reviews

Last month looked to be a very exciting month for anyone that's averse to the infuriating and arcane piece of consumer technology that is the VCR. We took delivery of Pace's new Twin digital video recorder and hoped to say goodbye to poor-quality recordings and unintuitive timer menus forever.

Except it hasn't quite worked out like that. That's not to say the Twin is bad – hardware-wise it's an excellent piece of kit and, although the software lets it down, it's still easier to use than the standard VCR. The main problem we have with the Twin is not what it is – but more what it could have been. It's a great step forward, but it falls short of a giant leap.

The first great thing about the Pace (page 36) is that it records a digital stream direct to your hard disk. Remember when we all thought VCR was fine, but then DVD came along and showed how clear and crisp things could be? With the Twin any recording you watch will be exactly the same quality as the original broadcast. It also has two tuners so you can watch one TV show and record another.

But unfortunately all is not rosy. Where the Twin falls down is scheduled recording. There's no electronic programme guide (bar the now and next info), so you're back to recording programmes via the channel/time/day scenario which is flawed and prone to errors. We also found the Twin to be far from stable. This can be ironed out with a software update but it currently makes recording a hit-and-miss affair.

Despite the advantages on offer, the VCR still warrants a place under the TV. Although the 'throw-in-a-tape-hit-record-and-hope-for-the-best' method is somewhat clunky, it delivers the goods. And I can't remember the last time my VCR crashed. ∎

Will Head, reviews editor

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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

How we rate hardware
• Features **This score rates the specification of a product by current standards. For example, a 2.6GHz PC with 512MB of RAM and a 120GB hard drive would score highly.**
• Build quality **This rating denotes 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.

How we rate software
• Ease of use **Rates how easy software is to install and use.**
• Features **Indicates how much the package contains. An office suite that**

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198 Top 10 charts

Located at the back of the magazine, the charts are designed so they're a cinch to navigate. The at-a-glance comments and buying advice help you make the right purchasing decision. Products we've already tested are ranked in our charts after competing against existing entrants. The result is a definitive guide to the best hardware on the market.

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.**

Prices
All prices are quoted by the manufacturer or distributor and exclude VAT. Please note that prices are only intended as a guide and you may see products on sale for less or more than our quoted price. *PC Advisor's* recommendations are for guidance only and are not a guarantee of suitability. The publisher takes no responsibility for purchasers' decisions.

PC Advisor Gold award

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Outstanding hardware products receive a *PC Advisor* **Gold award. This may indicate that the product will enter our charts next month but** *PC Advisor* **Gold also honours excellence in a product that is not covered in this month's charts.**