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In close-up this month are two of the very first Pentium II notebook PCs, a Windows CE 2 palmtop with a colour screen, and Version 3 of Claris's Web site creator – Home Page

Close-up

ADI MicroScan 5GT

Once, you could only buy a Sony Trinitron tube if it was in a Sony monitor, although Sony licensed the technology to other manufacturers to use under their own names. Now, however, Sony has started to sell its tubes to other manufacturers and ADI is one of the first to use a Sony Trinitron tube in one of its monitors. The result is the MicroScan 5GT –

a 17in Trinitron monitor for a very reasonable £410.

We tested the MicroScan 5GT with a 4Mb ATI 3D Rage graphics card, which gave us a maximum resolution of 1600x1200 in 256 colours at a refresh rate of 70Hz. This resolution, however, should be treated as a theoretical maximum as it is really too high for such a relatively small monitor. Drop the resolution to 1280x1024 and it can display 24-bit colour at a steadier 85Hz. The monitor works best at a resolution of 1024x768 in 32-bit colour with a rock-steady refresh rate of 92Hz.

As with all Trinitron monitors, the 5GT's screen is supported internally by two thin horizontal wires that run across the display about a quarter of the way from the top and the bottom. Unless you're displaying a white screen, these are scarcely visible, although some users do find them distracting.

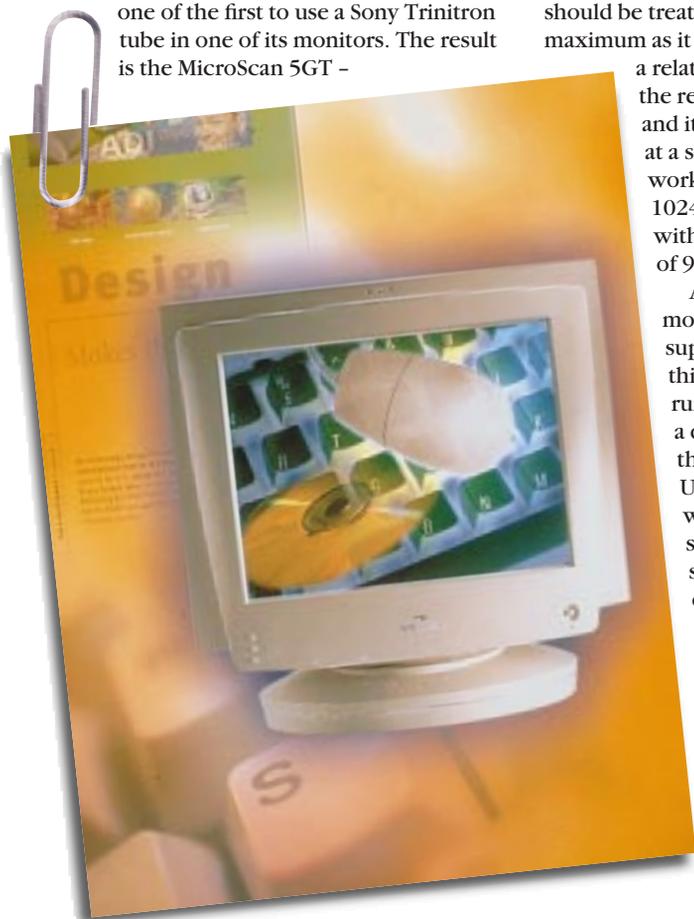
Overall, the quality of this monitor is excellent. As you would expect from a Trinitron screen, colours are bright and vibrant with good contrast. There was a tiny amount of distortion at the right-hand edge

of the screen but you'd have to look very hard to find this.

Incidentally, ADI also has a new lower-cost 15in monitor – the MicroScan 4P, which has a maximum refresh rate of 85Hz at 1024x 768. The unit has built-in speakers and a microphone, and there's also an optional USB hub. The controls are easy to use and cover most adjustments you might want to make, while the picture quality is very good for its price of £229.13.

Given the very low price, the ADI MicroScan 5GT is a real bargain and offers the high quality you'd expect to find on a much more expensive monitor. For smaller spaces, the MicroScan 4P is also worth a look.

Adele Dyer



17in Trinitron monitor
16in viewable area
1024x768 resolution in 32-bit colour at 92Hz refresh rate
£410.08
ADI: 0181 236 0801
www.adi.com.tw

ADI MicroScan 5GT	
Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Specifications



Viglen Home 333 PC

A Pentium II 333 PC for the home user, offering high performance and a good balance of software

Viglen has built up a good reputation for its PCs over the past 20-odd years. You can find evidence for this in the co-branding of the Home Pro systems it builds and sells through Dixons Group stores - they also bear the Microsoft moniker. The Home 333 is sold by Viglen itself and because it's available direct, it benefits from keener pricing than the Home Pro range.

As you'd expect from a machine based on Intel's fastest PC processor to date, the Home 333 goes like the clappers and its BAPCo performance result of 345 is one of the fastest we've ever seen. Graphics performance is well above par too. The ATi XPERT@Work graphics card (based on the same chips as the XPERT@Play awarded Best Buy in last month's graphics cards roundup) turned in a fine 3.41 result in the Final Reality graphics benchmark. You won't be disappointed with this machine's ability to keep up with the latest games.

Viglen bundles some games to propel



you straight into the thick of the action and also includes a more sedate pack of half a dozen Microsoft multimedia titles, plus a copy of Microsoft Works. Works isn't as high-powered as Microsoft's Office suite but it's certainly very functional and should suffice even if you want to do a bit more than just take work home.

The Home 333 does lack a few of the extras that we've come to expect on a PC at this price. For example, there's no Zip drive (something many manufacturers are now fitting as standard) and it would have been nice to have had a DVD-ROM drive, too. The system's 24x CD-ROM drive is certainly up to the job, but the future seems to lie with DVD discs. These will eventually replace the CD-ROM because they can hold entire movies and up to 17Gb of data. So if you want to watch DVD films on your Home 333, you'll have to add a drive later.

Fortunately, the Home 333 does leave plenty of room for expansion. The mini-tower case is more tower than mini and has bags of room inside. It's also tidily organised, a good sign that care was taken when this PC was built. The high standard of assembly extends to the Home 333's exterior as well, and its case is solid and quite stylish (for a PC).

It's good to see that Viglen hasn't

skimped on the mouse or the keyboard either. The popular Microsoft Intellimouse supplied has a rolling wheel for scrolling through applications, and the keyboard is a lightweight but nonetheless sturdy unit that should stand up to prolonged typing. There's also a Microsoft SideWinder Pro joystick, so you'll be able to get started with the bundled games.

The one disappointment is the 15in Envy monitor. Although its display quality is reasonable, its built-in speakers are redundant since a pair of Yamaha ones are also supplied.

More importantly, nearly £1,800 is a lot to pay for a PC that doesn't have a 17in screen. Those two extra inches make a huge difference to games and multimedia software, as well as making spreadsheets much easier to work with.

To be fair, if you're buying for home use you might not want a 17in behemoth cluttering up your sitting room, but we would still strongly recommend one. In fact, we'd have happily settled for slower performance but a bigger monitor - who knows, it might even come in handy for DVD movies if you add a suitable drive! **The Home 333 is a very fast PC but you might cavil at the lack of several accepted extras - including a decent-sized monitor.**

John Sabine

Specifications

- 333MHz Intel Pentium II processor
- 64Mb of SDRAM
- 5Gb hard disk drive
- ATi XPERT@Work AGP graphics card with 4Mb of RAM
- 15in monitor with built-in speakers
- Yamaha wavetable sound card
- Yamaha speakers with subwoofer
- 24x CD-ROM drive
- Internal 56Kbits/s modem
- Microsoft SideWinder Pro joystick
- Microsoft Works, Encarta and Money
- £1761.33 (inc VAT)**
- Viglen: 0181 758 7000**
- www.viglen.co.uk**

Viglen Home 333 PC

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

Amacom Flipdisk

Notebook PCs have room for only one internal hard drive, so if it needs upgrading, it's out with one and in with the other. But if you don't

like the idea of throwing away your old hard drive, the Amacom Flipdisk may be the answer.

External hard drives for notebook PCs aren't new but the Flipdisk puts a cunning spin on the idea. Its hard drive component is a normal 2.5in notebook drive wrapped in chunky blue plastic. The clever part is the interface - a standard Type II PC Card that folds out from beneath the case. Sit the Flipdisk on a table top, slide in the PC card and you've instantly increased your notebook's storage capacity. Usefully, the Flipdisk also has a parallel port interface, which means you can use it on desktop PCs, too.

Notebook users with Windows 95 simply have to plug in the Flipdisk to get it working and no external power source is required. The parallel port connection needs a supplied driver to be installed and power is drawn from the keyboard socket using a cable splitter.

The Flipdisk is both small and light



enough to fit into a jacket pocket but the plastic case won't put up with too much abuse. Not that any hard drive should be knocked about of course, but we would have liked to see sturdier plastic used in addition to the built-in shock absorbers.

The drive we tested worked smoothly in both PC Card and parallel port configurations and, apart from the flimsy plastic, we can't really find anything about it to criticise. Price-wise, a bare 2.5in drive of similar capacity doesn't cost much less, but this doesn't buy the Flipdisk's neat versatility.

Simple to use and reasonably priced, the Flipdisk is an effective and versatile way of adding to, rather than replacing, an existing notebook PC hard drive.

Julian Prokaza

Specifications

- External 2.8Gb hard drive
- Type II PC Card and parallel port interfaces
- Powered by a PC Card slot or a keyboard socket
- Size (wxdxh): 87x 45x31mm
- Weight: 186g

About £381 (inc VAT)

Amacom: 0181 993 7373
www.amacom-tech.com

Amacom Flipdisk	
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: Type II PC Card slot or a parallel port.

PhotoRecall

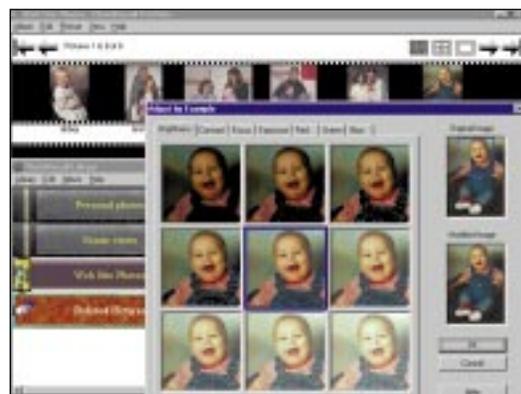
Most people have boxes of old photographs that are fun to sort through but no-one can remember what they're about. Organised types

may put their snaps into albums, but this is time-consuming. But if you have a PC and scanner, then PhotoRecall provides you with an interesting alternative.

PhotoRecall is a photo management system for digital images. It can import pictures from digital cameras or any other Twain-compliant device, including scanners. You can search your hard drive for photos and can even conduct Internet searches by keyword for suitable images.

Photos are stored in 'albums' and PhotoRecall will display them individually, four to a screen, or as thumbnails. It's easy to add and remove photos from albums and to create new albums. You can also give photos a title and add notes about each. Since all of PhotoRecall's images are stored in a central database, this may lead to some file duplication on your hard drive, but there is an option to just store pointers to files kept elsewhere.

PhotoRecall also has an editor that allows you to crop, zoom, flip and rotate images. You can adjust such things as the brightness, contrast, focus and exposure by choosing the effect you want from a



selection of samples, and special effects can be applied in a similar way.

Images can be exported from a PhotoRecall album in over 25 file formats and slide shows can be created to display photos in an album in sequence. Finally, there's the option to create a 'Portable Player' - a single file containing a set of images which can then be e-mailed or posted to someone and they can then 'play' without needing additional software. **PhotoRecall is a powerful photo cataloguing and management system and is likely to prove useful to home and small businesses alike.**

Steve Cotterell

Specifications

- Organises and stores digital photographs
- Searches local and network drives and the Internet for images
- Editing tools for correcting photographic mistakes
- Accepts images from digital cameras and scanners

£46.95 (inc VAT)

G&A Imaging: 001 819 772 7600
www.ga-imaging.com

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

Minimum requirements: 486 PC, Windows 95, 8Mb RAM, 20Mb hard disk space.

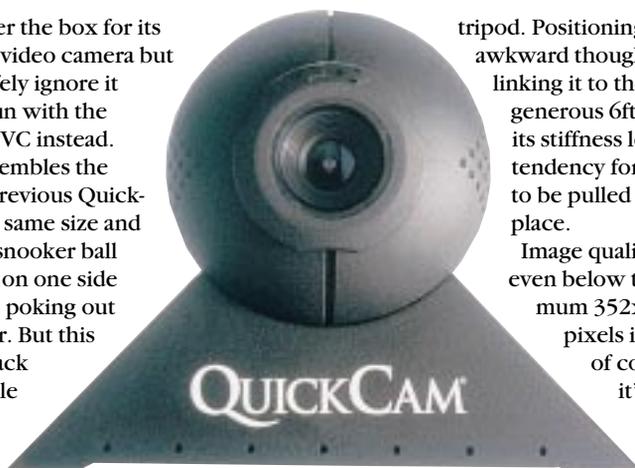


Connectix QuickCam VC

It's hard to imagine how someone could come up with a dull and dreary term for talking face-to-face with someone on the other side of the world using a PC, but someone has and it's 'video conferencing'.

Connectix has opted to splash this

term all over the box for its newest PC video camera but you can safely ignore it and have fun with the QuickCam VC instead. The VC resembles the design of previous QuickCams - the same size and shape as a snooker ball with a lens on one side and a cable poking out of the other. But this time it's black and available in two versions -- one



tripod. Positioning can be awkward though; the lead linking it to the PC is a generous 6ft long, but its stiffness leads to a tendency for the camera to be pulled out of place.

Image quality is good, even below the maximum 352x288 pixels in millions of colours, and it's possible to capture up to 15 frames

that connects to a parallel port and one to a USB port.

We tested the USB model, but check that your PC uses Windows 95b before buying one, since earlier versions of Windows 95 don't have USB support, even if your PC has the necessary sockets. With USB, getting the VC up and running is simple - you just plug it into a free USB port and follow the on-screen instructions.

The VC comes with a rubber stand but it can also screw onto a standard camera

a second if you happen to be using a speedy PC.

Connectix supplies QuickCam 3.0 and VideoPhone 3.0 but any third-party video application should work. Using the VC as a video phone needs a camera at the other end but anyone can receive video e-mail - simply attach a clip to a message.

A little pricey for an impulse buy, but if you want to get more out of your online communications, the QuickCam VC is a simple way to do it. Julian Prokaza

Specifications

Manual focus from 1in to infinity
 Image size: 352x288 pixels in millions of colours
 Software included for video conferencing and video e-mail
£113.63 (inc VAT)
Computers Unlimited: 0181 200 8282
www.connectix.com

Connectix QuickCam VC	
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: Pentium 100 PC with USB, 16Mb of RAM, 10Mb hard drive, CD-ROM drive, Windows 95b.

IMSI NetAccelerator Deluxe

When we last reviewed NetAccelerator (November 1997), we thought that it was an effective

method for your modem to earn its keep. It works by downloading Web pages which link to the one you're reading in the background, making them immediately available when you click a link. The main improvement in this version is its ability to work with Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer versions 4.0 (both are supplied), and AOL. In addition, small improvements have also been made which, IMSI says, have increased NetAccelerator's speed.

Speed improvements are only possible, though, if there's enough bandwidth to cope with NetAccelerator's downloading demands. If you're viewing a busy site that's struggling to service the demands of many users at once, NetAccelerator cannot download linked pages or increase speed.

Six other Web utilities are provided in this package and two are worth a special mention. Jackhammer works like a blunt instrument to access busy Web sites. You can enter up to four addresses and Jackhammer attempts to contact them - repeatedly - in the background while you browse elsewhere. When Jackhammer reaches a site, it opens a new browser window or downloads the file.



Gravity Lite allows users to read and contribute articles to over 20,000 newsgroups, on or offline. Either headers or full articles can be downloaded, sorted and saved. The other utilities included are WebSleuth Lite (an information gatherer), an anti-virus program called WebScanX, the file compressing utility WinPack 32 Deluxe and NetJumper, which bookmarks downloaded pages. At £5.00 cheaper than the original price of NetAccelerator alone, this package represents exceptional value for money.

This package provides an excellent and cost-effective selection of tools to simplify and speed up your use of the Web. Steve Cotterell

Specifications

Uses modem 'idle' online time to download Web pages
 Repeatedly tries busy sites until a connection is made
 Enables easy access to over 20,000 newsgroups
 Works in the background to improve your Web productivity

£34.99 (inc VAT)
IMSI (UK) Ltd: 0181 581 2000
www.imsiuk.co.uk

IMSI NetAccelerator Deluxe	
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: 486 PC, 8Mb RAM, 2.5Mb hard disk space, Internet access, Windows 95, Netscape Navigator 3.01 or Internet Explorer 3.02.

Claris Home Page 3.0

A program that promises the ability to design a Web site quickly and easily

The World Wide Web is one of the most popular parts of the Internet. Everyone and his or her proverbial mate have a presence on it, and you should have too. You mean you don't? Enter stage left, Claris Home Page.

Unperturbed by Microsoft's dominance of the PC software market, Apple subsidiary Claris has just released version 3.0 of Home Page – a program aimed at helping you design your own Web site.

Like its main competitor (Microsoft's Frontpage 98), Home Page promises to make designing a Web site a straightforward process by removing all the complicated technical stuff. Does it manage to? Well, it's a definite case of yes – and no.

As a rule of thumb, easy-to-use applications rarely need thick manuals. Claris Home Page's printed instruction guide can best be described as a pamphlet but, sadly, it accompanies an application which is not so easy to use. When you first launch Home Page, you're presented with a blank page complete with flashing cursor. What next? Read the pamphlet? No, that doesn't help, but fortunately, the electronic help files are much better. A few minutes spent with these proves to be an essential investment.

The simplest way to get started in Home Page is to use one of its Assistants (similar to Microsoft's Wizards). These

present a wide range of likely subjects, from personal to educational home pages, and after a few simple steps, you've got the guts of a working Web site. All you need to do now is add the bells and whistles by replacing the prepared template's text and pictures with your own content.

This is where Home Page really comes into its own because the CD-ROM is teeming with colourful pictures, animations, tunes and sounds. As you would expect, these can be dragged and dropped into place and then rearranged at will. For advanced users there are plenty of fine-tuning opportunities but you really don't need to be an expert to produce an all-singing, all-dancing Web site.

Of course, every now and then it's reassuring to check the fruits of your labour by taking a look at your evolving home page in your Web browser. Windows 95 is clever enough to know which browser is your favourite, so why on earth doesn't Home Page make use of this same information? To expect novice users to know what the browser's executable (.EXE) file is called, let alone where to find it, is quite ridiculous – and yet this feature expects the user to do exactly that.

Now, before digesting our next criticism, bear in mind that the *What PC?* office is equipped with a surfeit of pow-

erful PCs. Now we can say it – Claris Home Page is s-l-o-w. Even on a machine fitted with 64Mb of memory and powered by a 200MHz MMX processor, the program failed to keep up with our editing pace. It's extremely disconcerting – and on such a machine, entirely unacceptable – to find that the PC is several words behind when you type. But in Home Page, it happens constantly. Giving it the benefit of the doubt, we tried it out on two other PCs, but it was the same.

Still, we ploughed on and eventually produced a Web site that impressed most people we showed it to. Getting the site up and running for real on the Web was relatively straightforward, though you'll need to contact your Internet Service Provider (ISP) for some information that you're required to enter.

We really wanted to like Claris Home Page but it didn't prove easy. The program is unacceptably slow at times and assumes too much knowledge of the Internet. Buy it if you're an experienced user with a super-fast PC but novices might be better-off starting with the Web-page features of a good word processor.

Scott Colvey



Assistants to create pre-formatted Web sites, with frames and forms if required

Includes PC and Mac versions

Built-in spell-checker

Large library of images, sounds and animations

Drag-and-drop operation

45 complete page and site templates

£105.74 (inc VAT)

Claris: 0345 413060

www.claris.co.uk

Claris Home Page 3.0

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

Minimum requirements: 486 PC, 12Mb of RAM, around 50Mb of hard disk space, CD-ROM drive, Windows 95.



Dell Inspiron 3200 & Hi-Grade Notino 6266-2

Two of the first Pentium II-powered notebook PCs sold in the UK

As part of its campaign to move all PC users over to Pentium II-based machines, Intel launched a version of the processor suitable for notebook computers on 2 April. Here we take an exclusive advance look at two machines

based on the new chip – the fastest notebooks we have ever seen.

Both the Dell Inspiron 3200 and Hi-Grade Notino 6266-2 use the same Pentium II 266MHz processor, which has several important differences from the chip used in desktop PCs. The new processor runs at a lower voltage than its desktop counterpart and so gives a reasonable battery life – both manufacturers claim upwards of two hours. The lower power requirement also means that the processor runs relatively coolly and can do without a hefty heatsink, resulting in a smaller processor package.

The Pentium II chip is built on to the same Mobile Module as Intel uses for its 200MMX, 233MMX and 266MMX notebook processors. This module holds the special support chipset a Pentium II needs to communicate with the hard disk and graphics card, and keeping it the same means that manufacturers can use the chip in their existing notebooks with only minor (and hence less costly) modifications.

In fact, this is exactly what Dell and Hi-Grade have done. The Dell Inspiron 3200 is practically the same as its Inspiron 3000, while processor aside, the Notino 6266-2 is identical to the Notino 6266.

The Inspiron 3200 is a very competent notebook. Ours had 64Mb of RAM, a 4Gb hard disk and 13.3in TFT screen. We've commented positively on its compact design in the past but we're still not happy that the keyboard's typing angle cannot be adjusted. Although performance is impressive for a notebook, the Inspiron's BAPCo

score of 212 is still well below the 260 or so that we would expect from a desktop of the same specification.

The Notino is only a touch faster, giving a BAPCo score of 214. A notebook PC will never match an equivalently-specified desktop system, but this



relative lack of performance may be due to the Inspiron and Notino being such early machines. Nevertheless, both are more than fast enough for everyday use and the Notino achieved the higher score with 48Mb of RAM against the Inspiron's 64Mb.

Aesthetically, the Notino is the more pleasing of the two. It's a lot bigger than the Inspiron and has a rubber covering, similar to that found on the Psion 3c. Although it has the same size screen as the Inspiron, the Notino's larger case makes the 13.3in TFT panel look smaller.

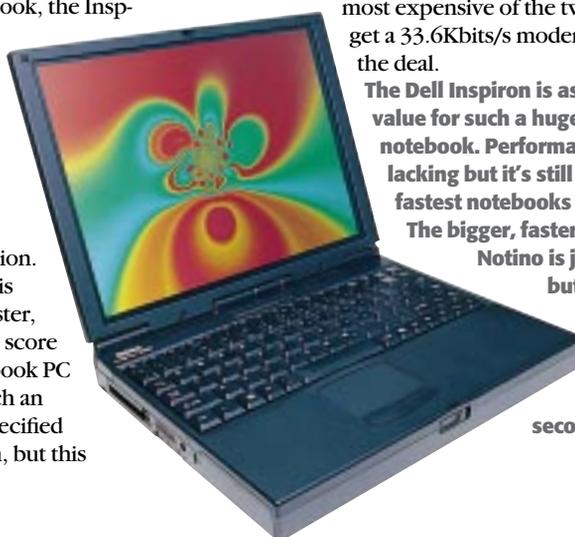
We liked the Notino's keyboard, which rises up as you open the case. Its slope also is more pleasant to type on than the Dell. It has a trackpoint button rather than a touchpad (the Inspiron has a touchpad) and this may not appeal to all users.

Despite having less RAM, it is also the most expensive of the two, but you do get a 33.6Kbits/s modem as part of the deal.

The Dell Inspiron is astonishing value for such a hugely specified notebook. Performance is a little lacking but it's still one of the fastest notebooks we've seen.

The bigger, faster Hi-Grade Notino is just as good but the higher price and lower specification put it in second place.

John Sabine



Specifications

Dell Inspiron 3200:

Intel Pentium II 266MHz processor

64Mb of RAM

4Gb hard disk

13.3in TFT screen

MS Office Small Business Edition

Hi-Grade Notino 6266-2:

Intel Pentium II 266MHz processor

48Mb of RAM

4Gb hard disk

13.3in TFT screen

33.6Kbits/s PC Card modem

Lotus SmartSuite 97, IBM WorldBook 97, IBM ViaVoice Gold

Dell: 01344 720000

£2,583.83

www.dell.co.uk

Hi-Grade: 0181 532 6111

£3,037.38

www.higrade.com

Dell Inspiron 3200

Build quality ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Performance ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Features ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Value for money ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Hi-Grade Notino 6266-2

Build quality ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Performance ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Features ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Value for money ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BAPCo rating: Dell – 212, Hi-Grade – 214

Hewlett-Packard 620LX

The first colour Windows CE 2 palmtop in the UK comes with 'pocket' versions of Word, Excel, Internet Explorer and Outlook

Windows CE 2 may superficially resemble its desktop-based counterpart but so far there's one thing missing – colour. Not that CE is to blame – version 2 of Microsoft's palmtop operating system has full support for colour screens – it's simply that no manufacturer has taken advantage of it. Until now.

Hot on the heels of the monochrome HP 320LX (reviewed in the March issue of *What PC?*), Hewlett-Packard has produced a Windows CE 2 palmtop with a colour screen.

Although significantly fatter than its little brother, the 620LX is still recognisable as a palmtop but it's more suited to a bag than a pocket. The extra bulk is due to the power requirements of the colour screen and the 620LX uses a rechargeable lithium battery pack that gives around five hours of use from a full charge. A replacement battery which packs twice the power is available from Hewlett-Packard and this could prove to be a very worthwhile investment.

The screen displays 256 colours at a resolution of 640x240. It's bright and easy to see in all lighting conditions. Image quality is still poorer than that of a good notebook PC, largely because of the extra touch-sensitive layer, but it's still far superior to any monochrome palmtop screen.

The 620LX has another advantage over other palmtops – its larger size gives it more room for the keyboard. The solid

rubber keys are still relatively small but there is plenty of space between them. It's no Psion Series 5 but the 620LX is one of the few palmtops suitable for prolonged typing.

The 620LX also has a number of special keys that offer shortcuts to various applications. These are helpful – it's both quicker and easier to activate Word by pressing a key rather than taking out the stylus and double-tapping an on-screen icon. Another useful shortcut is provide by the button on the outside of the case. Pressing this starts the Voice Recorder application that can be used for taking voice memos. Hewlett-Packard claims its compression system allows one hour of recording per Mb, yielding a theoretical maximum of 16 hours of dictation. Don't throw away your Dictaphone yet though – the quality of the recordings is suitable only for occasional memos and using the 620LX as a digital recorder will quickly drain its batteries.

Microsoft Windows CE 2 looks and acts just like Windows 95, and 'pocket' versions of Word, Excel, Internet Explorer and Outlook are included as standard. Connecting to your desktop PC is very simple and the supplied synchronisation software allows you to update chosen files, e-mail, contacts and diary information automatically.

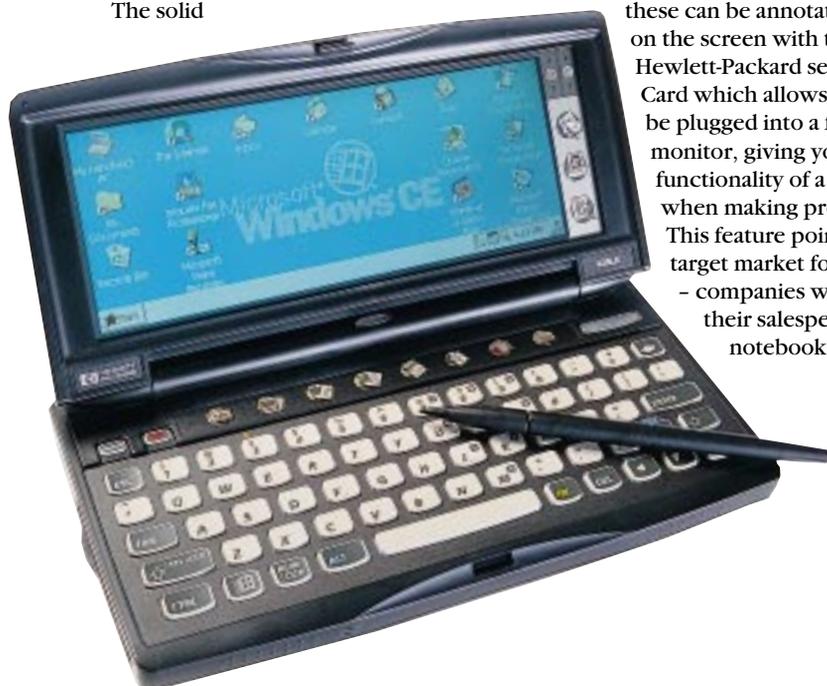
There's also a PowerPoint slide-viewer which lets you look at presentations created on your PC; these can be annotated by writing on the screen with the stylus. Hewlett-Packard sells a special PC Card which allows the 620LX to be plugged into a full-size colour monitor, giving you all the functionality of a normal PC when making presentations. This feature points to the real target market for this machine – companies which equip their salespeople with notebooks. At £799, the

HP 620LX may be expensive for a palmtop, but it is cheaper and more portable than a notebook PC.

Despite a 75MHz processor and 16Mb of RAM, the 620LX is by no means the fastest palmtop we have seen. In Pocket Word, it struggles to keep up with moderately quick typing and if you hold down the delete key to remove a lot of text, you can't see the result until you've released it. This isn't a major problem by any means, but it is annoying.

The HP 620LX has a wonderful screen but it's let down by its relatively short battery life and mediocre performance. Whether the machine's price is low enough to tempt people away from cheap notebooks remains to be seen.

Adam Evans



Specifications

75MHz Hitachi 32-bit processor

16Mb of RAM

640x240 backlit touch-sensitive screen with 256 colours

Microsoft Windows CE 2.0 includes Pocket Word, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint and Internet Explorer

Rechargeable lithium battery pack and mains adaptor supplied

Built-in speaker and voice recording

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

Docking cradle for connection to PC

Size (wxdxh): 195x103x32mm

Weight: 586g

£799 (inc VAT)

Hewlett-Packard: 0990 474747
www.hp.com

Hewlett-Packard 620LX

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

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



Quicken 98 Deluxe

The latest version of Intuit's home finance software, now with online share price updating

For several years Quicken has been the best-selling personal finance package in the UK, with a reputation for combining in-depth help and documentation, with a rich and flexible feature set and high usability.

Previous upgrades have always built on their immediate predecessors, sustaining quality, but Intuit has slipped this time. Although the product's fundamental strengths thankfully remain preserved, it's disappointing that Quicken 98 Deluxe displays so many careless flaws. None are particularly serious, but collectively they give the impression that Intuit has sacrificed attention to detail in a rushed launch - possibly driven by the earlier announcement of the increasingly competitive Microsoft Money 98 Financial Suite.

Installation needs 35Mb to 41Mb of hard drive space. The upper figure assumes you also install the bundled Microsoft Internet Explorer (which comes in both 3.0 and 4.0 versions) to take full advantage of Quicken's online facilities. Be careful if you need to uninstall any previous version of Quicken - due to ambiguous guidance, if you do this after installing Quicken 98, it wipes out both programs.

Another of the flaws that you encounter soon after starting a Quicken 98 session is that the in-context video clips, which show you how to handle some of the trickier procedures, no longer work. Finally, on viewing the introductory on-screen quick tour, you'll be thanked for buying 'Quicken Home and Business'.

Glitches aside, the good news is that the basic program has retained its balance of functionality and usability - and its excellent interface, too. Quicken 98 Deluxe has kept the same proven structure as Quicken 6 Deluxe. It displays a conventional menu and toolbar, with large icons at the top and an optional Activity Bar at the bottom with even larger icons for fast navigation to the seven major functional areas -



Accounts, Bills, Planning, Investments, Home and Car, Online, and Reports.

An understated strength of Quicken 98 Deluxe (and the standard version, too) is that you can use it in two modes. In the familiar multiple-window mode, you can employ all the usual operations like moving, sizing and cascading windows, and view two or more windows simultaneously. For simpler operation with more navigation tools, you can work with just one window at a time. This displays an increasing number of QuickTabs on the right for fast return to any window previously opened in the session. With that and many other customising options, Quicken offers you unsurpassed scope for tailoring its interface - a welcome facility in a program that you might work with frequently and at length.

Although Quicken 98 Deluxe comes with a dozen or so new features and enhancements, most of them are relatively minor. You can, for example, now print out a calendar to give you a visual overview of imminent financial events, and there's a new integrated invoicing section replacing QuickInvoice. Reports and graphs are more flexible, and Register sorting options now include payee and category. Investment tracking has several new facilities, including a new Portfolio View and a payslip wizard to help you track Self Assessment information.

In the online area, the improvements are more significant. Quicken 98 Deluxe

is now compatible with OFX (Open Financial Exchange), which means that it's enabled for the much-heralded online banking revolution.

However, at the time of our review, no high street banks had yet rolled out an actual service. Nor was the new enriched Quicken Web site yet operational, although hopefully it will be by the time you read this. In contrast, an impressive feature that is working splendidly is the online updating of share and unit trust prices - increasingly attractive in this nation of

shareholders.

Quicken 98 Deluxe's impressive balance of power and usability is now enhanced by additional online features. All the more pity that it's tarnished by a clutch of careless glitches and minor bugs which will hopefully be corrected promptly.

Terry Pinnell

Specifications

- Invoicing
- Online updating of currency rates
- Emergency records organiser
- Home inventory
- Automatic reminders
- Online share price updates
- Multiple windows
- Drill-down (Zoom) in graphs and reports

£49.95 (inc VAT)

Intuit: 0800 585058

www.intuit.co.uk

Quicken 98 Deluxe

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

Minimum requirements: 486 PC, 8Mb of RAM, 35Mb of hard disk space, Windows 3.1, Internet connection.



Claris FileMaker Pro 4

A database that fills the gap between simple electronic card files and complex relational systems

Databases seem to have fallen out of favour with the average user – Microsoft's Office suite doesn't include one unless you buy the professional version. People often choose not to use databases because of their complexity, and today's powerful spreadsheets are more than capable of storing lists and electronic card files.

Claris FileMaker Pro is aimed at those whose data is too sophisticated for a spreadsheet, but who don't want to learn database programming. What FileMaker Pro offers is the ability to create semi-automated database systems which can store pictures, sounds and movies, as well as text and numbers.

Fifty predesigned templates covering business, home and education are provided with FileMaker Pro for simpler tasks. Databases created from these templates will typically contain a form view, a list view and a predefined report for printing out the data. At the top of the screen is a neat set of control buttons for adding, deleting and finding records, and for switching between views.

If a template matches your needs, you can start using it straightaway, and it's hard to think of a more effortless way of creating a database. However, you'll almost certainly want to modify both the database itself and its screen layouts because a template is unlikely to be exactly what you want. There is, for

example, a template for collectors, but it's designed with coins and stamps in mind. Several changes would be needed if you wanted it to use it for something like antique watches or 1960s memorabilia.

Modifying a template is fairly easy once you've grasped that it's a two-stage process. First, you delete the fields you don't want and add new ones, then you modify the screen layouts by dragging fields and labels into new positions. You could define a database from scratch in the same way, but then you'd also have to define the control buttons that make template databases so easy to use.

One major weakness in FileMaker Pro, which is unusual for a Windows program, is that it does not have toolbar icons for common tasks – everything has to be selected from drop-down menus. What it needs is a couple of wizards – one to step you through customising the predefined templates and another to create a set of control buttons.

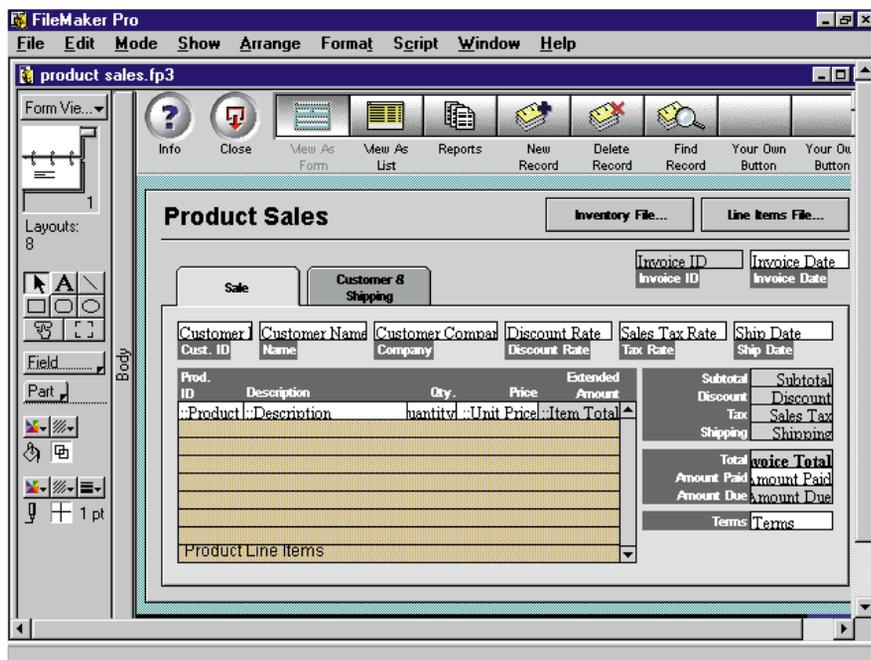
FileMaker Pro is very good at using information created in other programs, either by importing it into a database that has already been defined or, more simply, by opening a file from the donor program and saving it as a new FileMaker Pro database. Files from dBASE, Excel, Lotus 1-2-3 and Claris Works can all be treated in this way.

At over £200, FileMaker Pro is too expensive to use simply as a card index, so

it's also able to handle relationships between data stored in separate files. These have to be imported into FileMaker Pro before you can use them – it's not possible to attach external data files as you can with Microsoft Access. FileMaker Pro's system has the advantage of simplicity, but it does rather restrict the tasks for which the program is suitable.

Two commendable features are that it has a very simple scripting language and can store incredibly long text fields. Database administrators hate long text fields but others love them, using them for notes and comments that don't fit into a rigid database structure. The scripting language can be used to automate complicated processes by combining simpler actions (picked from a list) and storing them in a file. Scripts can be attached to buttons so that others can employ them simply by clicking with the mouse.

FileMaker Pro is not as flexible as a fully programmable relational database but it's much, much easier to use. Suitable for individuals and small workgroups who want to set up a database system without professional help. Paul Wardley



Specifications

Handles flat-file and relational databases

Simple scripting language

Databases can be produced in HTML format for use on the Web

Fifty built-in database templates

Multiple views of the same data

Stores sound files, graphics and QuickTime movies

Compatible with PC and Mac versions 3.0 and 4.0

£233.83 (inc VAT)

Claris: 0345 413060

www.claris.com/uk

FileMaker Pro 4.0

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

Minimum requirements: 486 PC, CD-ROM drive, 8Mb RAM, VGA graphics, 9Mb hard disk space, Windows 3.1.



IBM Aptiva Intrepid L44

A user-friendly PC from IBM, which also functions as a CD player and home communications centre

The IBM Aptiva Intrepid L44 may be black but it's more than just a standard PC with a paint job. The 15in monitor, for example, is equipped with a microphone, USB port and a built-in sound system by Bose – a company better known for its high-quality, miniature hi-fi speakers. The microphone and speakers enable the Intrepid to be used as a hands-off speakerphone, answering machine and audio CD player.

The system case is a floor-standing tower unit, so it's not easy to attach peripheral devices, which is why one of the USB ports is wired by a cable to the more accessible monitor. The cable from the monitor to the system unit looks like something from an electricity generating station and terminates in four plugs. These are colour-coded for correct connection to the video, speaker, microphone and USB ports on the back of the PC. Other connections have to be made for the mouse, keyboard and modem, as well as power cables for the system unit and monitor. The back of the PC is therefore some-



thing of a mess, but when you run the extra-long keyboard, mouse and monitor cables to the desktop you have a very neat system with no trailing speaker or telephone cables.

The Intrepid's keyboard is delightful. Like everything else in this system, it's black and loaded with extra features. On its right-hand edge are sets of buttons and lights, and a multi-function controller. The buttons are used to launch the Aptiva help system, a program installer, Word Pro, Lotus Organizer and Netscape. The help system is hard-wired into place, but the other four buttons can be redefined to launch any programs you want. A blank template is provided to cover up the predefined selections.

The keyboard's multi-function controller operates the CD-ROM drive and messaging system. It can be used to play, pause and skip backwards and forwards through tracks on an audio CD or messages on the answering machine. An indicator on the keyboard tells you if there are messages waiting, and a Talk button fires up the speakerphone if you want to reply.

Complementing the keyboard is a black Scrollpoint mouse with two buttons and an embedded Trackpoint finger-operated joystick controller. This is IBM's answer to Microsoft's Intellimouse, but has the advantage that it lets you scroll the screen in any direction rather than just up and down.

Inside the system unit is a highly inte-

grated Pentium II computer. The video controller and sound system are built onto the motherboard, so the only plug-in card is a 33.6Kbits/s modem that can be upgraded to 56Kbits/s via the IBM Update Connector. This service is available throughout the one-year warranty period of the PC, which uses the modem to call a special IBM number that automatically downloads and upgrades all the software on the PC as required.

There is little to criticise in terms of performance, which is on a par with other Pentium II 233MHz systems. However, the Intrepid's screen shimmers at 640x480 VGA resolution. Selecting 800x600 resolution, which is what most people prefer on a 15in monitor, fixes this. The 4.2Gb Ultra DMA hard disk provides ample storage and the 2Mb of memory on the graphics adaptor can be upgraded to 4Mb if you want to work with exceptionally high-resolution, high-colour graphics.

In all, this is a brave attempt at making a PC that's easy for newcomers to understand, but it could lead to a generation of users who end up scratching their heads when faced with an ordinary PC that hasn't got the Intrepid's extra features.

The Aptiva Intrepid is not cheap but it's very well made, well set up and easy to use. You can buy a faster machine for less money, but the Intrepid will appeal to people who take their kids to school in a four-wheel-drive off-roader. Paul Wardley

Specifications

Intel Pentium II 233MHz processor

32Mb of RAM

4.2Gb hard disk

Enhanced EZ-button keyboard

Scrollpoint mouse

24-speed CD-ROM drive

Bose speaker system built into monitor

Software: Windows 95, Lotus SmartSuite, IBM ViaVoice, encyclopaedia, games and communications software

£1,699 (inc VAT)

IBM: 0345 727272

www.ibm.com

IBM Aptiva Intrepid L44

Ease of use ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Performance ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Features ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Value for money ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

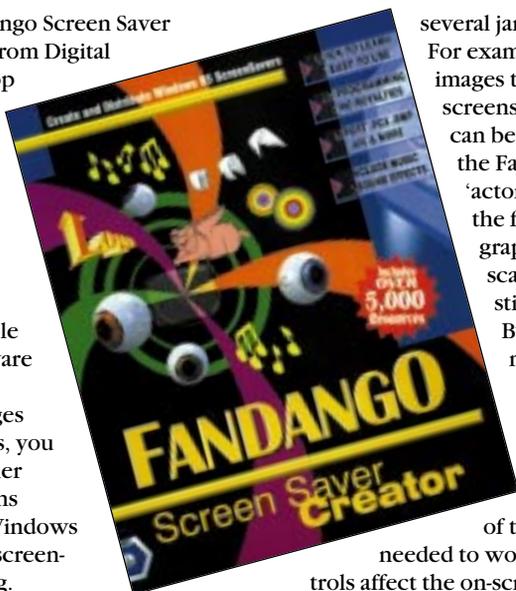
Fandango Screen Saver Creator

The Fandango Screen Saver Creator from Digital Workshop

allows you to create and distribute Windows 95 screensavers. Using either a wealth of images and sounds available with the software or your own imported images and sound files, you can put together wacky creations which leave Windows 95's standard screensavers standing.

In theory, Fandango makes the process easy, by not requiring any fancy programming skills. The software control panel is where most of your work will be done, and this includes icons for all the parts that go together to make up a screensaver.

You will need to get to grips with



several jargon terms, though. For example, the various images that make up each screensaver (of which there can be many) are known in the Fandango trade as 'actors'. These can take the form of still photographic images, landscapes, and moving or still cartoon graphics. But be warned - the more actors used, the slower the screensaver will be.

The control panel is tricky to master and a lot of trial and error is

needed to work out how the controls affect the on-screen action. When it does all come together as intended, the results are rather good, but we did find that particularly complicated screensavers would not preview properly.

There's good news for older PC owners - Fandango is supplied both on floppy disk and CD-ROM, although how many Windows 95 PCs don't have a CD-ROM drive is open to question.

Fandango is an excellent idea and great fun, but is undone by some annoying glitches. However, it's cheap and can produce some impressive screensavers.

Jim Haryott

Creates and saves personalised screensavers
 No programming knowledge needed
 Over 5,000 actor, image and sound samples
 Comes on CD-ROM and 3.5in floppy disk

£29.32

Digital Workshop: 01295 258335
www.digitalworkshop.co.uk

Fandango Screen Saver Creator

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

Minimum requirements: 486 PC, 16Mb of RAM, 10Mb of hard disk space, Windows 95.

Specifications

Seiko Smart Label Printer 220

Label printing has come a long way since the days of sticky plastic tape fired from a handheld labelling gun. The Seiko Smart Label Printer 220, for example, may look like a 1970s calculator, but it's actually a compact inkjet printer dedicated to printing sticky labels.

The Smart Label Printer is very easy to use and there are just two buttons to press - on/off and form feed. It's also easy to set up - just plug it into a free serial port (the cable supplied allows for both 9-pin and 25-pin connectors).

It can produce eight basic types of label - barcodes, address labels, and so on - and labels can contain mixtures of text and images. You can preview your label, preventing paper wastage resulting from trial-and-error label design. Multiple label prints can be handled too, thanks to the built-in database feature, and since each label takes around three seconds to print, running off a large batch won't take too long.

The Smart Label Printer can use a



variety of label sizes, provided they come on a roll and not an A4 sheet. We were supplied with address labels, measuring 29mm x 89mm. Larger address labels, plus tailored labels for 3.5in disks and VHS videos are also available - from Seiko, naturally.

At £185, the Smart Label Printer is more a business peripheral than something for use at home and therein lies the problem. In all honesty unless you need to print a lot of labels on a regular basis, it's a bit of a luxury item.

The Smart Label Printer 220 is a niche product which will appeal to a niche audience. With that in mind, it's quick and effective at printing sticky labels, but a standard inkjet or laser printer can do a similar job and much more besides.

Jim Haryott

Compact inkjet label printer
 Text, image and barcode printing
 One roll of labels included

£185

Seiko UK: 01628 410357
www.seiko.com

Seiko Smart Label Printer 220

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

Minimum requirements: 386 PC, 4Mb of RAM, 8Mb of hard disk space, Windows 3.1, free serial port.

Specifications