Ramblings
by Andrew Welch

decided that the time had come. My trusty Quadra 840av has served me well for the past two years, but as Apple moves its entire line of computers to the PowerPC chip, I legitimately need a PowerPC development machine to stay on top of things. Plus I'm a technology junky, and can't resist getting a new toy to play with.

So I had decided: time to order up a PowerMac. But what model to choose? I've always been partial to the tower design, so it was between an 8500 and a 9500. I decide to go with the 8500 -- the 9500 just looks a little to blocky for me, and even though we're talking about a computer, I think aesthetics are still important (plus both computers are pretty close in terms of performance).

So first I gave our local CompUSA a jingle. According to the representative I got ahold of, the PowerMac 8500 is a "special order-only item." They don't stock them. Hmm. The translation in my head was: "You'll have to wait a long time for your new toy." Drats.

In a minor funk, I next turned to Computer City. The friendly fellow I got ahold of there informed me that "...the PowerMac 8500 is back-ordered well into February, and perhaps beyond, depending on how many units Apple delivers." Ok, so now my elation at the thought of purchasing a new PowerPC Macintosh had turned to despair.

A few calls to various mail order companies gave me similar answers, which all amounted to this: "You ain't gettin' a new computer any time soon buddy!" Now to someone like myself, this was tantamount to telling me that there is no Santa Claus.

My thoughts then turned to Power Computing, a company that has the distinction of being the first Macintosh clone vendor. The ads for their new PowerWave Mac clones had caught my eye, though I admit that as a Macintosh bigot, I was a bit reluctant to buy a Mac from anyone but Mother Apple.

I first checked out the Mac magazines, flipping through a few reviews of the Power Computing machines, and darned if everyone wasn't universally giving them accolades. This was starting to look encouraging! To get some real dirt on the machines, I proceeded to scan Usenet and asked some questions on the `#macintosh` IRC channel. Everything was thumbs up, much to my surprise and delight.

But wait. It gets better. I fired up Netscape and checked out Power Computing's home page (http://www.PowerCC.com/). On the BYOB page (Build Your Own Box), you can design the system of your dreams: what model, how much memory, the size of the hard drive, and numerous other options. A few mouse clicks later and you have a spec sheet for the system of your dreams, as well as a price tag telling you how much it'll set you back.

I was impressed. So after a little pleading with our lovely accountant Gayle, I was on the phone with Power Computing placing my order. With some trepidation -- waiting to be shot down -- I asked the $64,000 question: "What is the availability on your PowerWave machines?" The answer was exactly what I wanted to hear: "Two weeks or so." Available systems -- what a refreshing concept!

he system I ended up ordering was a PowerWave 604@150mhz, 32mb of RAM, 1gb hard drive, built-in Zip drive, 64 bit accelerated video card w/4mb of VRAM, a quad speed CD-ROM drive, and 3 PCI slots. In other words, a Mac aficionado's wet dream.

Fast forward a couple of weeks: a friendly woman with a southern accent called to tell me that I should be expecting my machine sometime in the next few days, shipped FedEx. Literally just after I got off of the phone with her, FedEx was at the door with my box.

I had the system up and running in just a few minutes (I tore through the packaging faster than any Christmas gift I've ever opened): the packaging and documentation is top-notch, and everything worked absolutely wonderfully. System 7.5.2 was preinstalled, along with a number of bundled applications -- and we're talking about useful programs like ClarisWorks, Nisus, NOW Utilities, NOW Contact, a slew of fonts, and a bunch of multimedia CDs.

So what's the machine like? It's fast. Very fast. Using it is like opening up the throttle on a Porsche, rocketing along on the Autobahn as your hang onto the steering wheel and your companion wets the passenger seat. The machine itself resembles a cross between a Macintosh and a PC clone. In other words, while it is more attractive than your average PC clone, it isn't quite as sexy-looking as some of Apple's sleek designs.

I haven't encountered a single compatibility problem to date, and quite frankly, I don't expect to. It's quite simply a quality piece of work.

The long and the short of it is that as I type this article on my new Power Computing PowerWave, I'm extremely satisfied with the choice I made. If you ever had any concerns about buying a PowerMac clone from PowerComputing, my personal opinion is that you can put them to rest.

Companies like Power Computing are the best thing that could have happened to the Macintosh marketplace: were it not for them, I'd be at the mercy of Apple's backordered computers, and I'd have ended up paying more for less of a computer.

I wish PowerComputing well. Right now I need to get back to programming, otherwise I'll never be able to justify purchasing this new dream machine. So I'll leave you with one thought: When you're on the hunt for a new Macintosh, I'd strongly urge you to consider a Power Computing machine. You won't regret it -- I certainly don't.