reviews

Scoring and testing explained

Each review rates a product according to a set criterion for its type. The score is broken down at the end of the review to show how we reached our final verdict. Ratings range from 1 to 10 and fall into the following classifications:
1 to 3 – poor   4 to 6 – average   6 to 8 – good   8 to 10 – excellent

Hardware categories
• Features **This rates the specification of a product by current standards. For example, a 2GHz PC with 512MB of RAM and 80GB hard drive would score highly.**
• Build quality **How well the product is made and the quality of the components.**
• Value for money **The price of a product will often be the deciding factor between a good review and a bad review. This is not to say that cheaper products will always win out, but the better the price/performance and features ratio the higher the score.**

Software categories
• Ease of use **Describes how easy software is to install and use.**
• Features **Indicates how much the package contains. An office suite that only came with a spreadsheet would score poorly.**
• Value for money **Lots of features, good performance and a low price tag will result in a good score.**

Scoring
• Software **Overall ratings for software take into account the three main assessment categories above and any other factors that are covered in the detailed review.**
• Hardware **Our product charts rank hardware from 1 to 10 across a category, so we do not give overall scores. To gauge how well a hardware product has fared against the competition, look at where it falls in the relevant Top 10 chart.**

All our rankings are based on a calculation of features and performance compared to price, so the highest-scoring products also represent the best value for money. For those products not featured in our charts, anything we consider particularly outstanding is awarded a Recommended logo. Charts are introduced, amended or removed as and when necessary to cover any emerging hardware sectors, advances in technology or changes in the industry.

The Best Buy and Recommended awards
A Best Buy product offers a superlative combination of features, performance, value for money and customer service. Those that earn a Recommended award are almost as good, offering great value, quality and performance.

Prices
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PC Advisor's recommendations are for guidance only and are not a guarantee of suitability. The publisher takes no responsibility for purchasers' decisions.

Graphics chip vendor nVidia has ruled the market for a long time – some think too long. This month sees the release of ATI's latest bid to topple nVidia from the top. Although high frames rates carry the most kudos, the new Radeon 9000 Pro cards (see page 78) concentrate on offering reasonable performance and good value for money. ATI also has the Radeon 9700 in the offing, so we'll have to wait and see how it rates against nVidia's current top performer.

In the palm of your hand
Whereas the PDA (personal digital assistant) market was once a hotbed of innovation, with many different designs and form factors available, it's now boiled down to one basic design. The tall narrow touch-screen works, but it's getting a bit dated and there's little alternative. Sony's new Clie (see page 79), however, is far from traditional. The tilt-and-turn screen means it can function both as a traditional palmtop or an innovative clamshell. If you're fed up with handwriting recognition then there's also a keyboard available.

Bouncing back to the traditional Pocket PC arena, we've taken a look at the latest models from PDA newcomers Toshiba and NEC (see pages 80 and 95). Both entered the market at roughly the same time, but have chosen to develop in different directions. The new NEC model slims down the bulk of its previous release and opts for jacket expansion through the Rocketeer pack. Toshiba, on the other hand, is still staying jacket free, but manages to pack in extra functionality without piling on the pounds. The e740

offers built-in wireless connectivity and there's a nifty adapter available so you can hook it up to a monitor or projector.

If you'd rather stick with a traditional notebook, but want something smaller and lighter then we've got two ultraportable options for you. The IBM X24 and the Dell X200 may share small dimensions, but the similarities end there. Find out which model suits you by turning to page 84.

Surfing in style
If you're tired of waiting for slow downloads, then low-cost self-install ADSL (asymmetric digital subscriber line) is the way to go. Providing ADSL is available in your area, you can get online at 10-times the speed of a normal 56Kbps (kilobits per second) modem for around £25 per month. You'll need your own ADSL modem, though, so we've taken a look at two of the latest models on page 83.

Quiet as a mouse
If you want a low noise PC, then previously this meant sacrificing performance. Signum Data, however, has taken a new approach. Its Future Client system runs at 2GHz but has no noisy fan so is near-silent in operation. Turn to page 82 to find out more.

And the rest…
Despite the downfall of ITV Digital, DTT (digital terrestrial television) is alive and well and set to expand – and you won't have to pay a monthly fee. All you need to reap the benefits of the digital generation is a receiver. We've taken a look at two new models from Pace and Gundig on page 94.

We've also taken a look at the latest photo- and video-editing packages from Adobe (see pages 98 and 104) and there's our review of a new 3D web design application on page 100, which aims to make the process simpler and less time-consuming.

Whether you're after a new CD-RW drive, or looking to make the leap into the world of writeable DVD, then you'll find everything you need in our updated charts on page 134.

Finally, turn to Hot off the Press on page 35 for a sneak preview of Sony Ericsson's P800 mobile phone-cum-PDA and JVC's tiny new notebook. ■

Index