

Next month



Christmas gift guide

Whether you're treating someone special or writing your own wishlist, our round-up of technology treats and unusual Yuletide offerings is sure to please.

Plus! 50 best utilities

Indispensable add-ons that provide extra PC functionality at little or no cost.

Digital radio guide

How digital radio services differ from analogue stations and how best to tune in.

Tried & tested Online print services

What to expect, what they cost, how long delivery takes and how good the prints turn out to be.

Here's how Going robotic

Build yourself a robot and control it from your PC.

Here's how Rediscover your record collection

Convert vinyl and audio tapes to digital format and archive them on your PC.

The Advisors

PC Advisor's experts provide in-depth reports and analysis on their specialist subjects, ranging from Windows and Office to mobile computing and networking.



PC ADVISOR

**January
04 issue
on sale
13 November**

Top 10 charts

Power PCs These powerful machines are up to anything you throw at them. We look at the latest releases on offer.

Flat-panel displays Our LCD category also gets the refresh treatment.

QRIOsly compelling

In an anonymous boardroom in a swish Parisian hotel in early September, I, along with a select bunch of European journalists, witnessed something entirely inappropriate for such a mundane venue and, more to the point, beyond the realms of my imagination.

I knew we were to be shown Sony's latest robot creation. Had it worked on the day I'm sure the updated Aibo robot dog that, we were told, is able to retrieve its own pink electronic bone, would have been quite a sight. But I wasn't prepared for the smooth walking, limb waving, rhythmically gyrating silver vision that greeted us instead.

QRIO stands perhaps two feet tall when he gingerly unfurls himself and rises to his full height. He's able to walk in a relatively realistic manner and can cope with uneven surfaces and slight inclines.

In this first incarnation, his lower arms are somewhat clunky - more like those of a Lego man than anything else - and his fingers, though independently movable, have yet to be developed sufficiently to effectively grasp small objects. However, QRIO's overall mobility is simply staggering.

We were shown a five-minute workout and dance routine complete with QRIO's eyes flashing multicoloured lights for the full disco effect. Okay, so he'd been programmed to perform those steps, but it was spellbinding watching him all the same.

There are already more useful robots out there - assembling cars, assisting with life-critical surgery, while Electrolux is currently marketing the first robot cleaner. Sony's robot, should it ever reach our shores, won't serve any such purpose, though it is probably more sophisticated than the lot.

Three separate processors are needed to enable QRIO to walk, talk and learn about its environment and those around him. This means he can indulge in a bit of banter and sing along to your favourite karaoke tune with you.

Creating him has been a labour of many years and, when we were introduced in Paris, the nervous excitement of Sony's artificial intelligence team developers was like that of proud parents. It was soon clear why.

I can't see me ever actually owning one of these robotic companions but sometimes technology is truly astounding. This was one of those times. ☒ Rosemary Haworth

