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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

All the prices printed in *PC Advisor* are quoted by the manufacturer or distributor and exclude VAT. Prices are only intended as a guide, and you may see products on sale for less or more than our quoted price. If you're interested in purchasing any of the products reviewed in *PC Advisor*, please contact the manufacturer or supplier direct, mentioning both the magazine and the issue in which you saw the product. If they won't supply the product as reviewed, please contact reviews@idg.com. Please note manufacturers are under no obligation to feature reviewed products on their website. *PC Advisor's* recommendations are for guidance only and are not a guarantee of suitability. The publisher takes no responsibility for purchasers' decisions.



Intel has been cranking up the speed of its desktop Pentium 4 chip for sometime, but this month sees its mobile cousin hit the magic 2GHz mark. Not only does Hi-Grade's latest portable pack the fastest mobile processor, but the Notino's rugged design and military approval mean it's perfect for the hardy road warrior. Intel and Microsoft might dominate the PC industry, but if you fancy a change or are just interested in what else is available check out Apple's latest offering, the eMac. Both of these new systems are reviewed on page 52.

Small wonders

If you find carrying a PDA (personal digital assistant), mobile phone and notebook too cumbersome, then take a look at the latest smartphones on pages 53 and 55. The Nokia 7560 offers mobile phone and PDA functionality in one small device and even sends digital pictures thanks to its built-in camera. The Treo 270 brings colour and a longer battery life to Handspring's range of PDA phones, while O2's Xda combines Pocket PC with voice and GPRS (general packet radio service) data.

Good looking

For the more image-conscious reader, we have not one but two stylish LCD (liquid crystal display) monitors that will add a touch of class to any desktop. Samsung has enlisted the help of Ferdinand Porsche to design its latest model, the SyncMaster 171P, while Sony tries to not be outdone – its SDM-S71 display combines space-saving lines with great visuals.

New releases of note

If you're in the market for a notebook, then turn to page 54 to get the lowdown on the latest Sony and Fujitsu models. Sony's PCG-GRX416SP offers a true desktop PC alternative with its 16.1in screen, while the Fujitsu Amilo M-7800 packs specifications we're more used to seeing in the Power notebook chart than in the Budget price category.

If you like the idea of a notebook but are worried about the lack of expansion, an external CD-RW drive is the answer. We take a look at two such devices – La Cie's CDRW FireWire 40x12x48 and AOpen's ESW-884 – on page 58. Whether your priority is high-speed performance or comfortable portability, one of these drives should satisfy.

Making a mark

Inkjet printers are great at producing colour documents for a low initial cost, but limited print speeds mean they're not up to the task of more demanding large-scale jobs. If you mainly work in black and white and you've got a lot to print then a laser unit is usually the best option. On page 106 we take a look at what the market has to offer, from the sub-£300 range to high-end devices costing almost twice that.

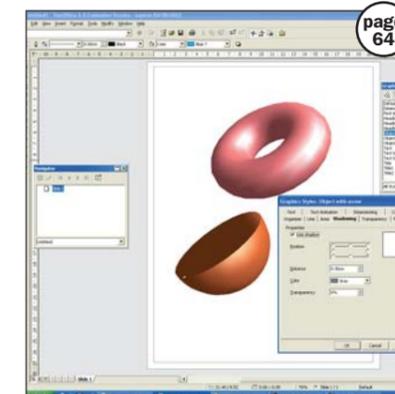
We've also updated our Budget PCs chart on page 88 so, whether you want business or pleasure from your new system, but certainly don't want to spend the earth, there should be something in there for you.

On the table

On the software side of things we've taken a look at StarOffice, a free (yes, that's free) office suite to see how it stands up to the competition on page 64. We've also reviewed Strydent Inksaver, an application that claims to save you money on your printouts (see page 66), plus there's Video Explosion Deluxe on page 67.

Read all about it

If that wasn't enough, turn to Hot off the press on page 33 and you'll find a sneak preview of Toshiba's sleek new PDA and Matrox's long-awaited Parhelia graphics card. These devices are so new you can still smell the cellophane – we do our best to keep you ahead of the game. ■



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