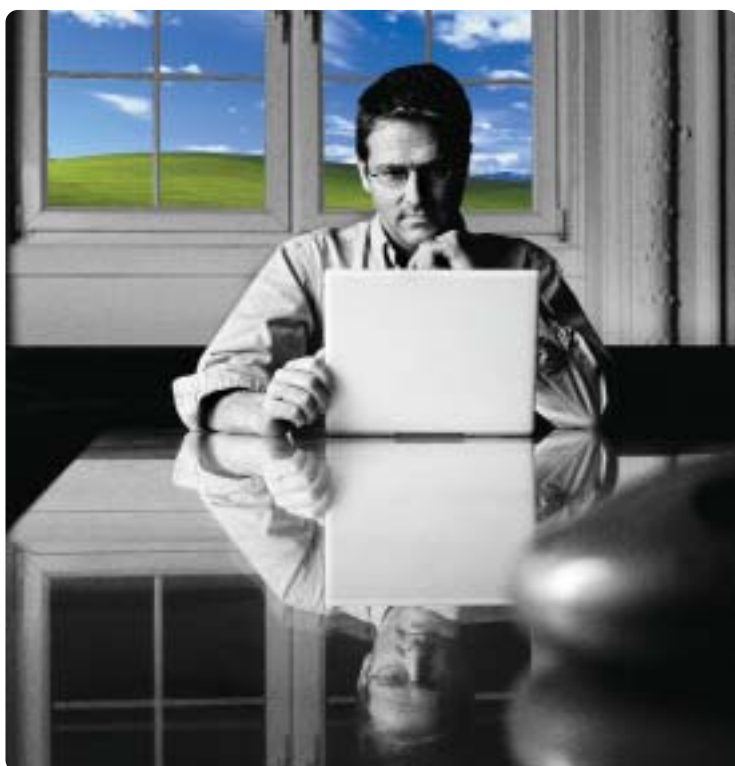# The long good buy

Once reviled by users, the operating system that has us hooked on upgrades and add-ons is now an accepted part of our computing lives

Born into a world of version proliferation, confusion and incompatibility, Microsoft's next-generation software was sent to free us from reboots and crashes and bring peace (aka brand unity) across the land. It was the operating system no one wanted to like, the upgrade few wanted to make, but gradually desktops from Strathclyde to Southampton have warmed to the bright green hills and sunny blue skies of XP.

So why the sea change? Well, it wasn't the quickly formed friendship it might sound. Going from hated expensive extra to must-have PC operating system has taken XP two years. And there are still aspects of the OS that niggle – not least its immutable licensing requirements.

Perhaps then, after suffering such a tumultuous acceptance period, you'd rather not have to think about XP's successor. Don't panic – Longhorn, as it is codenamed, is not due until at least 2004 or 2005. And given Microsoft's penchant for keeping us guessing it may well be later than that.

In the meantime, if the upgrade bug is too much to bear, there's plenty you can bolt on to Windows XP, from the essential (patches, downloadable via the Update website) to the strictly-for-fun Plus Packs.

Over the last year, we've looked at some of the best and worst of the XP operating system and in this, our last XP Advisor, we've rounded-up those pros and cons. Turn the page to find out what they are.

For this column, we've saved one of our favourite, favourite features of all: System Restore. Dull it may be, but boy is it handy when your PC's kicking up a fuss about that last program you installed. It can roll back your system to happier times effortlessly. Now which other Windows could do that? ■

Favourite feature

Go back with System Restore

Ever install some software and live to regret it? XP's System Restore can make the whole thing a distant memory in a matter of minutes.
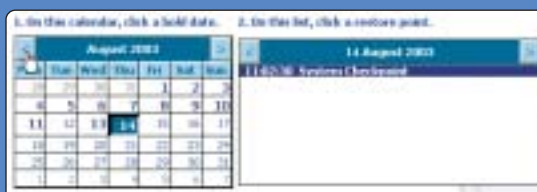
1 Click Start, Control Panel, Performance and Maintenance. (If you can't see this option choose 'Switch to Category View' in the taskpane on the left.) Finally, choose System Restore from the See Also panel on the lefthand side

2 Choose 'Restore my computer to an earlier time' then click Next and pick a date and time

3 You'll now see the Confirm screen. Check your settings and press Next when you're ready to restore to stabler times. Choose Back to pick a different date