat 13th Sent LEEDS Sun 14th Sept Sun 14th Sept ишт NOTTINGHAM

Sun 14th Sept Tues 16th Sept

Wed 17th Sept

WOLVERHAMPTON DONCASTER

MANCHESTER BIRMINGHAM

Sun 21st Sept Sun 21st Sept Sun 21st Sept DERRY Hillsborough Leisure Centre, Penistone Rd Woodford Leisure Fast Park Holderness Rd Harvey Hadden Sports Centre, Wigman Rd Fenton Manor, City Rd, Fenton

Derby County FC, Pride Park Stadium Leeds United FC, Elland Road

Wolverhampton Racecourse, Dunstall Pk (Eveni Doncaster Racecourse, Leger Way (Evening)

Bowlers Exhibition Centre, Trafford Pk (J9, M60) Edgbaston Cricket Ground, Edgbaston Richard Dunn Sports Centre, Rooley Ave, Odsal Moorway Sports Centre, Moor Lane, Allenton

Scottish

Bowlers Exhibition Centre, Manchester 11am - 4pm Stoke (Trentham Gardens), Wolverhampton Racecourse & Hull (Sundays only) 9am - 3pm All other shows & all Bank Holidays are 10am - 3pm. All midweek shows are Evenings 5pm - 9pr

299902

Scottish

Sun 14th Sept STIBLING Sat 20th Sent GLASGOW Sun 21st Sept

DUNDER

The Albert Halls, Dumbarton Road Kelvin Hall, Aroyle Street Ronar Hall Dundee University

706 299709

www.computermarkets.co.uk

PG 130







WEEKENDS 10am-3pm - WEEKDAYS 5pm-9pm ENQUIRIES 01744 601139

ST ANNES HIGH SCHOOL LYTHAM

Computer Fair

SUTTON LEISURE CENTRE ST.HELENS Sun 14th Sept Sat 13th Sept

Mon 15th Sept Tues 16th Sept Wed 17th Sep Sat 20th Sept Sun 21st Sept Mon 22nd Sept Wed 24th Sept Sat 27th Sept Sun 28th Sept

MORECAMBE SOUTHPORT WIGAN LANCASTER PRESTON WIDNES BLACKPOOL Mon 29th Sept CARLISLE

The Dome Floral Hall Mill at the Pier, Wigan Pier Salt Ayre Sports Centre Preston College, Fulwood Swallow Hillton Hotel Mill at the Pier, Wigan Pier Halton Stadium Norbreck Castle Hotel Swallow Hillton Hotel

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97£300.00 Email: stuff@jmills.biz COMPAQ ARMADA M700 battery Liion 8 cell part No. 136214 -002 £50. Tel: 01639 768464 (Port Talbot)

Compaq Deskpro Pentium 2 350 Mhz Processor, 64MB SDRAM, 3.2 Gb HDD, 1.44MB Floppy Drive, CD-ROM, USB Ports, 4MB AGP Video Card, Onboard Sound, Keyboard, Mouse and inbuilt speakers. £130.00 Tel: 0794 7581334 Email: bapron@barrysworld.co.uk

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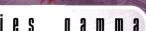
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