

DVD makes UK debut

DVD-ROM, the long-awaited next generation storage medium, has arrived in the UK. The first DVD drives for PCs, manufactured by Hitachi, should be on sale by the time you read this.

Similar in appearance to a CD-ROM drive, a DVD drive can read both normal CD-ROMs, at eight-speed, and new higher capacity DVD discs. A standard DVD disc holds up to 4.7Mb of data – about seven times more than current CDs – while a dual-sided dual layer can store an incredible 17Gb of data.

Reviewed in the Up Front section of this issue, the



Hitachi GD-1000 DVD-ROM has an expected street price of £400, an average access time of 190ms and a data transfer rate of 1.38Mb/s. It connects to the PC's IDE interface in the same way as CD-ROM units.

While no major applications are available on DVD at the time of writing, one major

use for the new discs will be for storing full-length feature films in digital format. These will be compressed using the MPEG2 video system, and will require a decoder board to play them back.

Hitachi: 01628 585000

Panasonic's Card Shot, the first digital camera to rely solely on the new industry-standard CompactFlash memory cards from SanDisk, has now been joined by the Picon camera from NEC.
Sandisk: 001 408 542 0500
www.sandisk.com

MarkTech's cdRunner is an eight-speed CD-ROM drive which connects to any notebook computer's PC card slot. It costs £269. The price of the six-speed version has been reduced to £234.

Marktech Systems:
0181 841 6711



A total of 7,000 schools are hoping to receive **Viglen** computers through retail giant ASDA's 1997 Computer Challenge scheme, which last year distributed £3 million worth of IT equipment.

ASDA school freephone:
0500 474645

B² SPICE is a design and testing program for electronic circuits. It offers file interchange with other SPICE programs but costs significantly less at £234 (reduced to £175 with an educational discount).

RD Research: 01603 872331

Internet Service Provider (ISP) AOL has 33.6Kbits/s access throughout the UK. It is the UK's number two ISP, with close to 150,000 members.

AOL: 0800 279 1234

The once popular **Commodore** brand has relaunched into the UK PC market. The new Commodore PCs, including machines with Pentium MMX technology, will be available from major retail outlets.

Commodore:
00 31 252 628 888

New Pilot models fly in

US Robotics has announced two new versions of its innovative pen-based PDA (Personal Digital Assistant), the Pilot. The PalmPilot Personal and PalmPilot Professional have 512Kb and 1Mb of memory respectively, a backlit screen and updated software.

The backlit screen doesn't add to the PalmPilot's weight and has little effect on battery life. Software improvements include new views in the Date Book application and a new expenses tracking application. The professional model can also be used to compose e-mail for later sending by a PC.

UK prices have yet to be fixed but the PalmPilot Personal will cost \$299, the Professional \$399. Prices of existing models will be reduced accordingly and US Robotics will offer upgrades to current Pilot users, in the form of a 1Mb memory card containing the new software.

A modem has also been announced that clips to the

bottom the PalmPilot and allows remote HotSyncs via the telephone. The 14.4Kbits/s modem runs on two AAA batteries and costs \$129.

US Robotics: 0800 225252
www.usr.com/palm



Office tailored for small businesses

In a surprise move, Microsoft has launched a 'Small Business' edition of its Office 97 office software suite.

Office perennials Word and Excel remain, as does newcomer to Office 97, Outlook, but presentation graphics tool PowerPoint has been dropped in favour of Small Business Financial Manager.

Details were patchy as we went to press, but we understand this new offering is a Sage- and Pegasus-compatible accounts package.

Microsoft is also bundling the latest versions of Publisher and AutoRoute Express Europe as part of the suite.

Like other Office 97 editions, Small Business is billed as being 'Internet ready' and included in the £411.25 price is a month's free connection to the Microsoft Network (MSN) Internet service.

A Microsoft representative told us the release of Office 97 Small Business follows research into the software needs of small businesses in the UK.

Microsoft: 0345 002000

Notebook makers widen user choice

Sharp's new PC-9090 notebook can be used to edit and play back digital video. As well as the video input and output sockets, for £4,577 you get a 150MHz Pentium processor and 24Mb of RAM

New from Panasonic is the CF-61 notebook with an eight-speed CD-ROM drive. It comes with 120MHz or 150MHz processors at £4,111 and £5,168, both models feature magnesium alloy cases to protect the 12.1in screens.

At the other end of the price scale Compaq has cut the cost of the Armada 1120 entry-level notebook by 16 percent to £1,174.

Sharp: 0800 262958

Panasonic: 0500 404041

Compaq: 0990 134456



ActiveX in banking row

Microsoft's ActiveX Internet technology is under fire after a German hacking group demonstrated how it could be used to transfer funds from the accounts of on-line banking services users.

Chaos Computer Club hackers recently appeared on German television to show off an ActiveX control that moves money from one account to another. Once downloaded the control searches the user's computer for Intuit's personal finance package Quicken, and alters its electronic banking facility forcing it to transfer cash without the user's knowledge.



The problem affects Web browsers compatible with ActiveX and arises from the amount of control ActiveX gives to programmers over

remote machines. Unlike Java applets, which are denied low-level access to the computers they run on, the unscrupulous can use ActiveX controls for more damaging purposes.

Microsoft's Authenticode certification system protects Internet surfers from potentially dangerous ActiveX controls such as this by allowing users to refuse controls. However, as ActiveX grows in popularity, users are becoming impatient with the number of Authenticode certificates they must negotiate.

Microsoft: 0345 002000

Intuit: 01932 578500

Two more join MMX bandwagon

Two more big-name computer manufacturers are shipping Pentium MMX machines. Compaq and Acer now join IBM, Dell, Gateway and HP, among others, in producing PCs based on the new multimedia-enhanced Pentium processor from Intel.

PCs in Compaq's revamped Presario 3000, 4000 and 8000 ranges include not only MMX processors, but also faster CD-ROM drives, SD-RAM for the main memory and larger hard drives – up to 4Gb

on models such as the £2,348 166MHz Presario 4180.

The top-of-the-range Presario 8770 boasts an even faster 200MHz MMX processor with 32Mb of SD-RAM, a 3.8Gb hard drive, 16-speed CD-ROM drive and 3D graphics. In line with the £3,289 price and advanced specification there is a wavetable sound card, a 33.6Kbits/s voice modem and a powered speaker system with separate sub-woofer.

A three-speaker sound system is also a feature of

Acer's Aspire mini-tower system, which comes with a 166MHz MMX processor. For a £1,899 price tag the system includes 32Mb of EDO RAM and a 17in monitor.

Since the arrival of MMX PCs is running some way ahead of MMX-specific software, Acer is bundling several MMX entertainment titles to whet the appetite, including Slamscape, Deathdrome and the Wide World of Animals.

Compaq: 0990 134456

Acer: 01628 533122

Compaq has extended its Presario PC consumer brand to include a range of notebook computers.

The first machine to grace shop shelves will be the Presario 1060, which is based on an Intel Pentium processor running at 120MHz.

On sale now at £1,999 (inc VAT), the Presario 1060 is fitted with a large 1Gb hard disk drive and 16Mb of memory. With a CD-ROM drive and 128-bit graphics processor also included as standard, Compaq is pitching the Presario 1060 as a complete multimedia system for those on the move.

Compaq: 0990 134456

Yamaha's new CD recorder offers quad-speed recording and six-speed read capabilities. The internally mounted unit costs £529 and offers the user an unusually flexible range of features.

The drive is sold with either an IDE or SCSI interface and is fitted with a secure caddy loading mechanism. However, users who prefer the convenience of tray loading can specify this as a no-cost option.

Other features include a 2Mb buffer to minimise the chances of data overflow during CD writing, support for all seven popular CD formats, including audio and CD-Extra, and an upgradable flash ROM.

Yamaha: 01908 366700



Owing to a mix up in our Art Department, pages one, four and 97 in some copies of this month's *What PC?* have been printed upside down. If you have one of the affected issues you should tear out the pages and send them, together with a stamped address envelope, to the usual *What PC?* address, marked for the attention of the Art Editor. We will be happy to send you the pages the right way up by return post.



Micrografx is now shipping FlowCharter 7 which, despite its name, can be used to produce diagrams such as pyramid charts, timelines and circle-spoke charts, as well as flowcharts.

New features include Living FlowCharts (dynamic diagrams that can be used to illustrate processes), and CoolSheet templates, which are ready-structured diagrams into which users can drag shapes and type their own text. It is also possible to customise charts with 10 freehand drawing tools and a number of pre-defined shadow and 3D effects.

The suggested retail price is £233.83 but users of Micrografx ABC FlowCharter or competing products such as Visio and CorelFlow can upgrade for £116.33.

Micrografx: 0345 089372

Intel rivals target MMX

Top vendors refresh their monitor ranges

Intel rivals AMD and Cyrix are set to release MMX-compatible chips in the second quarter of this year. Both companies plan to use the MMX name on their chips despite opposition from Intel, whose trademark application is in progress.

The Cyrix M2, successor to the M1 (6x86) Pentium-compatible processor is likely to be available in 200MHz and 233MHz versions, but Cyrix will not confirm this while it is busy promoting its new low-

cost Gx processor with built-in sound and graphics.

AMD is more forthcoming about its K6 MMX-enhanced chip, which is in sample production. This will also be available in 200MHz and 233MHz versions and will be pin-compatible with the Pentium Socket 7, but AMD is not claiming that the new chip will be a plug-in replacement for a Pentium as motherboard modifications may be necessary.

Meanwhile, Intel contin-

ues to follow its own agenda with a 166MHz OverDrive version of its MMX processor for upgraders and a full 233MHz version of the chip for system builders. These should ship in June, hot on the heels of the Klamath processor, a Pentium Pro with MMX capabilities that will initially be made available to corporates at speeds of 233MHz and 266MHz.

Intel: 01793 403000

Cyrix: 0800 137305

AMD: 01276 803100



ViewSonic has introduced two low-cost monitors with digital controls and high refresh rates. The 14in E641 costs £187 and the 15in E655 with a flat square tube costs £257. A slightly dearer Panasonic option is the 15in TX-T1565. This is controlled by an LED panel but has a slightly finer dot pitch for £293.

Sony has added three Trinitron screens. The 100sf, 200sf and 300sf models have 15in, 17in and 20in screens respectively. The 300sf, at £1,233 allows two computers to be connected simultaneously. The 100sf and 200sf models cost £387 and £645.

NEC's 21in P1150 is the largest CromaClear monitor to date and costs £2,055.

ViewSonic: 0800 833648

Panasonic: 0500 404041

Sony: 0990 424424

NEC: 0181 993 8111

Notebook giant unveils small wonder

Notebook giant Toshiba is selling the Libretto, a sub-A4 PC, in Japan. Measuring a tiny 210x115x34mm (about the size of a paperback book), the Libretto comes with a 100MHz AMD 5x86 processor (equivalent to a DX4/100), 8Mb of RAM and a 520Mb hard drive.

The TFT screen has a 6.1in diagonal, capable of a resolution of 640x480 and expansion is possible using the single Type II PC Card slot. The Libretto also has an IrDA infra-red port and



pointing device built into the lid. The lithium ion battery

offers up to three hours of use and the whole computer weighs 840g.

The Libretto is reportedly doing well in Japan, with a price that equates to about £1,500. Unfortunately, although Toshiba is considering selling a similar notebook elsewhere, it currently has no plans to make the Libretto available in Europe at present.

www.toshiba.co.jp/product/pcl/catalog/libretto/

librett1.htm

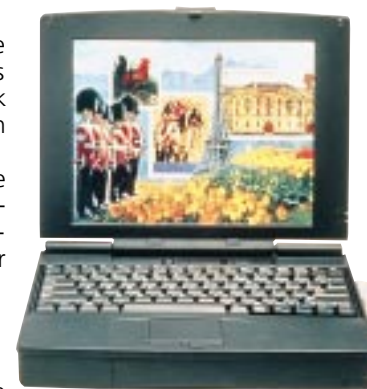
TI to sell notebook arm

In a bizarre news double whammy, Texas Instruments has launched a new notebook and sold the very same division that made it.

The announcement of the Extensa 660 mid-range notebook model was shortly followed by the news that Acer has bought Texas Instruments' notebook operation.

Apparently Texas Instruments decided to go ahead with the launch of the Extensa 660 as the deal with Acer will take some time to finalise. Development on the Extensa 660 began before sale discussions with Acer began.

Acer is well placed to take



over production of Texas Instruments' notebook range since it already makes existing Extensa models. When Acer takes the reins it will continue to market the Extensa, and will

also inherit Texas Instruments' popular TravelMate brand.

Until the sale goes through, which is expected to be before the end of March, Texas Instruments will be selling the Extensa 660 via the usual channels. Specifications vary, but a typical example is the 660CD which has a 12.1in dual-scan display, a 128-bit graphics controller and a 10-speed (10x) CD-ROM drive. With a 1.3Gb hard disk drive, the 660CD is expected to cost around £2,100.

Acer: 01628 533422

Texas Instruments:

0181 875 0044

EU funds 'driving licence' for IT skills

Training in basic computer skills is being boosted by an EU-funded project to create a 'computer driving licence'.

The driving licence consists of skills requirements in seven areas: word processing, spreadsheets, databases, presentation graphics, drawing (but not CAD), general understanding of the PC environment and networking (for example, connecting to the World Wide Web).

Students will be able to obtain their own training from in-house or third party sources, then take an exam in the relevant section, set by the driving licence project. If they pass, the driving licence is stamped accordingly.

The driving licence – which has received 250,000 ECUs from the EU in Brussels – can then be used to prove attainment of these skills to future employers. However, some organisations, such as Irish Life Insurance, are buying the licence in order to train existing staff.

The project is being managed by the national computer societies, and training given by training companies and computer vendors, such as Siemens Nixdorf.

Siemens Nixdorf:

01344 862222

Live sound and vision comes to Net

Progressive Networks has unveiled RealPlay, an add-in for Web browsers enabling them to play live audio and video broadcasts over the Internet.

RealPlay incorporates Progressive's popular RealAudio Internet audio system, and introduces a video element called RealVideo.

RealVideo delivers 'news-cast-quality' video signals on Net connections of 28.8Kbits/s or faster. Received videos can be played in a small window



that occupies around a quarter of the screen, with resolutions varying depending on the connection quality. Regardless of the connection speed, RealVideo broadcasts are currently limited to mono soundtracks.

Progressive has also set up Timecast, a Web site containing a variety of RealAudio and RealVideo samples as well as pointers to other sites offering RealPlay-compatible content.

www.real.com

www.timecast.com

Microsoft has firmed up plans for the next release of its Web browser, Internet Explorer 4.0 (IE4).

The first downloadable 'preview release' of IE4 is due to appear on Microsoft's Web site about now. A more mature 'public beta' is set to follow soon after, but a Microsoft representative could not confirm an exact date.

IE4 is expected to be quite a departure from previous versions, being tightly integrated with the Windows 95 desktop and an interface akin to Windows Explorer.

Additionally, Microsoft has reached an agreement with Internet news service provider PointCast to deliver content directly to IE4 users' desktops.

Microsoft: 0345 002000

Luxor UK's new 33.6Kbits/s modem can be sold for the low price of £77 because it relies on the computer's processor to carry out many of the functions which are normally performed by hardware in the modem itself.

This technology, called Native/Host Signal Processing (NSP/HSP), means the Typhoon MultiWave V.34 is best used on computers with 100MHz or faster Pentium processors that are able to cope with the processing overhead without suffering too much of a speed penalty.

The modem is bundled with Cheyenne's BitWare software

in order to make full use of the hardware's voice, fax and data capabilities.

Luxor UK: 01732 362212

Dr Solomon's Anti-Virus Toolkit has been updated to include protection against macro viruses in Office 97 documents.

The new version of Microsoft Office uses a different file structure to Office 95 so existing anti-virus programs are not guaranteed to detect viruses in Word and Excel documents. Although Office 97 can itself check a document for viruses when the document is opened, it cannot scan a hard disk for infected files.

Existing users will be provided with an update which will detect the new viruses, and will also be able spot viruses in compressed and archived documents.

S&S: 01296 318888

Motorola has announced a scheme to ease the fears of modem buyers who would like to move to faster 56Kbits/s modems but are uncertain about the future of the technology. There is currently no rigid standard for ultra high-speed modems and many users are wary about buying non-standard products, such as those designated X2, which already deliver the higher transfer rate.

Motorola's Tidal wave scheme promises both new purchasers and existing users of Motorola 28.8Kbits/s and 33.6Kbits/s modems a low-cost upgrade to 56Kbits/s, once the

industry standard has emerged. Consumers can register for the scheme up to 31 May on a freephone number.

Motorola: 0800 973266

Aiming at the home user, Primax has announced a pair of one-touch flatbed scanners. Both the Ultrascan 300 and 600 are intended to be user-friendly, with their software activated at the touch of a button from the scanner's front panel.



Both scanners are capable of 24-bit colour, at interpolated resolutions of, respectively, 4,800x4,800dpi (dots per inch) and 9,600x9,600dpi. They will be available in April, with the Ultrascan 300 costing £240 and the 600 priced at £349.

Umax has cut the price of its Vista S6E entry-level 24-bit colour flatbed scanner to around £235. It is capable of an interpolated resolution of 4,800x4,800dpi, and is available with several software options, including Adobe PhotoShop v.4.0.

Primax: 01235 559922

Umax distributed by IMC: 01344 872800

Siemens Nixdorf Information (SNI) has launched a Network Computer (NC) which can also be configured as a PC to provide the flexibility needed to meet changing business needs.

As an NC, the Scenic Pro Net 2 has no hard disk; it downloads operating system, data and files from any server on the

network, regardless of the platform. It could, for example, obtain financial information from one server, but customer data from another.

Users can then create documents or manipulate the data in any format and store the file or document on any of the network servers. A communication capability enables users to e-mail the document to a colleague, access the Web, and so on.

When the Scenic Pro Net 2 is configured with a hard disk, it offers a 133MHz Intel Pentium processor with 16Mb of memory. A CD-ROM drive, floppy drive, and I-Talk telephone adaptor can all be added, as can the I-View package, which provides video conferencing capability.

Siemens Nixdorf Information: 01344 862222

Sagesoft's update to its best-selling accounts software, Sterling Version 4, has been enhanced with features to make it easier to use and better integrated with software such as Microsoft Office and Internet Web browsers.

It's also being touted as millennium-compliant, which means it won't throw a wobbly when the clock in your PC ticks over into the new century. Ease of use follows from redesigned menus, larger icons and a tabbed filing system; and in addition to the usual Windows help system and wizards there's an information button which provides background briefings on complicated procedures such as making VAT returns. Priced from £412.

Sage: 0191 255 3000

An interactive music video of 'The Melody', Herbie Hancock's jazz hit, can be downloaded from **Media-dome's** virtual world on the Internet.

www.mediadome.com

White Collar Anti-Static Services now offers anti-static carpet treatments in the London and Greater London area to help protect PCs from the build-up of static electricity.

White Collar: 0171 928 9093

Diamond Multimedia has announced new Windows 95 and Windows NT drivers for its Stealth 3D graphics accelerators. Users can download the new software from the Internet at:

www.diamond.com

Diamond Multimedia:

0118 944 4400

PhotoDisc's on-line image library has grown in size. Registered users now have a choice of 50,000 royalty-free images to download, or they can order PhotoDisc CD-ROMs from the company's Web site.

PhotoDisc: 0181 255 2900

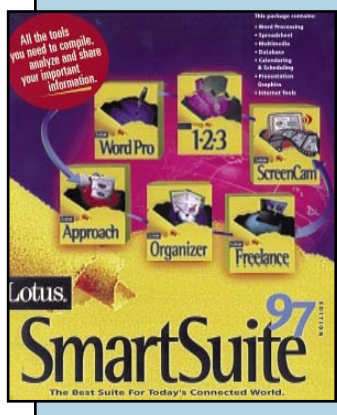
www.photodisc.com

Sony has launched a portable 6x CD-ROM drive. Doubling as an audio Discman, the drive costs £351 and comes as standard with an Adaptec SlimSCSI PCMCIA interface.

Sony: 0181 760 0500

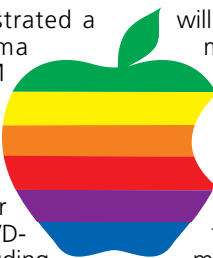
Free evaluation copies of **Lotus SmartSuite 97** are now available from the **Lotus** Web site. Be warned, though, that a full download using a 28.8kbits/s modem will take 14 hours.

www.lotus.com



Apple shows off DVD Mac

Apple has demonstrated a modified Performa 5400 with DVD-ROM capability. The first production models using the new technology will be available later this year and several new DVD-equipped PCs, including notebooks, are to follow early in 1998.



The announcement is a natural extension of Apple's previous policy of being the first computer vendor to standardise on CD-ROM. Apple

will demonstrate its commitment to the new storage format by launching a Web site (with hyperlinks to third-party vendors) to keep consumers abreast of the latest developments in DVD.

DVD standardisation is just one aspect of Apple's response to the MMX-based PCs that threaten its long-standing claim to the multimedia market. Another is the development of the Quick-

Time Media Layer, a system enhancement to integrate audio, visual, 3D and virtual reality technologies.

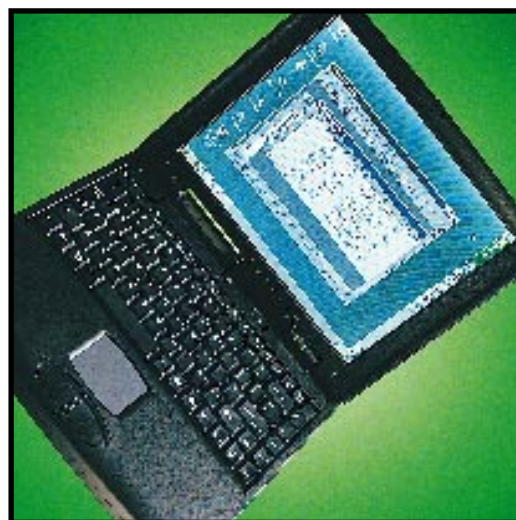
At the professional level a key technology for Apple is the Trimedia chip from Philips Semiconductors, a processor that is specially designed to relieve PowerPC processors of data-intensive multimedia processing tasks. Accelerator cards based on dual TriMedia chips are due to be available for use in media authoring later this year.

Apple: 0800 127753

Correction...

In last month's group test of colour notebooks (Travelling Bright, page 94), we stated that the PC Card expansion slots on the ACI Emerald machine were not fully recessed, leaving installed cards projecting a short distance outside the case. On retesting the machine this was discovered to be incorrect, and any cards that were fitted to the machine were in fact fully concealed and protected by the case.

What PC? And Software apologises to ACI for this error, but wishes to emphasise that the Emerald's original star rating and our overall assessment of the machine would not have been affected, had we been aware of the mistake before going to press.



Top 20 software packages according to Romtec figures

Position	Package	Publisher/supplier	Type	Last month
1	MS Windows NT Workstation	Microsoft	Operating system	4
2	MS Windows 95	Microsoft	Operating system	1
3	MS Office 7 Standard	Microsoft	Office suite	12
4	MS Office V4.2 Standard	Microsoft	Office suite	2
5	Lotus Notes for Windows	Lotus	Groupware	7
6	MS Office Pro 4	Microsoft	Office suite	5
7	cc:Mail for Windows	Lotus	E-mail	9
8	Lotus SmartSuite V3/4	Lotus	Office suite	10
9	PK Zip for DOS	Atlantic Coast	Utility	3
10	MS-DOS	Microsoft	Operating system	—
11	MS Office Pro 7	Microsoft	Office suite	6
12	MS Windows for Workgroups	Microsoft	Operating system	11
13	MS Publisher for Windows 95	Microsoft	Desktop publishing	—
14	Anti-Virus for Windows	Dr Solomon's Software	Anti-virus	8
15	MS Office V7 upgrade	Microsoft	Office suite	17
16	MS SMS for Windows	Microsoft	Network management	18
17	MS Access for Windows	Microsoft	Database	15
18	PK Zip for Windows	Atlantic Coast	Utility	13
19	MS Word for Windows	Microsoft	Word processor	14
20	First Aid for Windows 95	Cybermedia	Utility	—

Figures for December 1996, source Romtec. Business application and desktop operating systems unit sales only. OEM sales excluded.

Romtec figures are calculated by grossing up sales from resellers. If you are interested in joining Romtec's Reseller Panel and finding out how as a reseller you can benefit, call direct on: 01628 414013.