readers' writes

There's tough words for cybercriminals this month, while our star letter highlights yet more residents feeling ignored by the broadband revolution. There's more on the floppy debate and does XP Home really come without the Windows Backup Utility?

Cheap as chips

At long last I'm buying my first PC. I've spent quite a few months buying your magazine and what happens? I go into a chip shop, of all places, where they have a daily paper for the punters to read while they wait, and spot an advert for a Time PC. It had an AMD Athlon 2600+ chip, 1,024MB DDR RAM, 160GB hard drive, 128MB GeForce FX, DVD combo burner and so on, available for a limited period. I thought 'what a deal!' so I ordered one. The shame of this is I'm buying blind. The spec and price seem amazing but I'd have felt happier seeing a review. How come you folks seem so behind the times?
Marc Knell, Co Down

Ben Camm-Jones replies: it sounds like you're getting a good deal here, but there are things you have to take into account. It's likely, although not certain, that compromises have been made in terms of the overall deal to make it practical to sell this system at this price. For example, you mention nothing about the monitor or the speakers – are these provided? What cover will the warranty give you and how long is it? Though we can't review every PC, we recommend that you read the buying advice in our Top 10 charts before making a purchase.

Slam up the spyware

I read with interest the 'Court gets tough on cyber criminal' article on page 24 of *PC Advisor's* April 03 issue. I agree with the tough stance taken on anybody who writes programs that spread themselves uninvited. I would like to see the same action taken against writers of spyware and other such programs that can infect and cause damage to our PCs.

The spokesman from Sophos quoted in the article stated "This hard line suggests companies must be completely cheesed off with cybercriminals." Well, I am and I'm sure plenty of others are also fed up with them – including companies that use spyware. Maybe all software should come with a list of 'ingredients' stating exactly what programs will be installed, what each program does and how to remove it.
Chaz Allbrighton, Stevenage

Floppy fears

Emma Northam's rant about the disappearing floppy drives in Apple and Dell machines in the May 03 issue of *PC Advisor* (pages 19 and 240) raises some interesting points.

The suggestion that a £10 internal drive will solve the problem is not a runner. Looking at illustrations of the Dell and Apple systems it appears there is nowhere to put one. And if no drive bay exists you can bet your bottom dollar that no motherboard sockets exist either. So to get a floppy on a new-generation machine will mean acquiring an external USB device in its housing with firmware and cord.
John Ash, via email

Emma Northam replies: Dell is still offering the floppy drive as an option so you don't have to go without – yet. As long as buyers keep demanding the floppy, it could be saved from obsolescence.

Optical illusions

P J C Joyce's letter in the May 03 issue prompted me to write to you with a similar moan. I bought a Visioneer 8920 scanner on the assumption that I could turn my large collection of 35mm transparencies into image files. The optical resolution of the scanner is quoted as 1,200x4,800dpi.

Given the area of a 35mm transparency and assuming 1,200dpi is the 'real' figure, the resulting image should be about 1.8Mp (megapixels), enough for a sharp image at any normal magnification. The results, however, are distinctly fuzzy and increasing or decreasing the file size makes no difference.

I have tried taking the film out of its plastic mount and placing it directly on the scanner platen. I have also tried the effect of a collimated light source in place of the diffuse light from the scanner lid. Neither made any noticeable improvement.

I don't believe the scanner is faulty, as the local photographic store made scans for me using an Epson 1260P flatbed scanner and they were just as bad. I believe the actual resolution of these scanners is far less than that quoted.

Is there a way of obtaining sharp images from transparencies without spending the earth on a dedicated film scanner? One would think that a fairly simple optical setup using a digital camera should be possible.
Peter Fry, Winchester

Spencer Dalziel replies: while low-end flatbeds are well designed for photo matching they'll never offer the quality of expensive dedicated film scanners so there's no cheap solution available. The resolution on your Visioneer scanner is real enough but that's probably not the problem – it's more likely the dynamic range or optical density of your scanner.

Dynamic range/optical density is the range of dark to light tones over which the scanner can pick up detail ranging from 0 to 4 – where 0 is pure white and 4 is very black. A good dynamic range is an extremely expensive feature in a scanner and one with an insufficient range can't deliver good transparency scanning.

Lost Backup

On page 119 of *PC Advisor's* May 03 issue you state that XP Home doesn't include the Windows Backup Utility.

I'm amazed because mine does, though admittedly it doesn't install by default. My copy, which I bought from Amazon, has Windows Backup on the CD and it's amazingly good. Is Windows Backup only obtainable on the XP Home CD from Amazon? If so I feel very lucky.

Having installed XP Home I asked Microsoft's Help Centre about Windows Backup and was directed to an article entitled *How to: Install Backup from the CD-ROM in Windows XP Home Edition.*

By following the instructions I managed to install Windows Backup without any difficulty as indeed could the average 10-year-old. Although this is a minor point, it did persuade me that perhaps the rest of your XP advice might be similarly suspect.

However it's quite possible as a newcomer to computing I've wholly misunderstood the sentence. If so, many apologies for my ignorance in advance.
Dale Archer, via email

Emma Northam replies: you're right, Windows Backup does come with an off-the-peg version of XP Home. What we should have said was that because it's not installed by default when you load up Windows, if you buy an OEM version preinstalled on a PC, chances are you won't get Backup.

And you can't install it yourself from the CD because not all new PCs ship with original Windows discs.

Star letter

I'd like to echo the comments made by Richard Gray in Readers' writes in the May 03 issue of *PC Advisor*. I too am sick of the so-called broadband revolution that is sweeping the country – it seems to be a myth.

I live in York, a growing city with a sizeable head count. I am only 2.5km from the town centre, yet according to BT I'm over the 5.5 km limit from the exchange. So I turned to cable but I had no joy there either, as it was not installed when my section of the estate I live in was built. There is a 10-year rule before the roads can be dug up says NTL, yet only 200m away there are the familiar green cable junction boxes.

Great Britain is nowhere near being served as well as the main players in the industry would have us believe and, if I can't get broadband living so close to the city, then the likes of Richard Gray out in the countryside will have no chance. On what basis do NTL, BT and the like base their claims of 90 percent coverage? It certainly isn't on per head of population.

So a final plea to *PC Advisor*: don't forget the thousands who never will be able to get broadband. We need to know what the latest is on dialup 56K modems and for someone to keep pushing manufacturers to make improvements.
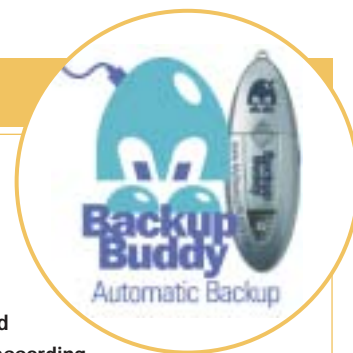**Alan Mullins, York**

Guy Dixon replies: we sympathise 100 percent with your predicament. So much so, in fact, that we're devoting an entire feature to the subject in the July issue of PC Advisor, *primed with tips on action you can take and alternative faster internet technologies. The figures normally quoted by BT and the UK's two cable companies – NTL and Telewest – refer to the percentage of the UK's population that can potentially access broadband internet access, with ADSL currently available to nearly 70 percent and cable available to 60 percent.*

Write to us

If you want to air your views, please write to *PC Advisor*, FREEPOST 20 LON87018, London W1E 4AN, or email us at pcadvisor_letters@idg.com or fax us on 020 7580 1935. Please mark emails *Readers' writes* in the subject heading.

Our star letter writer wins MyBackupBuddy, a pocket-size USB backup device with automatic compression and up to 500MB capacity. For more information, go to www.backupbuddy.co.uk.

Printer cloning

I read in your online news at www.pcadvisor.co.uk about Dell launching a new printer range. Could I respectfully suggest that you don't review them? My reasons are that the A940 is actually a clone of a Lexmark model that has been fiddled with to use chipped cartridges.

The EU, as you might know, is outlawing this because it breaches recycling laws. I believe that the same laws have stung HP. Had it allowed the A940 to use Lexmark cartridges, or its own lookalike ones, this could naturally have led to lower prices.
Kean Osgood, via email

Andrew Charlesworth replies: first, the reason for reviewing products is so that potential buyers can have an objective view of them, so the chances are we will review Dell's printers. Second, so-called chipped cartridges are not "being outlawed by the EU". The EC is in consultation with the printer manufacturers, cartridge refillers and cartridge cloners to ensure that adding intelligence to inkjet cartridges will not affect implementation of the Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment directive when it is enacted in member states. Clearly the cloners and refillers have an axe of self-interest to grind equally as large as the printer makers. ■