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In close-up this month are Sharp's HPC with a colour screen, an Intel Celeron-based PC from Evesham Micros, Intel's own 3D graphics card and Nokia's latest, smallest mobile phone

Close-up

Sharp HC-4500 & CE-AG04

The Sharp HC-4500 is a fully-featured palmtop computer that you can slip into a (large) pocket. It is powered by Microsoft Windows CE 2.0, which incorporates a Windows 95 look and feel, along with versions of a number of Microsoft applications, such as Word and Excel.

So far nothing's new but the single most important feature of this palmtop is its colour screen. It is bright and extremely clear and once you've used it, you'll never want to go back to a monochrome display. The 6in diagonal measurement means that it is big enough to fit a decent amount of information on screen, which is important if you're word processing or using a spreadsheet.

The drawback, as with all colour screens, is that it needs a lot of power and this cuts back on the battery life. The supplied rechargeable battery takes around three hours to charge and delivers a claimed six hours of continuous use. The backlight is one of the things that puts quite a drain on the batteries and Sharp includes a button to dim the brightness, thus extending the battery life. The trouble is that the screen is not as clear to look at.

The second most important part of a palmtop is the keyboard and we are happy to report that the HC-4500 has one of the best around, even though the calculator style buttons do look rather clumsy until you try them.

The optional digital camera card is, as the name suggests, a digital camera stuck on the end of a PC Card. This slots securely into the palmtop's card slot and, together with some bundled software, takes photographs and stores them on the palmtop (it can't be used on its own). It has a 2x zoom and is fairly easy to use. The quality of the images is good enough for small prints and Web sites but not for normal-sized prints.

The HC-4500 palmtop has a good keyboard and a fantastic screen but the battery life is a bit of a worry, as is the price tag.

Adam Evans



640 x 240 backlit touch-sensitive screen with 256 colours

16Mb RAM

Ports: serial, IrDA infra-red, Type II PC Card

Rechargeable Ni-MH battery pack and mains adapter

Built-in speaker and voice recording

Size (wxdxh): 186x96.5x29.6mm

Weight: 495g

Digital Camera Card:
Maximum 640x480 resolution

Optical 2x zoom lens

Palmtop: £799 (inc VAT)

Camera: £349.99 (inc VAT)

Sharp: 0800 262 958

www.sharp-uk.co.uk

Sharp HC-4500 and CE-AG04

Ease of use	★	★	★	★	★
Performance	★	★	★	★	★
Features	★	★	★	★	★
Value for money	★	★	★	★	★
Overall	★	★	★	★	★

Minimum requirements: For connectivity software 486 PC, 8Mb of RAM, 12Mb of hard disk space, a CD-ROM drive, serial port, Windows 95.

Specifications

Evesham Vale Prestige

One of the first PCs to be built around Intel's newest processor – the low-cost Celeron

When Intel launches a new processor, the entire computer industry sits up and takes notice. At least, that's what generally happens, so it's a little surprising that the latest launch has been so low-key. If you've heard of Celeron, it's because you read computer magazines, not because Intel's Bunnymen have been dancing around your TV screen as they did for both the Pentium MMX and the Pentium II.

Celeron is an emasculated Pentium II for low-cost machines. The design is essentially the same, so the different chips work in pretty much the same way. However, all Pentium II processors have 512Kb of fast, level-two cache memory built into the bulky chip package. It's a lot faster to access data from here than from main system RAM, so the cache speeds things up considerably.

Celeron doesn't have this cache, so even according to Intel's own figures, it's quite a bit slower than the Pentium II. Many major manufacturers are concerned about this and, in fact, neither Dell nor Gateway currently offer a Celeron machine. Both companies are likely to wait until later this year, when the next generation of Celeron proces-

sors is launched. Code-named Mendocino, this will actually have some cache memory, although only 128Kb – a quarter of that on a Pentium II.

The Evesham Prestige is the first Celeron PC we've seen and, as expected, it's a low-cost machine.

Although costing just over £800, you still get a fine set of components, including a decent keyboard and delightful Microsoft Intellimouse. There's also a CTX 15in monitor but if you want to see any software running on it, you'll have to pay extra as none is supplied by Evesham.

Getting the cover off the case can be a bit tricky – you have to unlock the front and remove it before you can undo the screws. Fortunately, the documentation is good and comes in an Evesham-badged binder – a nice little bit of corporate branding here.

Inside, it's a very tidy machine. The processor is tucked away behind the power supply, so we had to crane to get a good view of our first Celeron chip. As it turns out, it's not that exciting. It looks just like a Pentium II but stripped of its black case and the heatsink is much more compact. Still, although it's

difficult to get at, you probably won't need to do so, as it's unlikely that you'll be able to upgrade to a Pentium II chip even though Celeron shares the same Slot One interface.

The performance of this machine was disappointing, with a score of 183 on our BAPCo benchmark. Despite the 266MHz processor, this is less than the slowest Pentium IIs we have seen. It is certainly adequate for business use but it's much less than we'd expect from a newly-launched PC.

The Final Reality graphics benchmark paints a rosier picture though, and the Prestige gave 2.77 FRmarks.

Overall, graphics performance – usually a fair indication of its games performance – is fair and clearly boosted by the fast graphics card Evesham has chosen. However, the AGP test was disappointing. This isn't really important until more games make use of AGP but it's as well to be aware of it before you buy.

At this stage, we're reluctant to recommend a Celeron machine. The Prestige is certainly worth considering but bear in mind that you can get a fully-featured Pentium II for about £200 more.

John Sabine

Specifications

266MHz Celeron processor

No level 2 cache

32Mb of RAM

4Gb hard disk

24x CD-ROM

ATi XPERT@Work graphics card

Sound Blaster 16 sound card

56Kbits/s modem

15in CTX monitor

£784.90 (inc VAT)

Evesham: 01386 765511

www.evesham.com

Evesham Vale Prestige

Build quality ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Performance ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Features ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Value for money ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Nokia 6110

Barely larger than a Mars Bar and weighing just 137g, Nokia's new 6110 looks almost too small to be a fully functional GSM phone. It slips comfortably into a pocket though, and fits snugly into the palm of your hand, which means using it discreetly in public places is thankfully possible. The small size does

mean that the 6110's keys are a little dainty but they're well-spaced and usable by all but the fattest of fingers.

Small it may be but the 6110 still has a large, clear LCD screen. It needs it too, for the 6110 has a bewildering array of features. These are too numerable to detail individually but one handy function is the ability to group callers into different categories. Providing the numbers are stored in the phone's memory, you can put your boss in the 'Work' group, for example, and your babysitter in 'Personal'. Each group (and even individual callers) can then have a different ringing tone, so you know who's calling as soon as the phone rings.

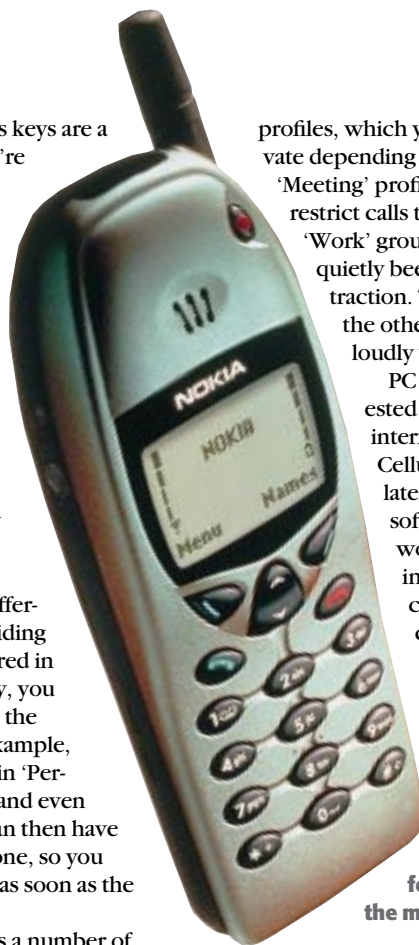
The 6110 also has a number of

profiles, which you can activate or deactivate depending on your location. The 'Meeting' profile, for instance, can restrict calls to just people in your 'Work' group, when the phone can quietly beep so as not to cause distraction. The 'Outdoors' option, on the other hand, might shriek loudly whenever anyone calls.

PC users will also be interested in the 6110's infra-red interface. Version 2 of Nokia's Cellular Data Suite (available later this year) will provide a software PC modem that works via a notebook's infra-red interface - no cable required. The phone can swap information with other 6110s and even beam its numbers to a printer with a suitable interface.

Small but perfectly formed, the 6110 is Nokia's cutest phone yet and has enough features to occupy even the most ardent tweak-freaks.

Julian Prokaza



Specifications

Five-line LCD display

Call grouping features

NiMH battery giving 60-270 hours of standby time, 3-5 hours of talktime

Size (wxdxh): 130x47x28mm

Weight: 137g

£99.99 (inc VAT) with airtime agreement

Nokia: 01480 434343

Nokia 6110

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Ability Office 98

Not *another* office suite? An overstuffed collection of technotricker that gobbles up your drive space and memory in dubious return for features that hardly anybody uses? Thankfully, no.

While Ability Office 98 does have a word processor, spreadsheet, relational database, drawing program, and 'Office Toolbar', it survives on just 20Mb of hard disk space, compared with around 200Mb for some other leading office suites.

This does mean Ability Office has fewer features than the pricier competition, of course, but does it mean it's not much good? If you can't live without such things as WordArt, AutoCorrect, grammar checking, indexing or tables of contents, then Ability is not for you. If you've never heard of such features, on the other hand, then Ability Office provides a perfectly compe-

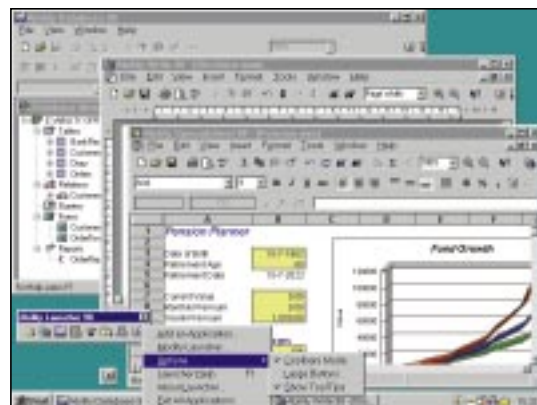
tent suite of programs for general office use. Add to this the benefit of being able to afford ten copies of Ability for every one of Microsoft's Office and it begins to look like a very good thing indeed.

Ability Office's features are still too numerous to cover in detail here but it does have the office suite basics of a spell-checker, thesaurus and undo/redo features. It also includes sophisticated OLE editing and documents created by each of the main applications can be inserted and edited in documents created by the others. Ability is able to import and export files in all major formats - RTF, HTML, WordPerfect, Lotus AmiPro, and Word. What's more, the application menus look uncannily like those in Microsoft's suite.

Ability is available as a 10Mb download via the Internet's Web, although you can get it on CD for an extra £10.

Lean, mean and keenly priced, Ability Office 98 is ideal for home and small office use, especially where you need file interchangeability without the big-program overhead.

James Taylor



Specifications

Ability Write 98 word processor with frames and styles

Ability Spreadsheet 98 with over 200 functions

Ability Database 98 with forms and reports

Draw - a basic vector drawing tool

£29.95 (inc VAT)

Ability: 0171 231 1004
www.ability.com

Ability Office 98

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

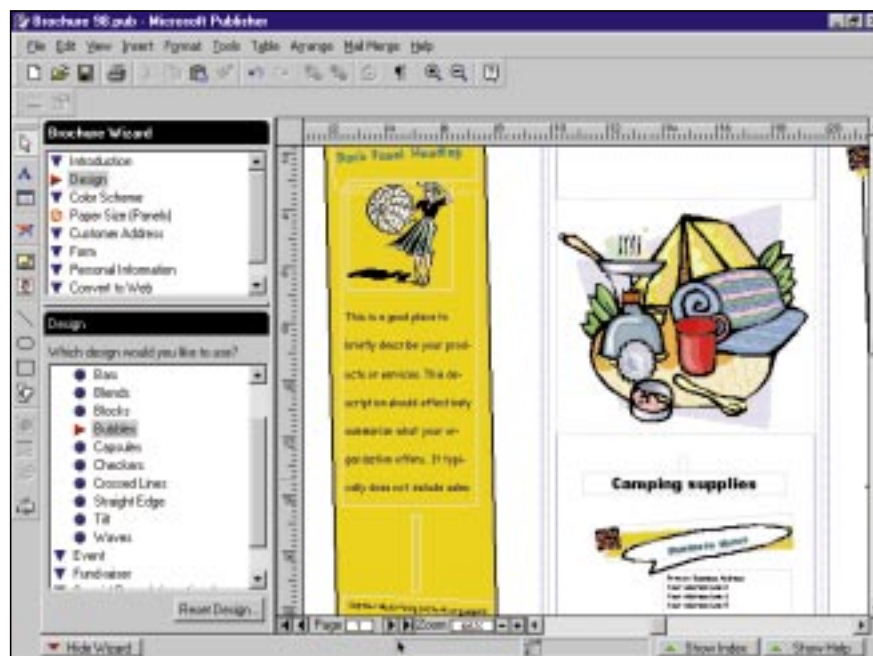
Minimum requirements: Windows 95, 486 PC, 16Mb of RAM, 30Mb of hard drive space.

Microsoft Publisher 98

The latest version of Microsoft's easy-to-use desktop publishing package

Ever since its debut in 1991, the design philosophy behind Microsoft Publisher has been to keep it simple, offer support and allow complete beginners to create professional-looking publications with the minimum of 'manual labour'. To this end came innovations such as Page Wizards – interactive templates that prompt for user input in a series of option dialogues; smart cursors – like the little van image that shows when you are moving an object, and an optional context-sensitive help panel. Publisher 98 continues in this user-friendly tradition.

For a start, there's much more of the same, with over 1,600 templates including old favourites that range from posters to paper aeroplanes. A new twist on this theme is the introduction of Design Sets – an idea so stunning in its simplicity you wonder why nobody thought of it before. With these you can create sets of different types of documents – letterheads and other business stationery, publicity material, brochures or Web sites incorporating



the same colours, styles and logos in a custom-designed 'look'. Complementing this is the facility to store profiles. In previous versions you could store, say, a company name and address, which would then appear in the appropriate place when a Wizard was run. This feature has been expanded – you can now store logos and colour schemes and have a choice of four profiles in which to keep different sets of information.

Colour schemes are another newcomer. Though you can still choose colours piecemeal, it's now much easier to choose from one of 60 schemes. There's also the added advantage that you can change an entire publication's colours for fonts, backgrounds, boxes and so on with just one mouse click. Better still, the same applies to the Design Sets, so if you create a newsletter, say, in the 'Bubbles' style, then change your mind, you don't have to start from scratch with a new Wizard but can instantly change the overall look of the publication. Another great improvement is in the drawing tools – these now match those in Office 97, with Bezier curves, more smart shapes and a rich set of fill, shadow and 3D effects.

Last year's model, Publisher 97, encompassed Web page creation, and 98 builds on that, with support for animation, sounds, and online forms. As ever, there's

a generous supply of resources with 175 fonts, over 12,000 clip-art items, over 300 animated GIFs and custom buttons and bars for Web pages.

One point on which we will take Microsoft to task is in the issue of disk space. The minimum installation size is given as 24Mb. But in order to get the Wizards to work correctly (which is really the whole point of the application) you need to install another 88Mb of clip-art. There's no good reason why this can't be accessed from the CD-ROM, like most clip-art collections. Worse still, the installation gives no choice of hard drive – though the Publisher program was happy to be installed on any drive, the clip-art insisted on being on C:. So if space is running out on that particular drive or partition, you are, in a word, stuffed.

Publisher isn't (and doesn't pretend to be) a professional package. If you want features such as process colour separations, precision placement, indexing or contents tables on a budget, you'd be better off with Serif Page Plus. Nevertheless, it offers an excellent introduction to DTP and the printed guide offers valuable advice on the principles of page design. **Still excellent at what it does best – easy DTP for the beginner – but make sure you have enough space on your C: drive!**

Tim Nott ➤➤

Specifications

Context-sensitive help panel slots in beside workspace

Web support includes animation, forms and sound

Design sets for 'corporate identity'

1600 templates and Wizards

60 pre-designed colour schemes

12,000 clip-art items – more available free from MS Web site

Instant coupons, address panels and other 'page furniture'

'Smart' headlines resize text to fit layout

£80.00 (inc VAT)

Microsoft: 0345 002000

Microsoft Publisher 98

Ease of use	★	★	★	★	★
Performance	★	★	★	★	★
Features	★	★	★	★	★
Value for money	★	★	★	★	★
Overall	★	★	★	★	★

Minimum requirements: 486 PC, Windows 95, 8Mb of RAM, 24Mb of hard disk space (109Mb with wizards).

Quarterdeck RealHelp

As DIY usually spells disaster around the house, the thought of PC fix-it software is enough to bring on a cold sweat. Sadly, Quarterdeck's RealHelp PC problem solver justified our fears. It promptly crashed our computer when we tried to reinstall the software, which, it

claimed, had been improperly installed the first time.

Once you have got it installed, RealHelp is simple enough to get started. It kicks off by prompting you to carry out a Full System Check. This analyses all your hardware and software, and highlights potential problems. Red marks mean RealHelp can fix the problem, yellow indicates there is either no fix or a manual workaround. However we found that trying to correct problems could lead you into hot water.

The bad news is that RealHelp has a tendency to manufacture problems. When we ran the Conflict Detector, it threw up a list of bugs in applications that had caused no difficulties in the past.

On closer inspection, we discovered that some of the problems were missing files, which had been left out during custom application installations. RealHelp also appeared to have invented a problem in Word, warning us that the edit sequence would cause it to crash but when we tried out the forbidden steps, it worked per-



fectly. This made us wary about the multitude of other 'problems' it had found.

This is not to say that RealHelp cannot help with serious dilemmas. It does create an emergency boot disk and imposes a sensible routine of regular backups. The difficulty with cure-all software solutions like RealHelp is that they can lead novices into more difficulties than they solve.

While it does include lots of handy features, when it invents problems and leads you into trouble if you try to solve them, RealHelp is more of a hindrance.

Ursula Tolaini

Specifications

Prevents and fixes PC problems

Monitors hardware and software to avoid crashes, data loss and conflicts

Links in to TuneUp Web site for latest fixes and drivers

£39.99 (inc VAT)

QuarterDeck: 01628 666322

www.quarterdeck.com

Quarterdeck RealHelp

Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: Windows 95, 486 PC, 16Mb of RAM, 35Mb of hard disk space.

Siemens Nixdorf Mobile Scenic 320

If you're in the market for a budget notebook, you probably expect one that's cheap, nasty and uses outdated technology. Well, the launch of Intel's Tillamook mobile processor and the

mobile Pentium II processor has meant that that's no longer the case.

Despite its brand name, the Scenic 320 is well specified. Its Pentium 166MMX processor may seem a little underpowered but it is a true mobile chip. This uses less power than its desktop equivalent, so you get better battery life and the chip itself is cooler. This leads to better performance – in fact, mobile CPUs generally outperform desktop chips where these have been fitted to notebooks to keep costs down.

With 32Mb of RAM (16Mb is standard but Siemens supplied us with an upgrade), the Scenic 320 was impressively fast. In fact, its BAPCO score of 167 was better than the Compaq Armada we tested last month – and that machine had a 233MHz processor.

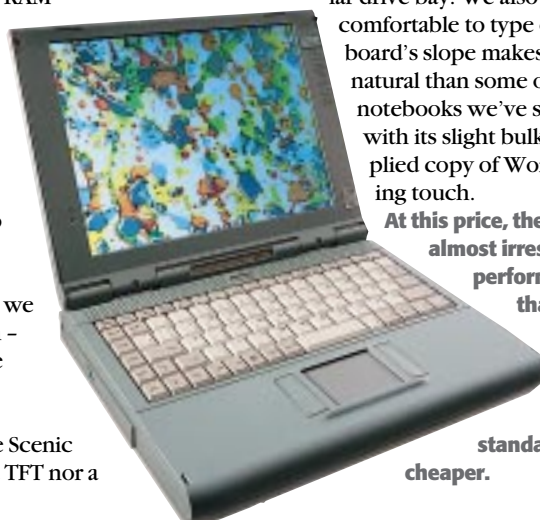
Unusually, the Scenic 320 has neither a TFT nor a

dual-scan screen. Instead, it's fitted with one that uses the new ADS technology. This updates much more quickly than a conventional dual-scan display, it's brighter and you can see it from a better range of angles. It's not as good as a TFT screen but is significantly cheaper and we were quite happy with it.

As well as a good set of components, the Scenic boasts a well-integrated design. It's one of very few budget notebooks to have an optional Zip drive to fit its modular drive bay. We also found it very comfortable to type on and the keyboard's slope makes it a lot more natural than some of the more boxy notebooks we've seen. We can live with its slight bulk, and the supplied copy of Word is a nice finishing touch.

At this price, the Scenic 320 is almost irresistible. It has performance better than you have any right to expect and although the screen isn't up to TFT standards it is a lot cheaper.

John Sabine



Specifications

Intel Pentium 166MMX mobile processor

12.1in ADS screen

Modular 20x CD-ROM, floppy and Lithium Ion battery

Modular Zip drive available

MS Word 97

Claimed 3-hour battery life

£1,232.58, includes 16Mb of RAM upgrade (inc VAT)

Siemens Nixdorf: 01344 850722

www.sni.co.uk

Siemens Nixdorf Mobile Scenic 320

Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Dell Dimension XPS R350

A fast and well-specified PC based on one of Intel's newest Pentium II processors and support chipset

Dell has a proud record of using the latest technology in its PCs and it can get new products on sale extremely quickly. It only keeps a week's stock of parts in its Irish factories, so unlike the big retail chains, it doesn't have vast numbers of older models to sell before it can afford to launch new ones.

A new model is just what the Dimension XPS R350 is. The Dimension series has been around for a while but the XPS R350 has a re-styled case. This features a recessed floppy drive and a much more bulbous front than before, designed to allow a better air-flow through the system box (these new processors are set to get even hotter than before). Unfortunately, although the lid is meant to have been modified too, we couldn't spot any difference and despite its no-tools design, it's still hard to remove.

Inside the case, everything is ship-shape. Dell has a reputation for good build quality and if neatness is any measure of this, the XPS R350 rates very highly. It has plenty of free expansion



before. It features the more sophisticated wavetable sound synthesis and we were more than happy with the sound quality through the supplied Altec Lansing speakers.

The fitted modem is a 3Com Sportster that only runs at 33.6Kbits/s but it can be flash-upgraded to the x2 standard. Although this isn't the official 56Kbits/s standard, we would expect it to be upgradable to the new V.90 standard as soon as this has been officially formalised.

Graphics too are up to the mark. Dell supplied a 19in monitor with our review system and this displayed very nicely,

although its on-screen controls weren't the most intuitive we've seen. Nonetheless, when it's paired with the STB Velocity 128 graphics card, you'd have to be very picky to carp about the display quality. It's an AGP card too, so you will be well prepared for the next generation of games that require 3D acceleration.

There's no DVD-ROM drive but there's plenty of room in the case to add one when DVD-ROM titles appear later in the year. Even better, because it's a 350MHz Pentium II, the support chipset on the motherboard is Intel's latest 440BX model. This allows the processor to talk to the other components at 100MHz rather than the older 66MHz standard. The practical effect of this is that you can use much faster 100MHz SDRAM and data is transferred more quickly within your PC, speeding up the system as a whole.

As well as the RAM, storage is provided by a gigantic - and fast - 14Gb hard disk and built-in Zip drive. You'll be pleased to know that Microsoft Office Small Business Edition, a great choice for home users despite its name, scarcely makes a dent in the hard drive and a three-pack of Zip disks should see you right for basic backups or file transfer.

Sound is provided by a PCI Turtle Beach sound card that we've not seen

although its on-screen controls weren't the most intuitive we've seen. Nonetheless, when it's paired with the STB Velocity 128 graphics card, you'd have to be very picky to carp about the display quality. It's an AGP card too, so you will be well prepared for the next generation of games that require 3D acceleration. There's no DVD-ROM drive but there's plenty of room in the case to add one when DVD-ROM titles appear later in the year.

Finally, performance. We often say that simply combining fast components is no guarantee of good system performance but this Dimension is superbly fast. With a BAPCo score of 360, it's even speedier than many of the 400MHz Pentium IIs that have just been tested in the Labs by our sister magazine, *Personal Computer World*.

The Dimension XPS R350 is extremely fast and well-equipped. If you want a topnotch PC then go out and buy it - at this price, there's little disadvantage to adopting new technology early.

John Sabine ➤

Specifications

Intel Pentium II 350
64Mb of RAM
14Gb hard disk
24x CD-ROM drive
4Mb STB Velocity 128 AGP graphics card
19in monitor
Turtle Beach Montego A36 PCI sound card
Altec Lansing speakers and subwoofer
USR 33.6Kbits/s modem (flash-upgradable)
MS Office Small Business Edition
£2,055.08 (inc VAT)
Dell: 01344 720000
www.dell.com/uk

Dell Dimension XPS R350

Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Intel Express 3D

Intel is best known for its PC processors and its Pentium and Pentium II chips have captured something over 80 percent of the market. But Intel wants more and to help get it, it's now moving into the graphics market with its i740 graphics chip.

Intel has started selling its chip to graphics card manufacturers for incorporation on their own boards but the Express 3D reviewed here is all Intel's own work. We saw a pre-production model with an active heatsink attached to the chip. Disappointingly, this won't be present on the final version, since we were looking forward to a graphics card with its own cooling fan.

The Express 3D is intended for sale to small computer manufacturers rather than to the general public. Accordingly, you're more likely to see it in a ready-built machine than as a standalone product. However, many mail-order firms are already offering it over the Internet and it is certainly a graphics card worth considering.

Intel claims blistering performance for all cards based on the i740 chip, including its own. A host of features are supposed to improve its speed and make it



an ideal platform for game-playing. We tested it on a fast Pentium II and got a good Final Reality score of 3.35. On the same machine, our Best Buy ATi XPERT card managed 3.01, so Intel's card is about 10 percent faster and looks just as good.

Bearing in mind that our test machine was running Windows 98 with beta drivers for both cards, this is a fair result for the Intel card. It's very easy to install and even has a utility to update the driver from a Web site. It may not live up to all of Intel's hype but preliminary pricing does look very fair.

You may find it tricky to buy one but the Express 3D is certainly worth a look and if you're offered one in your next PC, it's not a bad choice.

John Sabine

3D graphics card based on Intel i740 graphics chip

Supports 2x AGP

2Mb or 4Mb of RAM

\$125 (2Mb), \$149 (4Mb)

Intel: 01793 403000

www.intel.com

Intel Express 3D

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	n/a
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Specifications

Way Pro 2.0

Before Microsoft acquired AutoRoute, NextBase marketed AutoRoute Plus, a version for commercial users. It had many customisable features and users could enter their own data for display on the map. Although AutoRoute Plus is still available, French company Loxane has now developed a similar but up-to-date product covering the whole of Europe.

The fundamentals of Way Pro are similar to those of AutoRoute, in that you

enter your journey's start and finish points and up to fifty places you want to visit en route. You can set your vehicle's speed and fuel consumption profile and then calculate the shortest and fastest routes, along with routes that avoid tolls and/or motorways. The routes can be viewed on a map or as a text list of directions on screen or printed out.

The user interface isn't particularly intuitive and it can be difficult to work out how to do some things.

The manuals aren't much help either, since the translation from French to English is stilted and incomplete.

Data files of addresses can be imported (from Microsoft Excel, for example) for display on Way Pro's map, provided each record contains the correct eight fields of latitude and longitude data. Addresses can't be

pinpointed using postcodes, although Way Pro can display postcodes down to district level.

Transport managers and commercial travellers may find some of Way Pro's features useful, especially if they travel across Europe frequently.

Steve Cotterell

Covers the British Isles and all other European countries.

30,000 UK towns and villages and 218,000 km of UK roads

Up to 10,000 user-defined locations

Works with GPS receivers

£225 (inc VAT)

Inmac: 01344 868561

www.loxane.com

Way Pro 2.0

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: 486 PC, Windows 3.1, 8Mb of RAM; 65Mb of hard disk space.

Specifications



Fuji MX-700 & NX-5D

A new, megapixel digital camera from Fuji, with a photo-printer and floppy disk adaptor for SmartMedia cards

Fuji's latest digital still camera arrived too late to feature in our last group test, so we've reviewed it, plus a couple of interesting extras, separately. The MX-700 is a consumer-level camera, so it fills an obvious hole in the Fuji line-up, offering better quality than the DX-5 and DX-7 but without the crippling price tag of a professional model.

With a 1280x1024 pixel resolution,

Fuji reckons the MX-700 is the smallest 'megapixel' camera on the market and we see no reason to disbelieve this. It fits nicely into the palm of your hand and is good-looking too. It's slightly taller than it is wide but this vertical format doesn't make it any harder to use.

All the controls fall neatly to hand (as long as you're right-handed) and the case has a pleasantly-sculpted rubber grip. Power and display controls are just above the LCD screen, while other functions are accessed using a thumb-wheel in the upper left-hand corner of the case. There's a 2x digital zoom but, as on all such devices, all this really does is crop to the centre of your picture – nowhere near as flexible as a proper zoom lens.

We were pleased to find an optical viewfinder too, so you don't have to run down your batteries using the LCD screen to preview every shot. Two resolutions – 1280x1024 or 640x480 pixels – and three compression ratios give you a choice of six file sizes but here lies one of the MX-700's chief disadvantages.

To get the best-quality images, they need to be taken at 1280x1024 but you can only fit two of these on the supplied 2Mb SmartMedia card. Admittedly, the images are pretty good but if you want to record any more, you'll either have to compromise on quality or invest in a larger flash card. You can display pictures on your TV and connection to your PC is easy through the serial link and supplied software.

The serial link can be a bit fiddly though and, if you want to speed up the process, it might be worth getting hold of a FlashPath adaptor. This lets you read SmartMedia cards in your floppy drive and is much easier than messing around with cables. Load the SmartMedia card into the adaptor, insert the adaptor into your PC's disk drive and you can read the images just as if they were stored on an ordinary floppy. Be warned though – the adaptor is powered by two watch batteries and goes into power-save mode at the drop of a hat. We'd have welcomed some way of waking it up again through software.



Of course, it doesn't matter how good your pictures are if you can't see them on paper. The third gadget Fuji sent us was the NX-5D printer. Leaving aside its forgettable name, this is quite a handy device as long as all you want to do is print photos.

The printer uses special auto-chromic paper but, because this incorporates a layer of ink which is activated by heat, it's quite expensive – about 40p a sheet. It's also only available in 6x4in sheets, although you can print onto sticky-backed paper too. Usefully, as well as printing from your PC, the NX-5D can also be linked directly to the camera and a TV, so printing can bypass your computer completely. The printer even has a slot for a Smartmedia card, so if you only want to print your photos, all you need to do is press Print. Quality is fair, but still limited by the resolution of the camera.

The MX-700 looks great, handles well and takes pretty good pictures. We're less convinced by the printer though – it's good but not as flexible as a normal inkjet.

John Sabine ➡➡

Specifications

MX-700 camera:

Maximum resolution 1280x1024 pixels

2Mb SmartMedia card supplied as standard

Macro mode

2x digital zoom

Rechargeable battery and charger supplied

Size (wxdxh): 80x101x33mm

Weight (including batteries): 295g

NX-5D printer:

Thermal AutoChrome printing technology

Prints to 6x4in paper or stickers

Max 480x720 pixel resolution

MX-700: £649.99 (inc VAT)

NX-5D: £299.99 (inc VAT)

FlashPath adaptor: £69.99 (inc VAT)

Fuji: 0181 573 4444

www.fujifilm.co.uk

MX-700

Ease of use	★	★	★	★	★
Build quality	★	★	★	★	★
Performance	★	★	★	★	★
Features	★	★	★	★	★
Value for money	★	★	★	★	★
Overall	★	★	★	★	★

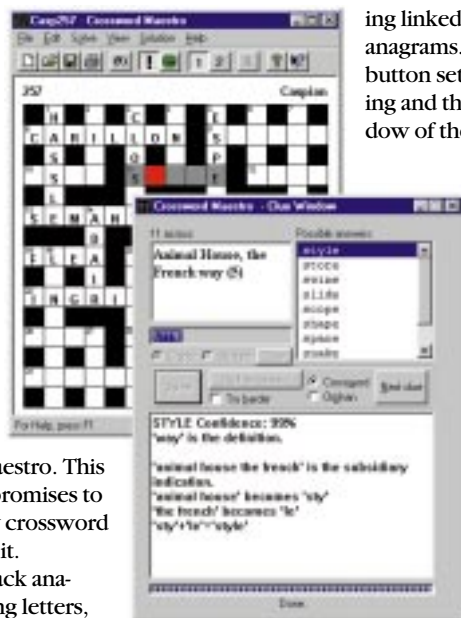
NX-5D

Ease of use	★	★	★	★	★
Build quality	★	★	★	★	★
Performance	★	★	★	★	★
Features	★	★	★	★	★
Value for money	★	★	★	★	★
Overall	★	★	★	★	★

Crossword Maestro

You're stuck. You've chewed down to the lead in your pencil but you still can't get to grips with seven across. Yes, you've been beguiled by the black and white charms of your newspaper's crossword but before you give up in disgust, don't despair - help is at hand in the form of Crossword Maestro. This handy little program promises to solve pretty much any crossword clue you can throw at it.

Rather than just crack anagrams and fill in missing letters, Crossword Maestro uses artificial intelligence to unravel the warped logic of both cryptic and non-cryptic crossword clues. If you need help with an existing puzzle, you can solve 'Orphan' clues by typing it into the Clue Window. This can handle all the same fiendish clue combinations you find in print crosswords, includ-



ing linked clues and anagrams. Pressing the Solve button sets the program thinking and the right-hand window of the Clue Window

shows all the possible answers, while the bottom window displays the most probable solution, with a percentage accuracy rating. There's also an explanation of how the solution was reached but although this sometimes provides a fascinating insight into how crossword clues work, the

program all too often comes back with 'I'm not sure how this works'.

You can also input a whole or part of a crossword from your newspaper to test the program's skills. However, this feature didn't work too well when we put in a puzzle from the *Guardian* and the Mae-

stro's Auto Solve feature only managed to solve three clues correctly.

Crossword Maestro is great as a prompt when you get stuck on those tough clues but when it comes to completing a full grid, it still leaves most of the hard work to you.

Ursula Tolaini

Specifications

Solves cryptic and non-cryptic crossword clues

Handles single clues and full crosswords

Allows you to create new grids and clues

£64.95 (inc VAT, plus £2.95 postage - £4.95 outside the UK)

Genius 200 Software: 0151 356 8000
www.genius2000.com

Crossword Maestro

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: Windows 95, 16Mb of RAM and a CD-ROM drive

Sharp MC-G1

When Nokia tried to meld a mobile phone with a PDA, the result was the fat but functional 9000 Communicator. Now Sharp has had a go and while its MC-G1 may have less features, it will at least fit in your pocket.

Superficially, the MC-G1 looks just like a larger-than-normal mobile phone but appearances can be deceptive. Where a normal mobile handset has a numeric keypad, the MC-G1 has a touch-sensitive LCD screen, protected by a hinged plastic cover. Switch the MC-G1 on, and the clear, backlit screen displays a traditional keypad for making calls in the usual way. The screen is more than just for stylish effect though. Tap one of the icons above and below it, and you're taken to one of the other applications.

As a straight PDA, the MC-G1 is a little on the basic side. The Schedule application has the usual daily, weekly, monthly

and annual views but there's no alarm function. The Contact list is more useful, since it can store names, addresses and other details - vastly expanding on the SIM card's simple name and number storage. Apart from a sketch pad for quick hand-written scribbles, the MC-G1 has no note-taking application though. Actually, this is no great loss as all information is entered using a tiny on-screen keyboard and although this is fine for typing names and numbers, it's too fiddly for much else.

The MC-G1's strength though, is in its ability to send and receive e-mail. If you have an account with an ISP that uses a POP3 e-mail system (which is most of them), the MC-G1 can be used to handle e-mail just like a desktop PC, except that it can't open attachments.

Though not quite as versatile as a separate PDA and mobile phone (or the Nokia 9000, for that matter), the MC-G1 is a neat solution to getting e-mail on the move.

Julian Prokaza



Specifications

Combined GSM telephone and PDA

Backlit, touch-sensitive screen with 239x160 pixels

SMS facility with templates

Send/receive e-mail with POP3 ISP

Built-in contact list, appointment manager, sketch pad and world time

NiMH battery with 45 hours of standby time

Size (wxdxh): 65x25x157mm

Weight: 245g

£300.00 (inc VAT) depending on airtime agreement

Sharp: 0800 262958
www.sharp-uk.co.uk

Sharp MC-G1

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Compaq Presario Raider 4860

Compaq's distinctive-looking flagship home PC that includes multimedia and DVD, features 3D accelerated graphics

Compaq has started using processors made by AMD and Cyrix on some of its Presario range in order to keep the prices down. The prestigious £2,799 Raider 4860, however, seems to be well outside such budgetary constraints. Not only does it have an Intel 333MHz Pentium II throbbing at its core, it also comes with 64Mb of SDRAM and over 7Gb of hard disk capacity.

It looks the part too, clad entirely in mean-machine black and sculpted like something out of *Star Wars*. The monitor is particularly imposing because of its sheer size as much as its design.

This is the result of fusing a pair of reflex-ported JBL speakers with a 17in display – an approach which keeps everything tidy and facilitates setup but it does result in a beast which is



free 85Hz vertical refresh. The screen surface is fairly flat and does not distort the picture but we found that running at 1024x768 resolution caused a slight but pervasive loss of focus across the whole image. Given the price of this system, this was disappointing.

The ESS sound chip and the ATI

going to need thoughtful positioning.

Apart from its general appearance, the other unusual thing about the Raider is the row of buttons below the screen and top of the system unit. Half of these turned out to be a basic set of controls for playing music CDs (start, stop, skip, volume and so on), while the other half included two programmable buttons for launching your favourite applications. The set mounted on the monitor are moderately useful, especially the CD player controls, but not necessarily something that would have us running out to buy this machine.

The central button might have more appeal as it allows you to suspend or resume the system at a touch. This so-called 'instant on' feature basically takes a snapshot of what's happening on the PC, saves it in memory and then turns everything off. Switch on and the PC restores everything to exactly the point you left it.

What did turn heads was the impressive sound from the 10W JBL speakers in the monitor. These stand comparison with a reasonably good portable CD player in terms of volume, depth of bass and clarity, and can fill a decent-sized sitting room with undistorted music that doesn't sound as if it's coming from your average PC.

The actual monitor itself has a 15.75in image diagonal and is capable of a flicker-

3D Rage Pro graphics controller are both built directly into the motherboard, leaving two ISA and three PCI slots free in a removable expansion slot cage. This can be pulled out of the system in order to expose the memory sockets, one of which is empty and can be used for an upgrade.

There are two front-opening 5.25in drive bays free, at least one of which might well be used for adding a tape backup or a 'super floppy' like an Iomega ZIP drive or similar. Considering the cost of this system, the lack of such a drive might raise a few eyebrows here and there but there were other omissions as well. The sound chip was the basic FM (frequency modulation) synthesis type, not the superior wavetable variety which can give much better results with the soundtracks of some games and is essential for using music software.

More fundamentally, the machine is fitted with a rather slow hard disk which had a distinctly deleterious effect on overall performance, which also wasn't helped by indifferent graphics handling. **Strip away the Raider's design and you're left with a decidedly slow system kitted out with good accessories. In other words, you're paying a heck of a lot for marginal aspects of the system like the shape of the case and a few moderately useful extra buttons here and there.**

Dominic Bucknall

Specifications

Pentium II 333
64Mb of SDRAM
Intel 440LX motherboard chipset
Integrated 4MB SGRAM ATI 3D Rage Pro AGP 2X graphics
2x Hitachi DVD-ROM
7.4Gb Quantum Bigfoot hard disk
Integrated ESS ES1887 FM audio
Internal 56Kbits/s modem
17in FST monitor with integral stereo JBL speakers, microphone and USB
Windows 95, Internet Explorer 4, Works 4, Quicken 6, Encarta 98 plus edutainment/games selection
£ 2,799 (inc VAT)

Compaq: 0845 270 4000
www.compaq.co.uk

Compaq Presario Raider 4860					
Build quality	★	★	★	★	★
Performance	★	★	★	★	★
Features	★	★	★	★	★
Value for money	★	★	★	★	★
Overall	★	★	★	★	★