

hot off the press

Unfortunately for us, computer manufacturers bring out new products whenever they feel like it, and some miss the deadline for inclusion in our Top 10 charts. So here we review some hardware hot off the production line that might top the chart next month

Hi-Grade UltiNote M6400-1800-I and AJP 8170

Power and Budget notebooks

This month we've got an exclusive preview of two notebooks powered by the Pentium 4 processor. Although they're portables, they feature a desktop CPU – like the flip chip Pentium IIIs used by most of the models in our Budget notebooks chart (see page 108). We managed to get our hands on a Hi-Grade model that falls into the Power category, and a second device from AJP which is a Budget unit.

Hi-Grade's UltiNote M6400-1800-I (right) uses a 1.8GHz Pentium 4 processor to great effect. Twinned with 512MB of RAM and a 16MB DDR (double data rate) RAM ATI Mobility M6 graphics chip, the P4 pulled in a WorldBench 4 score of 118 – the highest we have ever seen. The UltiNote's performance score beats this month's number one Power notebook by 15 points and, with a price of just £9 over our starting cost of £1,500, it would easily have won our Best Buy award had it reached the Test Centre in time.

AJP's 8170 (below) doesn't fare quite so well in the Budget category. Its price tag of £1,299 makes it quite expensive compared to the competition and, as such, it would only have won third place. The 8170 uses a 1.7GHz Pentium 4 processor, twinned with the same RAM allocation as the Hi-Grade, but our test unit only had 8MB of graphics memory. The AJP won a WorldBench 4 score of 99, which again is easily the fastest score in the Budget chart.

Of course, as with all notebooks using a desktop processor, battery life is not either of these model's strength – each claims a life of just 1.5 hours. However, if you are happy to use these portable devices for the job they were designed for – desktop replacement PCs – then this should suffice.

Each model has a 40GB hard drive, although the AJP comes with an eight-speed DVD-ROM while Hi-Grade has opted for a combo DVD/CD-RW drive. Both notebooks also feature a 14.1in TFT (thin-film transistor) screen capable of a maximum resolution of 1,024x768. Bundled software is limited on both machines, although each portable will run Windows XP Home. Hi-Grade's collect-and-return warranty lasts two years, covers you worldwide as well as for accidental damage. AJP, on the other hand, offers a year's return to base cover.

Hi-Grade: 020 8532 6111

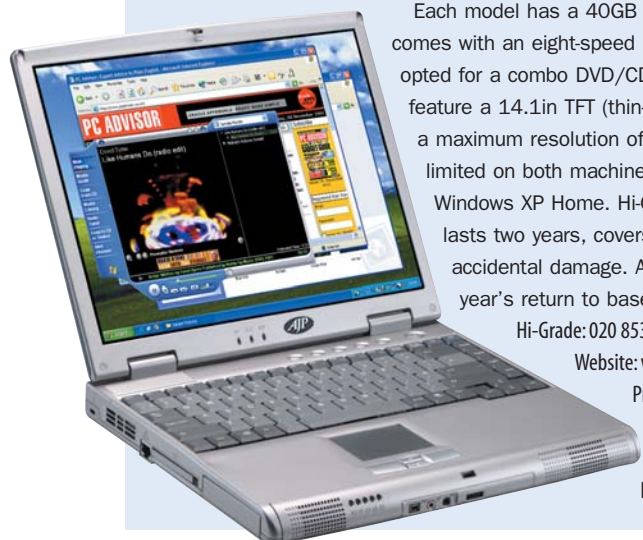
Website: www.higrade.com

Price: £1,509

AJP: 020 8208 9744

Website: www.ajp.co.uk

Price: £1,299



AOpen GeForce3 Ti200-DV64

Graphics card

The graphics card market moves quickly, and nVidia is never one to let the grass grow under its feet. Hot on the heels of the GeForce3 come the Titanium cards. Two versions are available – the Ti500 and the Ti200, which in terms of performance sit above and below the GeForce3 respectively. While the Ti500 offers the best performance a gamer could possibly demand, it comes at a price. With this in mind, we took a look at AOpen's Ti200 card to see how it measured up.

Comparing the results with a Ti500 card in Quake 3 at 1,024x768, both were fairly equally matched with the Ti200 scoring 105.3fps (frames per second) compared to the Ti500's 105.8fps using Demo2. Moving on to higher resolutions saw more of a difference, with the Ti200 scoring 85.9fps at 1,600x1,200 and the Ti500 100.6fps. While there's a difference, it's unlikely to make much impact as the frame rates are so high anyway.

With 3DMark 2001, the Ti200 card scored 4,701 at 1,024x768 and 3,512 at 1,600x1,200, where the Ti500 model achieved 5,195 and 4,180 respectively.

Although the Ti500 does have an edge over the Ti200, especially at high resolutions, the GeForce3 Ti200-DV64 offers better value for money. A similarly equipped Ti500 card – with DVI (digital video interface) and S-Video out – would cost around £100 more.

Avnet: 01296 737 957

Website: www.aopen.com

Price: £165



As ever, there are some great new gadgets on the market this month, so you might want to consider adding some to your home or office setup. To help you sort the duff from the desirable, we share our views on some of the more interesting product releases

Lindy USB webcam

Webcam

What better way to start the new year than by chatting with your friends and family all over the world in person. Well, webcams can't quite do that, but they do offer a more personal feel to plain text email conversations.

The Lindy USB webcam simply plugs in to your PC and lets you send still or video images. There's a crafty mounting clamp which allows for free-standing, it can be attached to a laptop screen for mobile use and a snapshot button is also incorporated. Bundled software enables digital conferencing and image-editing and provides a security software programme with automatic silent recording that begins upon motion detection – good for catching burglars, or the kids.

Lindy: 0164 275 4000

Website: www.lindy.co.uk

Price: £59.99



MEM 250 surge protection kits

Transient voltage surge suppression products

MEM 250's range of TVSS (transient voltage surge suppression) products offer protection of individual devices in the home and the office.

The 13A modem/fax protector (SS08M0) is a plug-in adapter which provides dual-surge protection, covering the data/telephone line to a fax machine or modem as well as the power supply. There is also a similar protector available for TV and video recorders (SS08AN), which incorporates male and female coaxial sockets for connection to the TV antenna.

Individual appliances can be safeguarded by the surge protection plug (SS08PL), which also includes a thermal cut-out and an LED to indicate the current status.

Website: www.mem250.com to find your local distributor

Price: varies according to specification



Philex DVD to TV kit

DVD-to-TV kit

Most people use their DVD players to watch films and bring graphics to life on PC games, but sitting around a computer screen to watch a two-hour film isn't as enjoyable as lounging on a comfy sofa. Well, the answer may be here in the form of this Philex device.

Philex's DVD to TV kit lets you display whatever is on your PC monitor on your TV screen. It includes audio and video cables and connectors for interfacing your PC with your TV, with a span of up to 5m. Supplied with full

operating instructions, Philex promises setup will be easy. All connectors contain corrosion-resistant gold contacts and a switchable Scart-to-phono lead and S-Video adapter.

Philex: 020 8202 1919

Website: www.philex.com

Price: £19.99



Toshiba PDR-M25

Digital camera

Digital camera prices are dropping. Gone are the days when you needed £1,000 to buy anything near decent – you can now get a good-quality device for under £300. The silver-cased, stylish PDR-M25 is such a camera. Designed to appeal to first-time buyers, there's a 2x digital zoom and a 3x optical zoom. The LCD (liquid crystal display) means shots can be previewed, giving you the chance to delete any embarrassing ones. Alternatively, you can download your favourites snaps in just three seconds and save them as Jpegs.

The Toshiba is supplied with an 8MB SmartMedia card which can store up to 112 low-resolution pictures. The built-in flash, with auto red-eye reduction, eliminates the risk of ruined pictures and, as with any digital image, you can doctor your snaps so you look like a supermodel.

Toshiba: 0870 442 4424

Website: www.home-entertainment.toshiba.co.uk

Price: £299



BUSINESS PRODUCTS

Premier Electronic LAN cards

Plug-and-play LAN cards



These high-performance LAN (local area network) cards promise to make PC mobility easier, allowing plug-and-play wireless connectivity and delivering data at 11Mbps (megabits per second). Plug and play cards are perfect for offices with 'hot desking' environments where several people use the same PCs or for people who are often out of the office and need to connect to networks.

The Premier cards support most popular network operating systems and access points and can handle all mobile data transactions and communication standards (operating in the licence-free 2.4GHz ISM band). Cards are currently available in PCI format for desktop PCs and PC Card Type II for laptop and handheld computers. Antenna options include integral and remote configurations for the standard free-space range of 2,400ft.

Premier Electronic: 01922 634 652

Website: www.premierelect.co.uk

Price: £108

Brother MFC-590

Multifunction device

Brother is using this brand-new multifunction device to replace two of its older models – the MFC-830 and the 840. Providing a splash of colour to any office task, the Brother MFC-590 is a bit of a Botham, offering colour printing, faxing, photocopying and scanning in one product. It has a small footprint and Brother claims it is one of the most user-friendly models on the market, so even the office idiot should be able to use it. Documents can be scanned at up to 9,600dpi scan resolution. There's also a fax memory of up to 170 pages and high-resolution rapid print output.

Brother: 0845 606 0626

Website: www.brother.co.uk

Price: £299.99



NEC GT950

Portable image projector

NEC's GT950 is a projector. We can get over the mundanity of this relatively quickly, however, as it does have some nifty quirks. Flat on its face it's a landscape projector, but stand the GT950 upright (thanks to the convenient stand) and you've got a portrait model. Clever, hey? And don't worry about the menu bars being upside down – these also change to the correct orientation.

Weighing in at 7.2kg, the NEC features an optional network card, so you can use someone's network connection. NEC claims the fan is as quiet as a church mouse, and at 32dB this could have a ring of truth. Plus with 2,000 Ansi lumens, this projector will be bright enough for all your presentations.

NEC: 08459 404 020

Website: www.nec.com

Price: £5,775



LifeView FlyJacket

Multimedia expansion pack

The unusually named FlyJacket provides output from a Compaq iPaq PDA (personal digital assistant) to a large display, enabling high-quality presentations or demonstrations to be run without a laptop. The plug-and-play device connects to either a projector or monitor, allowing the user to achieve an 800x600 24bit true colour display. The FlyJacket is supplied with an IR remote unit which features up/down buttons, so you can slide in and out of screens during presentations, and also doubles as a handy pointer. It functions as a video interface for both video and S-Video, so it can operate with TVs, VCRs and DVDs. Connection is made without tying up the iPaq's CompactFlash slot, keeping it free for data communication. A version is also available that incorporates a built-in camera, allowing users to capture images and display them as part of a large-screen presentation.

Peripheral Corner: 01420 566 700

Website: www.peripheral-corner.co.uk

Price: £160

