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In close-up this month are two new PDAs that use Windows CE 2, the first 266MMX notebook PC, a 3D graphics card with integrated sound and a PC that doubles as a home cinema system

Close-up

PowerCom Powernote

Regular readers of *What PC?* may recognise this notebook from our earlier reviews of Dell and ACi machines. It's made in Taiwan by major OEM manufacturer Compal and then sold in this country under a number of brand names. This time round, it's got a Powercom badge on its lid and something special under the hood.

In fact, this is the first 266MHz notebook to be available in the UK, just beating Dell and Gateway 2000's offerings. The processor is the latest in Intel's Tillamook range of low power-consumption chips, designed specifically for notebook PCs. Interestingly, despite its speed, it's a Pentium MMX



chip rather than a Pentium II. Coupled with the processor are a good set of components. The 13.3in TFT screen is bright and clear, and big enough to run comfortably at a resolution of 1024x768 pixels. There's an ample

64Mb of SDRAM and 3.2Gb hard disk on which even a full installation of the supplied Microsoft Office Small Business Edition barely makes an impression.

The last extra is a Xircom combined K56flex modem and Ethernet adaptor, which picked up four stars in last month's *What PC?* even at its RRP of £300. Although it doesn't perform quite as well as some of its desktop cousins, it's still an exceptionally convenient solution if you want to connect to an office network as well as the Internet.

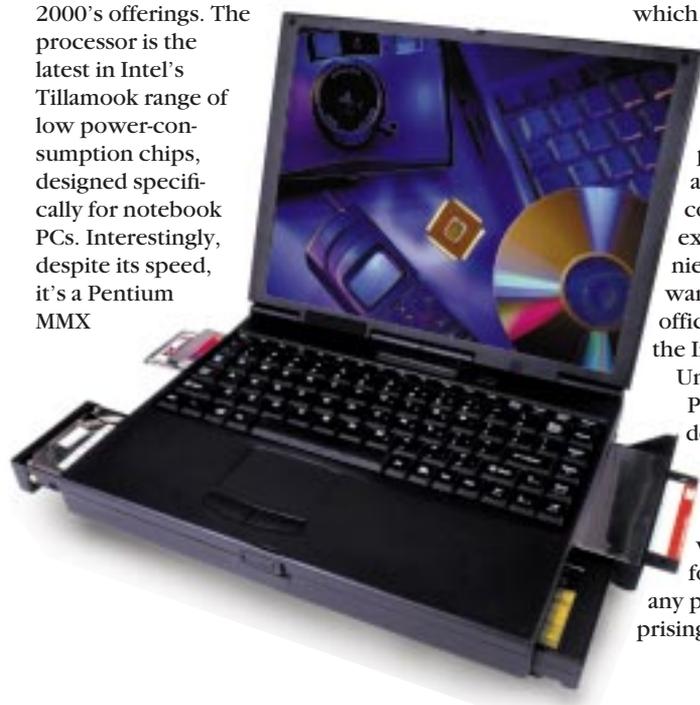
Unfortunately, the PowerNote is let down in two areas.

The keyboard is okay but it can't be adjusted for rake and we found it uncomfortable to type on for any period of time. Surprisingly, the other disap-

pointment is performance. The notebook scored 208 on our BAPCo test - fast for a notebook but barely ahead of one we've tested with a 233MHz processor and 32Mb of RAM. We expected much more of a difference given the PowerNote's mammoth specification.

To bring a notebook of this calibre under the £3,000 mark is quite an achievement and it demonstrates the pace of change in the mobile computing market. Performance lacks punch but the PowerNote would still be a good choice if you need the latest technology.

John Sabine



266MHz Pentium MMX processor
64Mb RAM
3.2Gb hard disk
13.3in TFT screen
Xircom combined K56flex modem and 10/100 Ethernet adaptor
Microsoft Office Small Business Edition
£2,877.58 (inc VAT)
PowerCom Direct: 01753 680777

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

Specifications

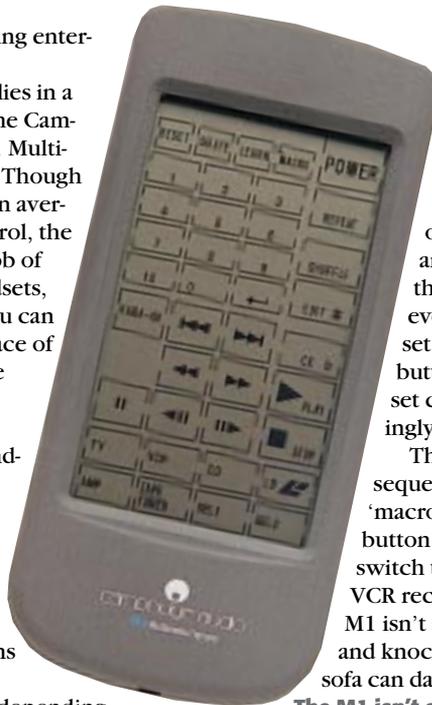
Cambridge Audio M1 MM Explorer

The remote control handset is loved by couch potatoes everywhere but the home entertainment explosion has led to a problem: when you settle down for a night in front of your TV, VCR, laser-disc player, satellite receiver and Dolby ProLogic decoder, you can spend more time fiddling with each

handset than being entertained.

The solution lies in a device such as the Cambridge Audio M1 Multimedia Explorer. Though no bigger than an average remote control, the M1 can do the job of eight other handsets, which means you can reclaim the surface of your coffee table with one fell swoop.

Universal handsets are not new but the M1 is a little different. First, it has a touch-sensitive LCD screen instead of buttons and the 'button' layout changes, depending on the device you're controlling. Second, where other universal handsets rely on lists of codes for different devices, the M1 learns from the handsets it's replacing.



Setting up the M1 is a long-winded but straightforward process. Point one of your usual handsets at the M1's infra-red receiver, press one of its 'buttons' while pressing one of the handset's buttons and the M1 will remember that function. Repeat this for every button on every handset and that's it. The M1 has buttons for almost every handset configuration but infuriatingly, not for Teletext.

The M1 can also store sequences of keystrokes as a 'macro'. You can program a single button to turn everything on, switch to Channel 4 and start the VCR recording. Unfortunately, the M1 isn't as robust as other handsets and knocking it off the arm of the sofa can damage the LCD panel.

The M1 isn't cheap but it can replace almost any remote control. The backlit model is essential for dark rooms and it's only real failing is that you have to tear your eyes away from the TV screen to use it.

Julian Prokaza

Specifications

Replaces up to eight infra-red remote controls

Backlit touch-screen LCD panel

Macro function for recording multiple commands

Uses 4xAAA batteries

M1 £80

Backlit M1 £100

Richer Sounds: 0171 940 2240

Cambridge Audio M1 MM Explorer

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

BigDisk

Windows applications get bigger with each new release and with a few installed on your PC, free hard disk space can be thin on the ground. Second hard drives can be added easily but if you've already got eight drive letters in My Computer (like some of our PCs), you may not want to add another two with a partitioned 4Gb drive.

BigDisk from Synchronys solves this problem by fooling your PC into believing that some or all of another hard drive is part of the c: drive. In other words, you can virtually combine several hard drives into a single c: drive.

The program supports fixed and some removable (Iomega and SyQuest) drives. Before using a removable drive, it's worth knowing that when files have been moved onto it, you can't remove the disk from the drive without risking system instability and data loss. Network drives can't be used as secondary storage either.

Following installation, you can specify the portion of your secondary drives to be included in the new c: drive, or you can let BigDisk automatically create new files and install new software on the drive with the most free space. Your Windows and other system folders' files are automatically protected against relocation and you can protect any other folders. BigDisk can be instructed to move folders to free up space on a hard drive.

Like all programs that manipulate data on hard drives, BigDisk does need to be used with a degree of caution. Without the program, any moved files are marooned and inaccessible, and the only safe way to uninstall BigDisk is to use its own uninstaller.



If you have several drives but just want a single drive letter, then BigDisk can help, but it needs to be used with care on some systems.

Steve Cotterell

Specifications

Allows your PC to read all its hard drives as one c: drive

Extends the amount of free space on the c: drive by moving files to other drives

Moves complete folders and applications

Transparent to Windows in normal use

System-critical folders are automatically protected from relocation

£29.99 (inc VAT)

Roderick Manhattan: 0181 875 4444

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

Minimum requirements: 486 PC, Windows 95, 8Mb RAM, 4Mb hard disk space, two or more logical hard drives.



Casio Cassiopeia A20 & Hewlett-Packard HP 360LX

Two new handheld PCs that use the latest version of Microsoft's slimline operating system – Windows CE 2

One of the old adages of the computer industry is 'never buy version 1 of anything' and this was certainly good advice for Windows CE. Microsoft's plans for an operating system to power a new breed of pocket computer may have looked great on paper but when the HPCs (handheld personal computers) finally appeared, their reception could hardly be called rapturous.

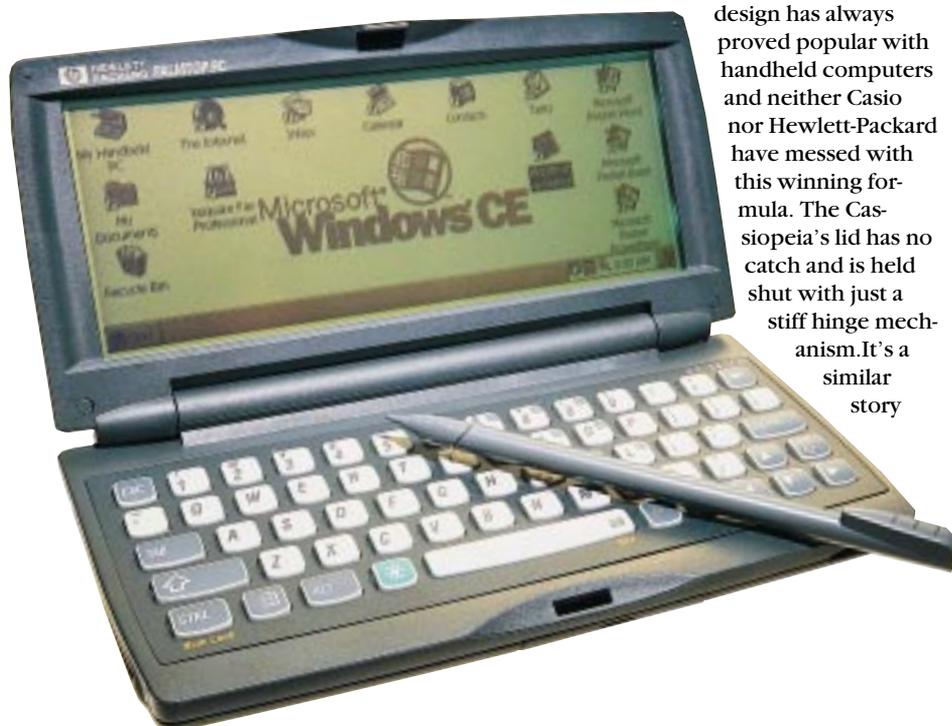
Although Windows CE looked like Windows 95, it lacked many of its functions (the 'CE' stands for Compact Edition) and its slimmed-down applications were far from perfect. But it was the hardware which drew the most flak. With their murky screens and pedestrian pace, HPCs compared badly with the competition and you could still only buy one model of HPC in the UK high street a year after they were launched.

Things look much better with Windows CE 2 and the next generation of HPCs. The first new models to arrive at *What PC?* were from Casio and Hewlett-Packard but there should be several others on sale by the time you read this.



Of the two, the Casio Cassiopeia A20 is the most stylish and its slim case, clean lines and brushed aluminium lid give it a certain James Bond appeal. The Hewlett-Packard HP 360LX, on the other hand, looks just like last year's 320LX and its surfeit of thick grey plastic styling won't appeal to everyone.

The clamshell case design has always proved popular with handheld computers and neither Casio nor Hewlett-Packard have messed with this winning formula. The Cassiopeia's lid has no catch and is held shut with just a stiff hinge mechanism. It's a similar story



with the 360LX, though this does have a catch to keep it closed.

Both the Cassiopeia and 360LX have a 640x240 LCD screen that's a touch over 6.5in from corner to corner. The screens are still touch-sensitive but the poor contrast problem which plagued mark 1 HPCs has been resolved. The Cassiopeia makes do with four grey scales whereas the 360LX has a lavish 16 and although

80MHz SH3 32-bit processor

8Mb RAM

640x240 backlit LCD screen with four grey scales

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

Applications: Pocket Word, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint, Internet Explorer

Requires 2xAA batteries or mains adaptor (supplied).

Size (wxdxh): 185x94x24.5mm

Weight: 430g

£499.99 (inc VAT)

Casio: 0181 450 9131
www.casio.co.uk

Casio Cassiopeia A20	
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: For connectivity software – 486 PC, 8Mb RAM, 10Mb hard disk space, CD-ROM drive, serial port, Windows 95.

both screens are crisp and clear, the 360LX's has the edge. The 360LX also has a better backlight – an easier-on-the-eyes paper white – but the Cassiopeia's luminous green is still usable.

The Psion Series 5 keyboard is the standard by which all others must be judged and sadly, neither Casio nor Hewlett-Packard have come close. Casio seems to have borrowed the Cassiopeia's keys from one of its pocket calculators and while the small, flat, rectangular buttons allow a reasonable typing speed, they're a little too close together for comfort. The 360LX leans towards the Psion Series 3 style and has widely-spaced, squarer keys with a rounded top surface and these are a little easier to use. Screen and keyboard aside, the Cassiopeia and 360LX are otherwise pretty much the same and both have a single Type II PC card slot, flash memory card slot and infra-red interface. The serial interface on each is different but the Cassiopeia's can also be con-



nected to a Casio digital camera for downloading images for use in documents and e-mails. The Cassiopeia also has a couple of LEDs on the edge of its lid for silent alarms but both HPCs have a built-in speaker loud enough to disrupt most meetings.

Windows CE 2 brings a range of new features to the HPC mix and both the Cassiopeia and 360LX are now nearer the ideal of a true pocket PC than ever before. Many changes are cosmetic – the Start menu now has cascading menus, applications have consistent toolbars, and there's a Favorites folder for documents and Web sites. The Taskbar can be hidden to maximise the screen area and all open applications can be instantly minimised by clicking the 'desktop' icon.

Pocket Word and Excel have also seen welcome changes. Word now has a much-needed spell-checker (though the even more-needed word count is still missing) and there's a full-screen and zoom view option. Template support has also been added and the paragraph formatting controls beefed up. Pocket Excel can now sort data and worksheets can be split into panes for multiple views on the same information. Larger views of a worksheet can be seen on-screen with the zoom function and specific sections can be printed using the Set Print Area option.

One of the most common uses of a pocket computer is as a personal organiser, and Windows CE's organiser appli-

cation – Pocket Outlook – has undergone extensive alteration in keeping with its additional role of e-mail manager. Incoming messages appear in the Inbox and where possible, attachments can be viewed with the appropriate application.

Windows CE 2 also has a completely new application – Pocket PowerPoint. Before you get too excited, this isn't a fully-featured presentation program but merely a player for presentations created in Office PowerPoint. Nevertheless, it's still a useful way to take presentations on the road and as a HPC can be connected to a normal monitor via a PC Card VGA adapter, itinerant presenters can leave their bulky notebook PC in the office.

When linking to a PC, Windows CE 2 stands up well. Once the Windows CE Services software has been installed on a PC, synchronisation between it and a HPC is automatic when a connection is detected. Information in each version of Outlook is updated and documents stored in the Synchronised Files folder on either machine are transferred. A Mobile Devices folder is also added to the desktop and files can be dragged and dropped between PC and HPC like any other.

Windows CE 2 is a more realistic proposition than its predecessor and the new HPCs have also improved. The 360LX has the edge in terms of screen and keyboard but both models are powerful enough to replace a notebook PC in many situations.

Julian Prokaza ➡

Specifications

60MHz Hitachi 32-bit processor

8Mb RAM

640x240 backlit LCD screen with 16 greyscales

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

Applications: Pocket Word, Excel, Outlook, PowerPoint, Internet Explorer

Requires 2xAA batteries or mains adaptor (supplied).

Rechargeable batteries and docking cradle included.

Size (wxh): 183x94x29mm

Weight: 457g

£599.99 (inc VAT)

Hewlett-Packard: 0990 474747

www.hp.com

Hewlett-Packard HP 360LX

Features ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Ease of use ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Performance ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Value for money ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

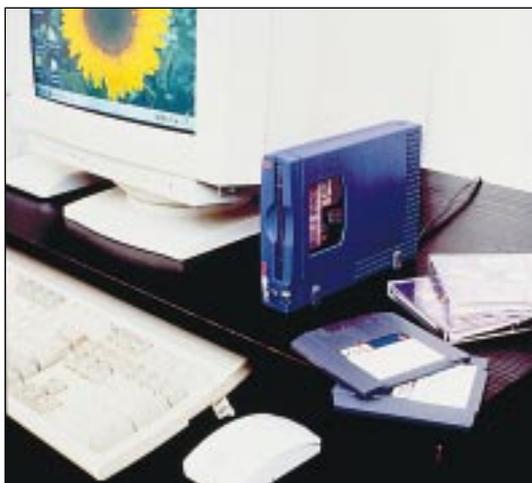
Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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

Iomega ZipPlus

Iomega practically redefined the market for small, cheap and portable storage devices with its Zip drive and over 10 million drives have been sold. Nonetheless, this success hasn't stopped Iomega from tampering with its winning formula.

The ZipPlus looks much the same as the old Zip, with a few alterations. The disk eject button now doubles as a power switch - one press to eject the disk and a second to switch off the drive.



The power supply has been altered and it now auto-senses voltages from 100 to 240 volts, enabling it to be used worldwide (providing you have an appropriate plug adapter).

The drive's connections to the PC have also been updated. The original Zip drive came in both parallel port and SCSI versions but you had to choose which you preferred. With the ZipPlus, you get the best of both worlds as both interfaces are integrated as standard.

We tested the drive first on a PC's parallel port and it seemed a little slow, taking just over eight minutes to copy 79.6Mb worth of files to the disk. Worse, it took nine minutes to copy them back to our PC's hard disk. Things are much better with the SCSI interface though. With a top-notch Adaptec card, the file copy times both fell to around a minute and a quarter. You won't notice such a big improvement with slower SCSI cards but we'd expect even a low-end one to be about four times as fast as a parallel connection.

Finally, the drive is bundled with image-editing and sound recording software, together with a utility to download complete Websites to disk for offline browsing. The software is good value but it's all unashamedly intended to make you use more Zip disks.

The Zip was a good product and it's just got better. Worth the money for making backups alone, let alone the extra storage flexibility it offers. John Sabine

Specifications

Stores 100Mb on a floppy-sized disk
Auto-detects SCSI and parallel interfaces
Auto-sensing multi-voltage power supply
£169.99 (check before pub) (inc VAT)
Iomega: 07000 466342
www.iomega.com

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

Imation SuperDisk

Although it's now being promoted as the SuperDisk, this alternative technological take on the high capacity floppy has also been known as the a:drive and the LS-120. A high-profile bundling deal with Compaq disintegrated and the licence to make the drives has now been bought by Imation - a subsidiary of the giant 3M corporation.

Unlike the ZipPlus, the SuperDisk has a metal case which gives it a solid feel.

Currently, the drive is only available with a parallel interface, so you'll need to install a driver. This done, we didn't have any problems setting it up and found it was faster than the ZipPlus in its parallel configuration. We copied the same files (a total of 79.6Mb) to it and this took five-and-a-half minutes, though when we copied them back to our hard disk, the time had slipped to under eight minutes.

A performance accelerator utility is bundled with the drive and this works by physically writing data to the disk in the background after you've clicked the 'Save' button in an application. This had little overall effect and the dynamics of

the acceleration process can be confusing. There were occasions where file icons appeared on the desktop within 30 seconds but the files took several minutes more to be transferred.

The SuperDisk can also use normal floppy disks, although this is not as useful as it seems. You can't boot from it and disks formatted in the SuperDrive can't be read by ordinary floppy drives. Also, if you connect your printer to the pass-through port on the drive, you'll have to copy files back to your hard disk before you can print them - a pain if they're large graphics and you're short of disk space.

The SuperDisk drive is solid but the disks feel flimsy and performance suffers without a SCSI option. John Sabine



Specifications

Stores 120Mb on floppy-sized disk
Reads standard floppy disks
Parallel interface
£139.99 (inc VAT)
Imation: 01344 402000
www.imation.com

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

Tiny Movie Centre Freedom

A monitor-less Pentium II system unit with DVD, multiple speakers and an LCD projector with roll-up screen

Tiny Computers is rapidly becoming a big name on the high street with the focus very much on the home user. Nowhere is this more apparent than in its most eye-catching showpiece - the Movie Centre Freedom system.

In a nutshell, the Movie Centre is a Pentium II-based PC supplied with many speakers, an LCD projector and a free-standing 68in screen instead of a conventional monitor. The idea is that you use your television as a surrogate computer display for day-to-day use and switch to the projector when you want to watch DVD movies.

This sounds pretty good in theory but things are not quite so simple in practice.

The first place we expected trouble was in the basic setup because with five speakers, a PC-to-TV connection and an LCD projector to cope with, there was a certain potential for confusion. In fact, if you work steadily and follow the setup instructions to the letter, everything should work fine - until, when you sit back to admire your handiwork, problem number one becomes instantly apparent.

The cable that connects the PC to the TV isn't very long, so the machine has to be stood close to the set becoming the visual focus of the room. The PC sits inside a midi-tower case in the usual office oatmeal colour and looks decidedly out of place beside a matt black TV and video stack. Then there are the five speakers. Three need power from DC adaptors to work properly which leads to a mess of cabling and speaker positioning needs some careful thought. The speakers are all identical twin-cone units from Radio Shack and while they produce a good surround-sound effect from the Dolby ProLogic decoder card, the sound quality is no more than fair.

The second problem arises from using the TV as a monitor. The picture is automatically adjusted for optimum quality when you connect to a TV but the squashed, crude-looking Windows desktop is altogether inferior, even to a standard 14in monitor operating at a 640x480 resolution. To do anything more than control the DVD player, you're going to need a proper monitor, but where are you going to put it? The TV is in the way of the obvious place and moving the system unit with all those speakers to deal with just isn't a practical proposition.

Using the DVD

playback features is easy, and can be done from an armchair thanks to the small, lightweight infra-red keyboard. This has a surprisingly wide range of reception angles and with both dedicated and programmable buttons for controlling things such as CD and DVD playback, as well as a small joystick pointing device, it does a good job as a sort of super-remote.

Once it's set up properly and the lights are dimmed, the picture delivered to the free-standing screen by the Philips LCD projector is very watchable. There's a slight jerkiness with DVD playback but you soon stop noticing this as the illusion takes hold. Tiny supplies the Bond film *Goldeneye* to get you going, along with the latest Microsoft Home CD pack which includes the useful Works, Money, Encarta 98, the fun Flight Simulator (giddy on the projector!), and Golf.

Although it's a clever idea, not everyone wants a beige PC in their living room and using the Tiny Movie Centre Freedom as a true PC might be tricky without a quiet, non-family space and a desk.

Dominic Bucknall

Specifications

266MHz Pentium II processor

 64Mb of SDRAM

 4.86Gb UltraDMA Fujitsu hard disk

 4Mb ATI 3D Rage Pro AGP graphics

 Hitachi DVD/10-speed CD-ROM drive

 Hardware DVD and MPEG2 decompression

 MiroMEDIA TV tuner/Teletext card

 Integrated Yamaha audio with wavetable synthesis

 Dolby Prologic Surround Sound card and five active speakers

 Internal 56Kbits/s modem

 Infra-red keyboard with joystick pointer

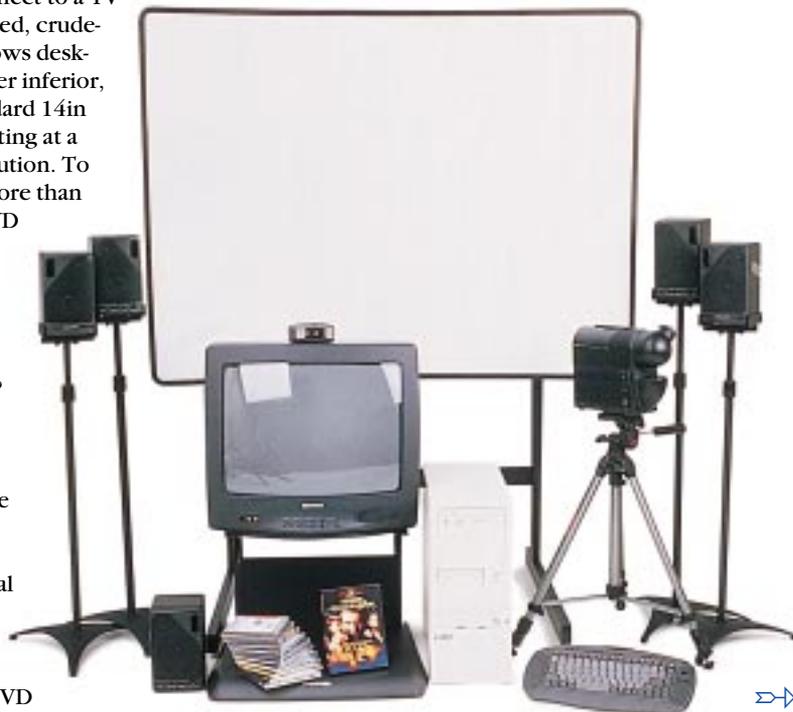
 Philips LCP 6000 LCD projector (supports 16:9 wide picture format)

 Microsoft CD Pack 98 (includes Works 95, Money, Encarta 98 and Flight Simulator)

£2,701.33 (inc VAT)

Tiny Computers: 01293 821 333
www.tinycomp.co.uk

Tiny Movie Centre Freedom	
Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Norton Utilities 3.0

A set of utilities for Windows 95, designed to speed up your PC, keep it running smoothly and aid recovery from disasters

Norton Utilities, for 15 years the undisputed king of utility software, has been extensively revamped to hold its market-leading position against competition from low-cost rivals such as Helix's Nuts & Bolts. Although some of the features in Version 3.0 are new, many are slicker incarnations of old favourites such as System Doctor and Speed Disk.

The utilities can be run in several ways - as stand-alone programs, via extensions to the right-button mouse menu or through the Norton Integrator. The latter is an easy-to-use control panel that divides the utilities into four functional groups covering problem solving, performance enhancement, preventive maintenance and troubleshooting.

There is also a high level of integration between the utilities. A good example is that of System Doctor which constantly monitors the hard disk, memory and system files for faults. When System Doctor finds a problem, it passes it to another utility called WinDoctor for repair. WinDoctor works mainly by examining the Windows registry and can detect potential hardware and software problems caused by missing files, inappropriate drivers or invalid shortcuts.

You can allow WinDoctor to fix problems automatically or you can go through them step-by-step and decide what you want to do. WinDoctor managed to find a number of anomalies, even on a test PC with a relatively fresh installation of Windows. But it's not foolproof and will remove references to files it thinks are missing but may be stored on a CD-ROM that isn't currently in the drive.

Potential problems that slip through the net of WinDoctor and System Doctor have to get past CrashGuard 3.0 and AntiFreeze. These two utilities intercept programs before they bring down the system and give you a chance to save your work. They can't trap every potential error but extra security is worth having.

There is no backup program for data but Norton provides a recovery program that generates a set of disks to use when rescuing a PC that has damaged system files. Rescue disks stored on floppies have to be used from DOS but Zip drive

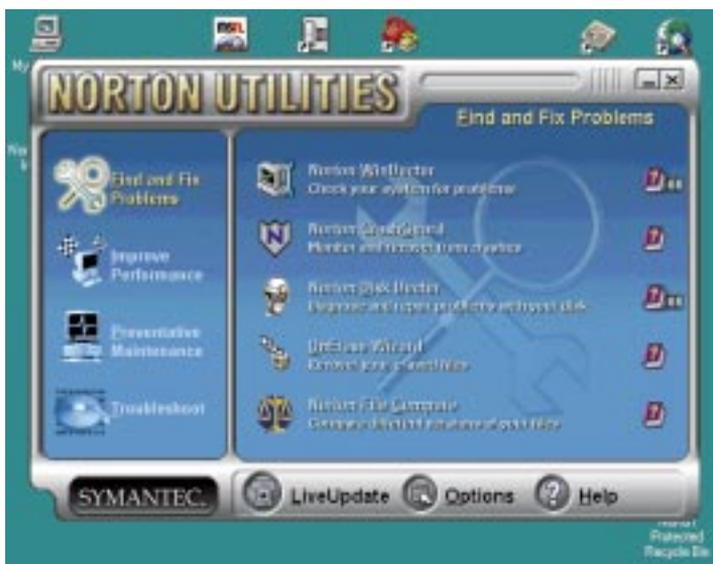
owners can make a rescue disk that contains a bootable version of Windows 95 for emergencies.

Several utilities are designed to speed up a PC by removing unnecessary files, compacting the registry, optimising the use of virtual memory and rearranging the files on the hard disk. It has to be said though, that any improvements thus gained are sufficient only to make up for the disk space and processing time claimed by the Norton Utilities. The only visible speed improvement is through the use of Speed Start, a utility which cuts the time it takes to launch major applications. Norton claims that Speed Start can cut launch times in half but a more typical result is that Excel starts in seven seconds instead of nine.

A live update feature allows modem owners to download updates to the Norton Utilities, and Internet users can receive a six-month trial subscription to Norton Web Services - a facility that scans the software on your PC and automatically downloads and installs updates for a range of popular programs.

Reports from the US indicate that some users of Norton Utilities 3.0 have found it conflicts with their Diamond Stealth 3D graphics cards and McAfee VirusScan software. Symantec is to issue a fix to be incorporated in the boxed product. The only problem we had was a corrupted display when running Speed Disk on a PC with a Hercules Terminator 3D graphics card.

Norton Utilities 3.0 can't do everything and very few file and data management tools are provided. As a means of creating and maintaining a stable Windows



system it's still the one to beat but it's worth shopping around for a discount on the rather hefty price. Paul Wardley

Specifications

Norton Integrator combines the separate utilities

WinDoctor checks for configuration problems

System Doctor traps potential problems as they arise

CrashGuard helps recover from system lock-ups

SpeedStart launches applications faster

Zip disks can be used as Recovery disks

Separate disk repair tools for DOS and Windows

Free online updates

£104.58 (inc VAT)

Symantec: 0171 616 5600

Norton Utilities 3.0

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

Minimum Requirements: Windows 95, 8Mb RAM, 45Mb hard disk space, CD-ROM drive.



Corel Print House Magic

This low-cost suite from Corel includes Wizard-based drawing and editing tools, a large library of graphic elements and personal utilities. It's one to reach for when you need to make an eye-catching logo, card, poster or banner and don't have much time.

Specifications

25,000 clip art images

5,500 photos

Specimen projects

Address book and calendar

£41.11 (inc VAT)

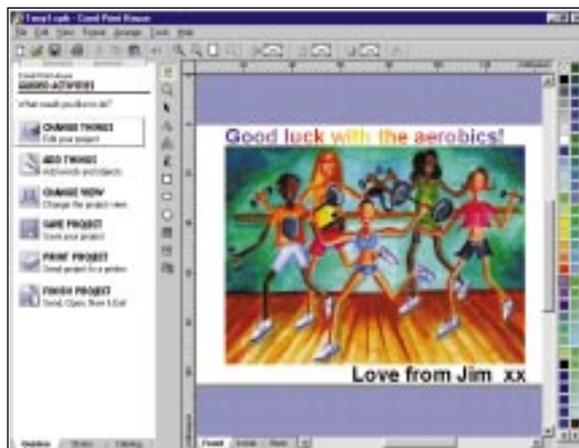
Corel: 0800 581028

www.corel.com

Corel Print House Magic

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

Minimum requirements: 486DX PC, 8Mb RAM, 60Mb hard disk space, Windows 95, CD-ROM.



Print House is the suite's main component and it's now at version 3.0. The program is based on the renowned Corel Draw and it's easy to use without sacrificing versatility, though you have to get used to the unusual split-screen interface. The suite comes with a huge bundle of clip-art, photos, borders and backdrops, and even a repertoire of catchy greeting card phrases for every occasion.

Installing from the two CD-ROMs is simple but the suite takes up nearly 60Mb of hard drive space and alters your

image file associations. None of the sample projects are installed though, so you'll need to keep the main CD-ROM to hand for these. The projects make easy work of creating different designs and they can be customised to suit your personal needs.

Photo House 2 - the image editing program - is principally for touching-up your photos before using them in Print House. Be gone, red-eye and acne! The third program in this

loosely-integrated trio is Friends and Families, with utilities such as calendar, address book and list manager. The thin logic justifying their inclusion seems to be that you can use the reminder facility of the calendar to prompt that birthday or anniversary card.

It's easy to turn out good looking designs with Print House Magic. While its personal utilities are not that impressive, the combination of Print House 3 and Photo House 2 does offer great value.

Terry Pinnell

Colour Copier 2

People working from home or in small offices don't usually have access to colour photocopiers. If they need one, they visit a copy shop, which can be expensive and time-con-

Specifications

Turns your scanner, printer and PC into a sophisticated photocopier

Overlays text, photographs and logos to copies

Creates posters up to A0 from A4 originals

Images can be mirrored, rotated and resized before printing

£34.95 (inc VAT)

Data Becker UK: 01420 22707

www.data-becker.co.uk

Colour Copier 2

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

Minimum requirements: 486 PC, 8Mb RAM, 4Mb hard disk space, colour printer, colour Scanner with 32-bit Twain driver, Windows 95



suming. If your PC has a colour scanner and printer, however, Colour Copier 2 will turn it into a colour photocopying system. If you don't have colour facilities, black and white copies can also be made.

Colour Copier 2 can produce identical sized copies and pages can also be enlarged, reduced, mirrored and rotated. Titles, notes and text can be added using a 'Transparent Overlay' and areas of text can be highlighted or obscured. There's a 'Rubber Stamp' feature which adds the time and date to copies, and images imported from files can even be placed onto copies.

The program also offers some image enlargement features. Posters of to A0 in size can be produced from an A4 original and then printed by using multiple tiled A4 pages. You can scan multiple images, select parts and collate them together into a single collage copy.

Though simple to use, Colour Copier does have a few quirks. You can't change the scanner between black and white and colour without restarting the program

and the default printer can't be changed once the program has started.

We tested the program with a Primax Jewel 4800 scanner and Epson Stylus Colour 600 printer and obtained excellent results. Copying isn't confined to inkjets though and a HP LaserJet III also gave good monochrome copies. However, copy quality is governed by the hardware used.

Colour Copier 2 is a useful application and small office users will certainly find that it saves both time and effort when it comes to producing occasional colour copies.

Steve Cotterell

MS Works 4.5 & ClarisWorks Office

Updated versions of the two top integrated packages, both of which now come bundled with a host of extras and utilities

Just as three companies have sewn up the office suites scene, two companies now dominate the market for integrated packages - Microsoft and Claris. Their programs have more in common than the word Works in their names because both adopt a broadly similar approach to the question of integrating spreadsheet, word processor, database and graphics facilities within a single program. However, they're by no means identical and as each program has been upgraded from version 4, it's a good excuse to take another look at this pair of versatile bantamweights.

ClarisWorks is now in version 5 and has been given a new name - ClarisWorks Office. Microsoft Works keeps the same name but jumps to version 4.5. Both programs have been visually enhanced with new logos and colour schemes as well as improvements to their existing features. ClarisWorks has changed the most, with the addition of customisable toolbars (called button

bars), a ruler that now controls paragraph formatting, hot links to Web pages and cell naming in the spreadsheet.

When either program is loaded it displays a dialog box from which you can jump directly to an appropriate module to begin work or choose to create a new document with the help of a Microsoft Wizard or Claris Assistant. These employ a question-and-answer approach to help you set up documents suitable for specific tasks - address lists, certificates, newsletters and so on. Microsoft Works has more wizards than Claris's handful of assistants but Claris compensates with 170 pre-defined templates that you are free to modify.

The write stuff

The Microsoft Works word processor provides a good set of tools for most purposes. You can do all the obvious things such as entering, editing and changing the appearance of text; check spelling; count words and insert graphics or tables from the spreadsheet module. Other refinements include Easy Text,

which is a facility to store often-used phrases which can be called up by typing an abbreviation, and footnotes with automatic page numbering. However, Works is very much a stripped down version of Word, and Microsoft has always been careful not to make it so powerful that people buy it instead of the company's flagship word processor.

Microsoft Works does not use saved styles, so each paragraph has to be formatted separately. Easy Text can be used to mimic a style function but you can't make global changes to a document by changing style definitions. Another drawback is that while multiple columns are easy to set up, they apply to an entire document and can't vary from page to page. There are no section breaks or column breaks to control the flow of text and there's no outlining facility to help you plan a document.

All these features and more are included in the ClarisWorks word processor, which is more like a stand-alone product than a module in an integrated package. Like Microsoft Works, it

Specifications

Five modules: word processor, spreadsheet, database, drawing, communications

100 Templates and Wizards for document creation

7,000 clip art pictures

Address book

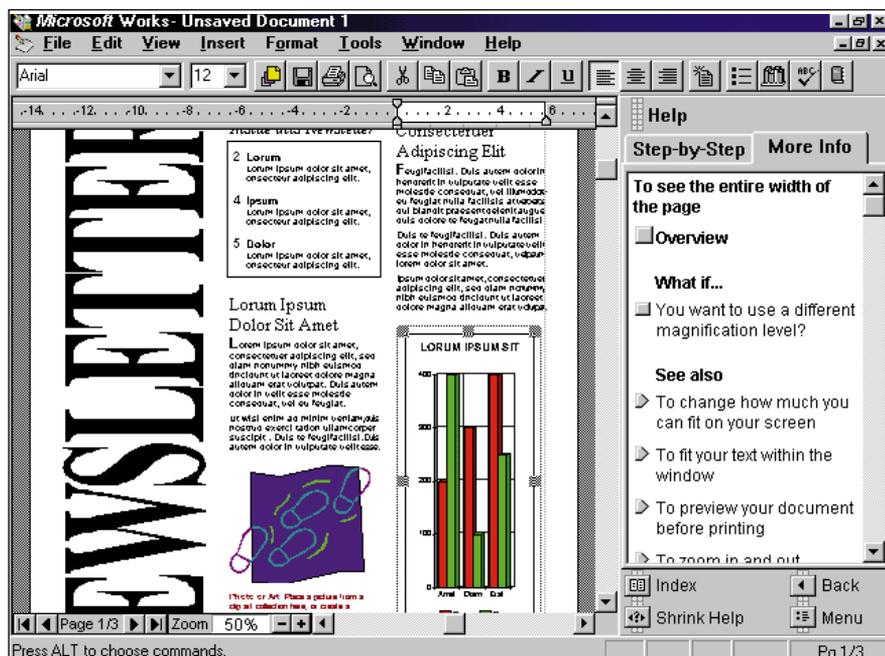
Task Wizards provide interactive help

£99.99 (inc VAT)

Microsoft: 0345 002000

MS Works 4.5	
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum Requirements: Windows 95 PC with 8Mb RAM, CD-ROM drive, 5Mb hard disk space.



also includes a decent spellchecker, a thesaurus and the ability to load and save documents in a wide range of formats.

Between the sheets

Both packages come with capable spreadsheets and are evenly matched. ClarisWorks has many more built-in functions but the ones in Microsoft Works are easier to use due to its Easy Calc tool. Although ClarisWorks has a pick-box for functions, you have to go to the help screens to find out how to use them.

Neither spreadsheet has the tabbed worksheets found in stand-alone programs and the charting options are more limited but for figures that can be stored on a single sheet and don't need consolidating with other data, they're fine. Both programs can check spelling in spreadsheets and ClarisWorks also offers a thesaurus.

Data basics

The database in Microsoft Works is the program's weakest link and although it improves with each release, it's still little more than a glorified card index. The best thing in the new version is its report creator - a tabbed dialog box offering options governing the sorting, selection and analysis of data for printed reports.

The database in ClarisWorks is the real thing and although it's only a flat-file program (it can't make relationships between data in separate files), it allows you to save sorts and searches in combination with report definitions to create a flexible range of screen and printer layouts. There are drop-down pick lists to make data entry easier, stylesheets for formatting and the ability to present database records as a screen slideshow.

Get the picture

Adding clip art to either of the Works packages is easy. ClarisWorks has a Library option on its File menu showing the categories available and Microsoft Works has a Clip Art Gallery shared by other Microsoft applications.

The latter includes no fewer than 7,000 pieces of clip art, giving it a sharp edge over the few hundred examples in ClarisWorks.

When it comes to creating your own pictures and diagrams ClarisWorks is the better program because it includes not only drawing tools but also a decent painting module which reads and saves files in a variety of formats. For this purpose, Microsoft Works relies on the Windows Paint program, which is limited to BMP and PCX images and has a limited range of editing tools. ClarisWorks' paint module, however, is capable of creating complex pictures and enhancing scanned images. Unfortunately, neither program can acquire an image directly from a scanner.

Other goodies

Microsoft Works incorporates a communications module - a hangover from early DOS versions of the program. ClarisWorks pretends to have one too but it just calls up the HyperTerminal program included with Windows 95.

Both programs include Internet Explorer but Microsoft Works doesn't use it for anything, whereas ClarisWorks can have links to the Internet embedded within its documents. It's also able to load and save HTML documents.

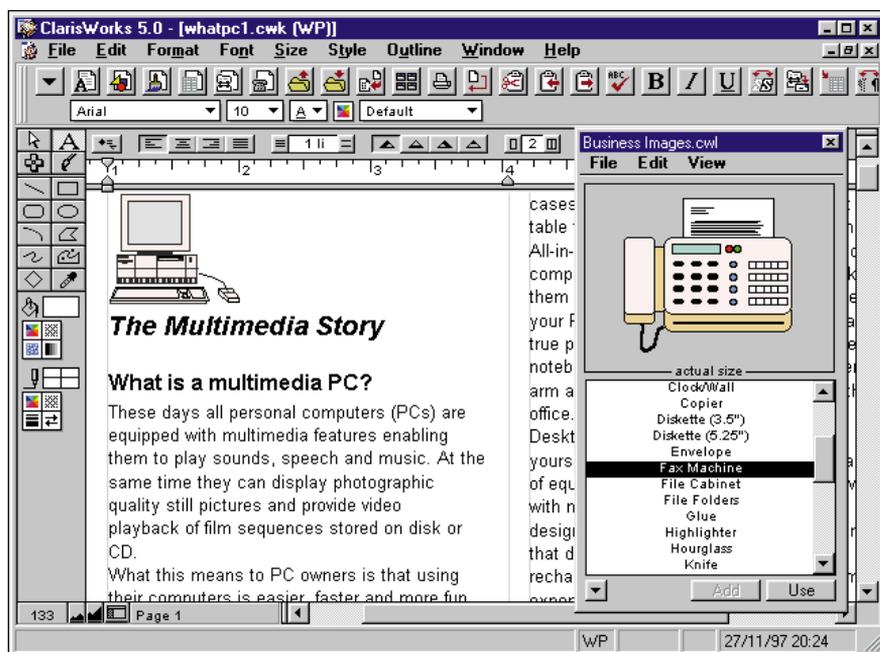
An extra program on the ClarisWorks CD is a 'Lite' version of Claris Home

Page. This is a drag-and-drop designer for Web pages that can be used to knock up anything from a simple home page to a complete site which can be tested offline within Home Page Lite (or in a browser) and then uploaded to a server. Home Page Lite is not as straightforward as Claris would like you to think but it beats HTML programming.

Given the Internet emphasis of ClarisWorks, it would be nice if the next version incorporated an e-mail module instead of the redundant HyperTerminal communications feature. In other respects, ClarisWorks is about as good as an integrated package can get while retaining ease-of-use and not making too many demands on hardware. Microsoft Works is as competent as ever but it's looking very long in the tooth and hardly bears comparison with the only slightly more expensive ClarisWorks.

ClarisWorks is a great program for notebook PC users who are short of disk space and resources but don't want to sacrifice features. It's also an excellent choice for PC beginners who don't know what software they need but want to dabble in everything.

Microsoft Works has had a long life as an undemanding program for undemanding users but is now past its sell-by-date. It may be the most popular integrated package (it says so on the box) but that's because it's given away free with so many new PCs. Paul Wardley



Six modules: word processor, spreadsheet, database, drawing, painting, communications

Hot linking to Internet Web pages

Extensive import and export filters for other programs

175 Templates and Assistants for document creation

Claris Web page designer

Pipex Dial trial Internet account

£116.33 (inc VAT)

Claris: 0345 413060

ClarisWorks Office

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

Minimum Requirements: Windows 95 PC with 8Mb RAM, CD-ROM drive, 21Mb disk space.

Apocalypse 5D Sonic

In theory, the idea behind Videologic's latest addition to its Apocalypse family is a good one. It combines a top notch graphics chip, 3D accelerator and wavetable sound on single PCI card, freeing up expansion slots and doing away with the hardware conflicts that can occur as you mix and

match add-ons. In practice, it's even better. The Apocalypse 5D Sonic has everything you need for today's multimedia and games titles, and enough power left over for tomorrow's software.

The 5D Sonic uses a tried and tested Tseng Labs ET600 graphics processor for 2D output, while 3D is handled by the VideoLogic/NEC developed PCX2 chip. The former is linked to either 2Mb or 4Mb of MDRAM and the latter backed by 4Mb of speedy SDRAM. The card provides a maximum resolution of 1280x1024 pixels and offers 24-bit true colour support in all modes.

Videologic has opted for a Sound Blaster compatible ESS AGOGO-XP processor to handle audio. This chip boasts 64-voice wavetable synthesises, 3D effects and full reverb, chorus, bass and treble controls.

All this technology is useless without software, and the 5D Sonic comes bundled with five games, including Ultim@te Race and Tomb Raider. Each title plays well and is designed with the card in mind, so shows off the hard-



ware well. Sound applications are also bundled, including MidiSoft Studio which allows you compose your own MIDI tunes.

In tests, the card turned in a fine performance and managed to cope nicely with other titles thrown at it, though some tweaking was required to get smooth sound under Quake 2. While this wasn't a major problem and took only a minute to fix, it's something that would annoy most users and Videologic needs to keep an eye on compatibility issues.

The Apocalypse 5D Sonic is a nice all-in-one solution, providing good 2D and 3D performance. Compatibility can be a problem though.

Chris Cain

Specifications

Graphics card with 2D, 3D and sound capabilities

Supplied with five games and music applications

6Mb card £222

8Mb card £245

Videologic: 01923 260511

www.videologic.co.uk

Apocalypse 5D Sonic

Features ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Ease of use ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Performance ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Value for money ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: Pentium 166 PC, 32Mb RAM, free PCI slot

Family Tree v2.0

Most genealogical software is structured for the American market, so it's good to come across a product like GSP's Family Tree, designed specifically for British users.

We installed Family Tree without difficulty. The slim manual contains a tutorial and the CD holds sample family trees.

As well as starting trees from scratch, Family Tree can also import GEDCOM (Genealogical Data Communications) files - the standard file format used for the exchange of data between genealogy programs. When you've created a tree, the main screen offers five choices. You

can edit the details of the tree and its author or you can view two family tree formats - a multimedia family album or a screen of statistics. The statistics contain family marriages, reproduction rates and life expectancy figures. The Family Album picture and sound clips are attached to people's details during creation or editing.

Individuals are added to the family tree via a toolbar button. Because there is no 'family' screen, children must be individually linked to each parent. This is a somewhat long-winded process and one that's open to error. Another problem occurs when entering dates: only numeric information is accepted. For example, it's impossible to enter 'about 1884', 'between 1884 and 1887' or even '1887?'. This limitation will cause problems for serious users.

Ancestor and descendant trees can be customised, printed or viewed. Unfortunately, the default background colour doesn't work on a 256-colour screen, and on our test machine, this rendered unmagnified text almost unreadable.

Not the easiest family tree program for beginners to use and with limitations that lessen its usefulness to serious genealogical researchers. Steve Cotterell

Specifications

Designed for the British market

Organises family history into a logical structure

Family trees printed in a variety of formats

Pictures and sounds can be added to family albums

Calculates family statistics including average life expectancy

£19.95 (inc VAT)

Global Software: 01480 496575

www.gspltd.co.uk

Family Tree v2.0

Features ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

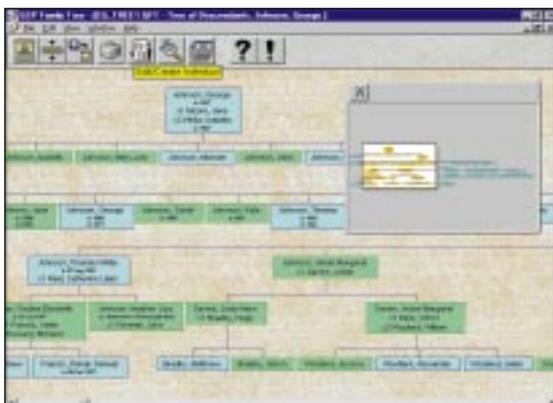
Ease of use ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Performance ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Value for money ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Overall ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: 486/66 MHz PC, Windows 3.1, 8Mb RAM, 7Mb hard disk space.



DocuPrint & HomeCentre

Two new inkjet printers from Xerox – the DocuPrint XJ4C is a dedicated colour printer and the The HomeCentre is a combined colour printer and scanner with software for colour copying and faxing

These new products from the Xerox stable are two very different beasts. The DocuPrint XJ4C is a dedicated colour printer, aimed at the home and small office market. The HomeCentre, on the other hand, is a complete colour scanning and printing solution targeted, as the name suggests, at the home computer user. Despite the disparity in looks and function, both models are based around the same inkjet printer 'engine'.

The first thing that strikes you about both devices is their size. The DocuPrint XJ4C is big by today's printer standards while the HomeCentre can only be described as a cross between a fifties jukebox and a huge toaster. This is one of those 'love it or hate it' designs and although we must confess a certain

grudging fondness, we're not sure if anyone would want it in a corner of their living room, assuming they could get it through their front door.

Access to the printers' insides, either to change an ink cartridge or to un-jam the occasional piece of paper, is an important part in the design of both models – just lift the lid and you're straight in. The ink system is also well thought out. The main cartridge holds four ink tanks – one each for black, cyan, magenta and yellow and each can be removed separately for refilling. While this is a fiddly job, it's certainly not difficult and is better than the all-in-one cartridge system where running out of one colour means replacing them all. The ecological and financial importance of this soon becomes apparent when your child proudly shows you their printouts of big smiling suns over bright yellow deserts populated by dozens of camels.

Installing and setting up the software for both devices is pain-free and Xerox supply super-friendly instructions for the HomeCentre. Controlling the printer from the PC is extremely easy. Graphics show how much ink remains in each of the tanks and you can perform a variety of cleaning and maintenance tasks without having to touch the printer.

Sadly, print quality from both the DocuPrint and HomeCentre is not particularly impressive. Colours are rather

grainy on plain photocopier paper but costlier inkjet paper does make some improvement. Text is also disappointing, with blurred edges and none of the sharpness we're used to seeing with modern inkjet printers.

The HomeCentre's scanner sits on top of the case and accepts paper as wide as an A4 sheet when mounted on the printer, but you can detach it at any time and scan larger documents manually. The bundled software makes it easy to use the HomeCentre for colour copying and faxing. Xerox has not skimped on the quality of the scanner and colour copying is surprisingly good, though it still suffers from grainy colour.

These are two average colour printers with nothing special to mark them out from the crowd. The HomeCentre's removable scanner and easy-to-use software is a step in the right direction but it is overpriced.

Adam Evans



Specifications

- 600dpi resolution on some media
- Individual re-fillable ink tanks
- 1ppm colour printing
- 4ppm monochrome printing
- HomeCentre has detachable 24-bit colour scanner
- DocuPrint XJ4C: £198.58 (inc VAT)**
- HomeCentre: £586.33 (inc VAT)**
- Xerox: 0800 454197**
- www.xerox.com**

DocuPrint XJ4C

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

HomeCentre

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

Minimum requirements: 486 PC, 16Mb RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive, 100Mb hard disk space, Windows 95.