news

Browsers battle it out

Microsoft and Netscape stepped up their head-to-head battle for dominance of the Internet browser software market this month, with the launch of new versions of their respective packages.

Microsoft was first off the mark with the release of Internet Explorer 3.0 (IE 3.0), which was made available for download from Microsoft's Web site on August 12th. No charge is being levied on the product.

Microsoft claims some one million Net surfers downloaded IE 3.0 in the week following its release, already doubling the total downloads of the previous version, which was released in December '95.

The latest version of the Navigator browser – also version 3.0 – appeared a week later on Netscape's Internet home page. Netscape is charging $49 (about £33) for the software, although users can try it for 30 days free of charge.

In a flurry of last-minute salvoes, Microsoft and Netscape each signed up a number of 'information providers' to deliver a range of information services, free of charge, direct to users' e-mail boxes. The list of providers includes the likes of MTV, *HotWired* and the *New York Times*.
Apple: 0990 127753
IMC (for Umax): 01344 872800

Psion 3c succeeds the 3a

Psion has finally quashed rumours of a replacement for the 3a by launching not one, but two new models.

The Series 3c and Siena both have their predecessor's clamshell design, but they now have a rubberised finish.

The Series 3c is essentially an upgraded 3a, though the existing built-in applications have been improved and there is a new application for taking quick notes.

The Psion Siena is more of a departure from the norm, and is intended for use as an electronic organiser, rather than a fully-fledged hand-held computer. The applications are more or less the same as those found on the 3c, but they have been rewritten for the Siena's smaller screen.

Both models also have a built-in infra-red port that allows data to be transferred at 115Kbs.

Prices are £399.95 for the 2Mb Series 3c, and £229.95 for the 1Mb Siena. See this month's Up Fronts (page 23) for an exclusive review of both products.
Microsoft: 01734 270001

Data dies a death if PCs are Hare carriers

Two new viruses are playing havoc with PCs worldwide.

Hare – also known as Euthanasia, HDEuthanasia and Krsna – is a particularly virulent strain which triggered on August 22nd, and is due to do so again on September 22nd.

On either date, if the virus is active, the following message is displayed: '"HDEuthanasia" by Demon Emperor: Hare Krsna, hare hare...' It then overwrites all hard disks, destroying data.

The second newcomer is an Excel macro virus, Laroux. At the moment, this is known only to infect versions 5 and 7 of Excel that run in a Windows environment. It is not destructive – it exists only to replicate.

Symantec and McAfee have updated their Web sites to provide advice on how to cope with infected machines.
www.symantec.com/
www.mcafee.com/
Symantec: 01734 814230
McAfee: 0171 209 2222

Apple polishes up its home Performas

Apple is going all out for the home market this September with the launch of its fastest ever PowerPC Performas.

Aimed at families and small businesses, the new machines are split into three categories to reflect their configurations.

Based on an all-in-one design, the Family Macintosh comes in 160MHz or 180MHz flavours. It includes 16Mb of RAM, a 1.6Gb hard disk, eight-speed CD-ROM drive and a 28.8Kbps modem. The faster model features a TV tuner as standard, and is finished in stylish black. Prices start at £1,699.

The tower-based Home Office system starts at 180MHz and features additional business and comms software. Prices, with a 15in multimedia monitor, start at £1,899.

Finally, the 200MHz Creative Studio, at £2,699, offers professional graphics software and video editing with built-in M-JPEG video capture card.
Apple: 0990 127753

Microsoft gets festive

Microsoft has dropped the 'Home' brand which adorned the packaging of many of its most popular software titles and peripherals.

From now on, these products will carry nothing more than the familiar Microsoft logo – but the packaging has been redesigned in an effort to distance the programs from Microsoft's more 'serious' offerings.

New products include Picture It!, a graphics acquisition and editing program, and Greetings Workshop which enables the creation of personalised stationery and greetings cards from a desktop PC.

Perennials such as Encarta, Music Central and Cinemania are being updated and will be launched before Christmas.

3D Movie Maker has also been revamped to include logos and characters from Nickelodeon, the popular children's satellite TV channel.

Microsoft is also adding the finishing touches to the latest version of its DTP system, Publisher, which will include a Web page designer.

The prices have yet to be set, but most products should be available before Christmas.
Microsoft: 01734 270001

Presarios restyled for an easier life

Compaq has redesigned its Presario home PCs to create three new ranges – the 3000, 4000 and 8000.

The PCs are the first to be designed by Compaq's dedicated consumer and retail division, and have features intended to make life easier for home users, such as push-button controls for quick access to certain functions and applications.

The Presario 4000 and 8000 series consist of six PCs, in curvy desktop and tower cases. Processors range from Pentium 120 to Pentium 200, and hard drives from 1.2Gb.

All machines have CD-Rom drives and wavetable sound, and all but the entry-level 4108 have 33.6Kbps modems. Prices start from £1,499 for the 4000 series and £3,199 for the 8000.

The Presario 3020 is a radical departure from the traditional desktop PC design, consisting of a 'luggable' desktop case with built-in 12.1in TFT screen. Based on a Pentium 166 processor, the 3020 has 24Mb of Ram, a 2Gb hard drive and six-speed, four-disc CD-ROM drive. The 3020 costs £3,399.

Compaq: 0181 332 3000

InContext has announced the first Beta release of Flash-Site, a high-speed off-line browser for the World Wide Web. The company claims the program offers the ultimate way to surf the Net and organise Web information, while reducing download costs.

FlashSite offers accelerated browsing by allowing simultaneous and continuous downloading of multiple Web sites to your hard disk. Once downloaded, you can browse through sites at your convenience, search for information, and file it for later use.

Other options in FlashSite include automated information collection, and targeted retrieval for downloading only the bits of sites that you want.

The beta version of FlashSite can be downloaded from:
www.incontext.com/products/FlashSite
InContext 001 416 922 0087

Watford Electronics has released a new flatbed scanner called the Scan-It Pro 4800P.

The 4800P is a 24-bit colour scanner which offers true optical scanning resolutions of up to 1,200dpi. These can be interpolated to a maximum of 4,800dpi using the included software.

Watford is bundling a suite of software including RecognitaPlus, ImageIn and Action Centre. With these programs, users of the 4800P can perform scanning, copying, faxing and OCR (optical character recognition) operations.

Usefully, the 4800P connects via a PC's parallel port, thus doing away with the need to install a card inside the machine. The 4800P is available now for £233.83 (incl VAT).
*Watford Electronics: 01582 487777*

Orchid has launched a PC video accelerator card based on 3Dfx's impressive Voodoo Graphics chipset.

The Righteous 3D card is designed solely to boost a PC's 3D video performance and has to be used with an existing video card. It will, however, work with any video card – 3D or otherwise.

The Righteous 3D card is the first commercial video card to use the Voodoo Graphics chipset and, judging by the images on the 3Dfx Web site, the launch of the card should signal the arrival of some visually outstanding games.

The PCI card is Windows 95 DirectX compatible and is expected to cost around £235.
Orchid: 01256 479898
www.orchid.com
www.3dfx.com

▶
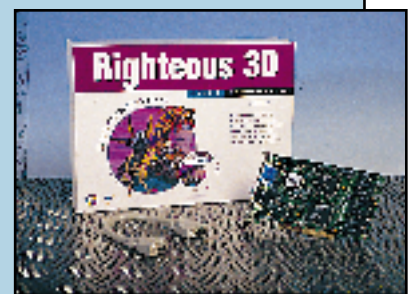
Intel's top chip sees action

Siemens Nixdorf and Carrera have both announced PCs based on Intel's top-of-the-line 200MHz Pentium processor chip.

Carrera's new flagship is designed for high-end business use, while Siemens is targeted at home users who want the best in multimedia and entertainment.

The Siemens SCENIC PC features a tower or desktop case, 16Mb of EDO RAM, a 4x CD-ROM drive, and integral fax modem, and a 2Mb 64-bit graphics card.

The system comes with Windows 95 pre-installed and the tower version, along with 17in multimedia monitor,

retails for around £3,172 (including VAT).

Carrera's Power 200 is based on Intel's 430HX PCI chipset, with 512Kb of pipeline burst cache for enhanced performance. Users can tailor the rest of the design to suit individual requirements and prices are set to start at £1,702.

The company has also introduced a machine which is based on the IBM 6x86 processor technology. This sixth-generation CPU features advanced super-scaler architecture, 16Kb of cache and is compatible with both Pentium chipsets and sockets.
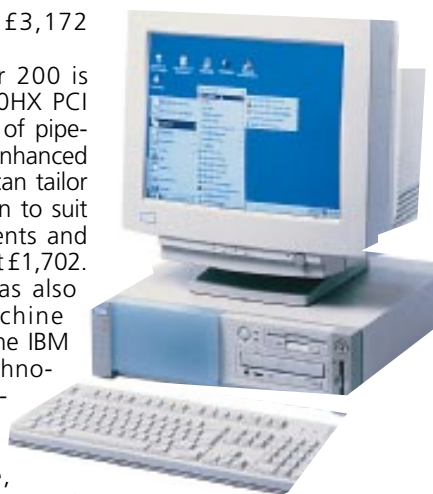
Carrera: 0171 830 0586
Siemens Nixdorf: 01344 862222

The IBM PC has its fifteenth birthday

IBM is celebrating the launch of its first PC – just 15 years ago.

The first IBM PC cost $2,880 (about £1,920), for which you would have got a machine with an Intel 8088 processor running at 4.77MHz, 64Kb of RAM and a floppy disk drive capable of storing a trifling 160Kb of data on 5.25in disks.

In contrast, an entry-level PC from IBM today costs £997.58 and includes 8Mb of RAM, an 850Mb hard disk drive and a Pentium processor running at 100MHz.

Looking to the future, Gartner Group – a company that keeps an eye on the computer industry – has been making a few predictions. They reckon that a typical PC in the year 2000 will have 64Mb of RAM, a 5Gb hard disk and a RISC (Reduced Instruction Set Computer) processor performing 100MIPS (millions of instructions per second).

IBM: 01256 343000

Nikon and Sanyo get the picture on screen

Sanyo's new digital camera is for the domestic PC user and photographic enthusiast.

Called the Image PC, it stores pictures in memory instead of on photographic film and, like all digital cameras, it costs nothing to run apart from an occasional set of batteries.

The Image PC looks and works just like an ordinary camera, offering point-and-shoot simplicity, due to its fixed-focus lens and automatic flash. With the standard 1Mb of memory it can store up to 32 full-colour pictures.

Nikon's new personal digital cameras look more like portable phones than cameras, but they offer several refinements: photographs can be previewed on a built-in 2.5in screen, and details of each picture can be saved by recording a voice annotation or making a note with an electronic pen.

Nikon has not yet announced prices, though they are sure to be significantly higher than Sanyo's VAT-inclusive £579.99.

Sanyo: 01923 477220
Nikon UK: 0181 541 4440

Latest inkjets on display

Both Lexmark and Hewlett-Packard have announced new inkjet printers this month.

The Lexmark 2050 comes with a free copy of Lexmark's own 'Workshop' CD-ROM, a compilation of commercial software that includes Photo-Impression image-editing software, and a set of graphics programs for creating labels, greetings cards and T-shirts.

The £334.88 printer uses dual printheads (one carrying three colours, the other one with just black) and employs a new type of waterproof ink.

The Lexmark 2050 with its software bundle is clearly aimed at the home user, but

its price is not too far from that of Hewlett-Packard's new DeskJet 820Cxi. At a cost of £415.95, the 820Cxi is aimed at small office users. HP claims print speeds of 6.5ppm (pages per minute) using black text or 4ppm in colour, thanks to its new implementation of the Windows Printing System.

Meanwhile, Canon has dropped the price of its existing entry-level BJC-210 from £269 to £210. The printer now comes with a colour ink cartridge and a Dorling Kindersley CD-Rom reference work called 'Space and the Universe'.

Lexmark: 01628 481500
Hewlett-Packard: 0990 474747
Canon: 0121 680 8062

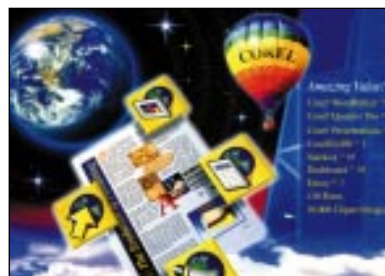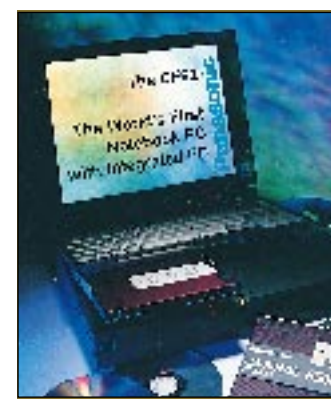# WordPerfect suite for Packard Bell PCs

The labyrinthine history of the WordPerfect suite of office software has taken yet another turn. Corel, the new owner, has announced an agreement with Packard Bell NEC to bundle the suite on all new Packard Bell PCs.

The specially modified version 7 will include the WordPerfect word processor, Quattro Pro spreadsheet, Corel Presentations, CorelFLOW and the usual mix of thousands of fonts and clip-art images.

The software will be pre-installed on up to 5 million PCs, with a copy supplied on CD as well.

The agreement also includes the right to extend the bundling of the product to PCs sold by NEC and Zenith Data.

Corel's WordPerfect Suite 7 has a lot of ground to make up before it can compete on level terms with the longer-established Windows 95 office suites from Microsoft

and Lotus; this agreement should give it a kick start.

Packard Bell: 01753 831914
Corel: 0800 581028

Introducing a unique notebook…

Panasonic has launched the CF-62 – the world's first multimedia notebook with an integrated PD drive.

Developed by Matsushita, Panasonic's parent company, the PD (Phase change Dual) drive operates as a 4x CD-ROM drive as well as a high-capacity, re-writable optical disc drive.

Up to 650Mb of information can be stored on each PD cartridge, so it's ideal for archiving, storing big multimedia files and transporting data. Also, up

to ten hours of dictation can be recorded on one cartridge.

Available in 100MHz and 133MHz Pentium versions, the CF-62 has a 12.1in TFT colour screen, with up to 1,024x768 pixels, 16-bit stereo sound, and high-speed IrDA. It supports the latest CardBus and Zoomed Video (ZV) PC card standards, and uses Lithium Ion batteries.

The 100MHz-based CF-62 has an RRP of £4,638, while the 133MHz one costs £6,226.32.

Panasonic: 0500 404041

Sony and Iiyama have each released new monitors this month.

Sony's 15sf II and 17sf II are 15in and 17in monitors respectively. Both models have Sony Trinitron screens with a 0.25mm dot pitch and are capable of displaying 640x480 at 120Hz, 800x600 at 100Hz and 102x768 at 80Hz. The monitors cost £464.13 for the 15sf II, and £759.05 for the 17sf II.

Iiyama's Vision Master 17ES is a 17in monitor that has stereo speakers built into its case. The monitor has a 0.26mm dot pitch and can display at 1,280x1,024 at 80Hz and 1,600x1,200 at 69Hz. It costs £703.83.

Sony: 0181 760 0500
Iiyama: 01438 745482

BBC Worldwide, the commercial arm of the BBC, has set up a new division for interactive publishing. BBC Multimedia will publish titles across five key genres aimed at children of pre-school age and upwards.

Chief among the products will be children's titles based on popular TV characters, which are designed to develop numeracy and literacy, as well as computer and multimedia skills.

Other releases will include quizzes aimed at families and young adults, screensavers, games, language learning titles and educational discs compatible with the National Curriculum.
**BBC Worldwide: 0181 576 2000**

Apple has announced the release of QuickTime 2.5 for Macintosh, the latest version of its multi-platform multimedia architecture. The new revision is designed to meet the requirements of content creators for broadcast, music, film and the Internet.

The main improvements are an enhanced music system, which gives professional-sounding General MIDI capabilities in software, without the need for hardware synthesisers, and support for interactive 3D objects with QuickTime movies.

Other features include multiprocessor support for high-end systems and new JPEG and RAW Codecs on Power Macs.

QuickTime 2.5 requires System 7.5 and is available free from:
www.quicktime.apple.com
Apple: 0181 569 1199

Superscape VR has launched an ActiveX control for Microsoft's Internet Explorer 3.0 that allows virtual reality to be experienced via the World Wide Web.
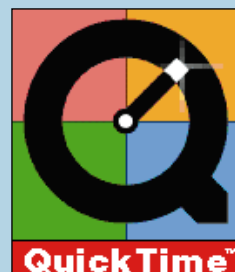
Viscape for ActiveX uses a point-and-click interface to enable users to explore three-dimensional 'worlds' created with one of Superscape's virtual-reality authoring tools.

ActiveX is a set of tools that enable programmers to make Web pages less of a passive experience, by including such enticements as video clips and interactive objects. Several worlds are already on-line, and both Internet Explorer 3.0 and Viscape can be downloaded free of charge.
Superscape VR: 01256 745745
www.microsoft.com
www.superscape.com

Demon, the UK-based Internet service pioneer, provides customers with a dial-up Internet connection for a flat rate of £11.75 a month. It has now announced that all its customers will receive 5Mb of Web space, through which they can post their own Web pages free of charge.

Demon's offer is unusual in that 5Mb of space is far more generous than the usual 1Mb available from other service providers. Also unusual is the fact that Demon places no restrictions on the use of Web space for commercial purposes.

The service is available immediately to existing users and new customers.
**Demon: 0181 371 1234**

Toshiba is to be the official supplier of notebook PCs to the BT Global Challenge yacht race. The company is also sponsoring one of the yachts and has named it the *Toshiba Wave Warrior*.

Each of the 14 yachts competing in the Global Challenge has been equipped with two Toshiba notebooks, a T2100 and a T2130CT.

The T2100 notebooks have been configured with the Scansat Inmarsat Standard C Satellite communication system which facilitates position reporting.

PC Weather Fax has been installed on the T2130CTs and, when connected to the yachts' HF radios, will enable up-to-date weather information to be displayed on-screen.

The BT Global Challenge yachts are due to set sail from Southampton on September 29th.
Toshiba: 01932 841600
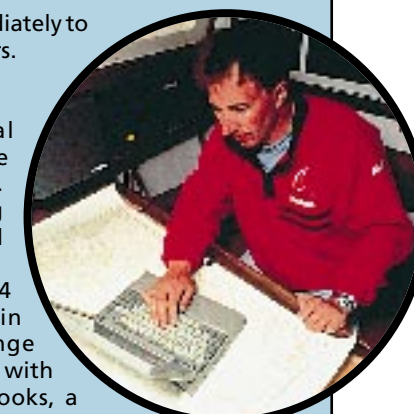
Oregon Scientific's new £29.99 palmtop organiser may have only a 12Kb memory, but a built-in FM radio and world clock provide added value.
Oregon Scientific: 01628 826 688

Mitac has designed a desktop PC exclusively for Comet. The £1,499 machine is based on a Pentium 100 and includes a 14.4Kbps modem.
Mitac: 01952 207200

Fujitsu's 230Mb Dynamo portable magneto-optical disk extends the storage capacity of notebook computers indefinitely. It costs £468 and uses £20 replaceable disks.
Fujitsu: 0181 573 4444

Miro's MiroMedia View with TV upgrade was reviewed in September's Up Fronts, where we stated that we would highly recommend it if it cost £100 less. Well now it does: the price has dropped to £349.
Miro: 01494 510250

Sony's latest CD-Rom drive is the eight-speed CSD-88EE. The drive is capable of a data transfer rate of 1.2Mb per second and costs £135.13.
Sony: 0181 760 0500

Tally, formerly Mannesmann Tally, has launched an eight-page-per-minute laser printer using the Windows Printing System. The T9208 costs £668.
Tally: 01734 788711

Newsgroup nasties nailed

New Scotland Yard has issued a stern warning to Internet Service Providers (ISPs).

The ISPs have been directed to remove from their servers any newsgroups which contravene the Obscene Publications Act – or face prosecution.

In a letter sent to, and to be distributed by, the Internet Service Providers Association (ISPA), Chief Inspector Stephen French of the Metropolitan Police Service outlined a list of 151 newsgroups suspected to contain obscene material.

alt.sex.prevost-derbecke
alt.sex.prom
alt.sex.prostitution
alt.sex.reptiles

The letter goes on to indicate that the Police regard ISPs as publishers, and warns that '...publication of obscene articles is an offence'.

The offending newsgroups represent less than one percent of the approximated 20,000 that exist, and they reside predominantly within the alt.binaries and alt.sex subsections.

At the moment, removal of the highlighted newsgroups and the continued monitoring of other suspect materials, is being entrusted to the ISPs themselves. However, Chief Inspector French states than an enforcement policy will be applied should self-regulation fail.
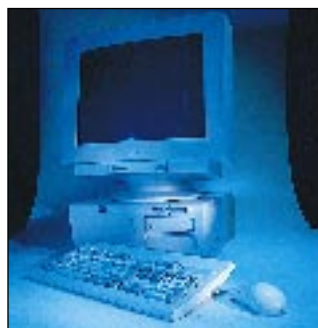*New Scotland Yard: 0171 230 1212*

IBM and Dell slash prices on desktops

Dell and IBM have each announced price cuts on their desktop PC ranges.

Dell is cutting up to 17 percent from the price of its OptiPlex business PCs. This brings the price of the high-end GXpro 200 model down to £2,743.63 (including VAT), from its previous price of £3,295.88. The GXpro 200 is fitted with 32Mb of RAM and a 2Gb hard disk, and comes complete with a 15in UltraScan monitor.

IBM's price changes affect its PC340, PC350 and PC700 models, and the cuts range from 12 to 19 percent. The entry-level PC340 is a Pentium 100MHz-based machine with 8Mb of RAM and an 850Mb hard disk, and now sells for £997.58 (including VAT) – a saving of £225.60.

The reductions on IBM's higher specification machines is not quite so marked, with just £71.68 being lopped off the Pentium 133MHz, 16Mb of RAM, 1.2Gb hard disk PC730, making the new price £1,655.58.
Dell: 01344 720000
IBM: 01256 343000

Top 20 software packages according to Romtec figures

Position	Package	Publisher/supplier	Type	Last month
1	Office v4.2 Standard	Microsoft	Office suite	1
2	PK Zip for Dos	Atlantic Coast	Utility	9
3	MS Windows NT Workstation	Microsoft	Operating system	–
4	WFWG 3.11	Microsoft	Operating system	5
5	MS Windows 3.1	Microsoft	Operating system	–
6	MS Office v4.3 Standard	Microsoft	Office suite	–
7	MS BackOffice	Microsoft	Server software	8
8	MS Windows 95 Upgrade	Microsoft	Operating system	–
9	Dos Upgrade	Microsoft	Operating system	6
10	MS Office 7 Standard	Microsoft	Office suite	4
11	Norton Administrator	Symantec	Network manager	–
12	Smartsuite v3/4 for Windows	Lotus	Office suite	7
13	Dr Solomon's anti-virus for DOS	S&S International	Anti-virus	–
14	Word v6 for Windows	Microsoft	Word processor	12
15	cc:Mail for Windows	Lotus	E-mail	11
16	Lotus Notes for Windows	Lotus	Groupware	13
17	PC Anywhere Windows	Symantec	Comms	18
18	MS Office 7 Pro	Microsoft	Office suite	16
19	MS Project for Windows	Microsoft	Project management	20
20	Dr Solomon's anti-virus for Win	S&S International	Anti-virus	20

Figures for June 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.