



Power PC Dell Dimension 8300

PCs are all too often hidden in upstairs bedrooms surrounded by piles of junk. In your average household the only PC components you'll see are the monitor, keyboard and mouse. You have to move a pile of dog-eared paperbacks to slip in a floppy disk or a CD-ROM and if it weren't for the whirring of the fans you'd never even notice that the tower unit was there.

But it doesn't have to be this way. The days of ugly beige boxes are numbered with vendors such as Dell paying far more attention to PC design. Rather than hiding the Dimension 8300 away, you'll want to make it the centrepiece of your living room. Both form and function have been given high priority in this beautifully conceived system.

Dell's midnight runner

The Dimension's midnight grey casing and rounded curves are features that other manufacturers have been eyeing enviously but so far haven't managed to emulate. Opening up the case is easy enough as there are no screws, but you can't remove the side panels so it could be difficult to access the 8300's innards.

Upgrading the Dimension will be the last thing on your mind, though – the Dell is packed with the latest components including a 3GHz Pentium 4 processor. This chip is capable of behaving as if it were two CPUs thanks to Intel's HT (hyperthreading) technology. In our tests, though, HT failed to improve the Dell's performance. In fact, we achieved a higher WorldBench 4 score when the technology was disabled (126 points compared to 121 with HT switched on). Software that has been designed with HT technology in mind is becoming more common and this is where you'll see a real performance advantage.

If you like your visuals sharp for playing games or using other graphics-intensive applications then the Dell will blow your socks off. The ATI Radeon 9800 graphics card is bundled with a top-quality 18in TFT flat-panel display. This screen may not match the image quality of a top-of-the-range CRT monitor, but the picture is still impressive. The real advantage of flat-panels, though, is that they don't hog precious desk space and look far more stylish than a bulky CRT.

Both form and function have been given high priority in this beautifully conceived system

You're surrounded

Audio is another area in which the 8300 excels – the Audigy2 sound card is the best that money can buy. The Altec Lansing setup consists of a huge subwoofer – it's slightly bigger than the tower unit itself – and five smaller satellite speakers to create superb surround sound.

Although some setups bundle a subwoofer with seven satellite speakers, a 5.1 system like this will still create fantastic audio.

CD writers are slightly old hat nowadays – if you want to back up large amounts of data then you'll need a DVD writer. The Dimension's bundled NEC ND1100A DVD+RW drive is a

good quality piece of kit. It may not be an all-format model (it can't write to DVD-R or DVD-RW) but it can still fit 4.7GB of data on to a single disc – about seven times as much as you'd be able to fit on a CD.

In terms of software, the operating system is Windows XP Home and you'll get Microsoft Works 7.0 as your office suite. A three-year onsite warranty covers the Dimension and you won't get a much better deal than this for £1,299 excluding VAT and delivery charges.

Verdict

If you bought an ultra-cool car you'd want to show it off to your friends and neighbours – trust us, you'll want to do exactly the same with the Dimension 8300. Its components will probably go out of date before the PC's design does, but this system can do the business as well, even though it might not be the fastest machine on the market. ■

Ben Camm-Jones



Dell Dimension 8300

- ☐ Dell: 0870 907 5693
- ☐ www.dell.co.uk
- ☐ £1,299 ex VAT

Specifications

3GHz Pentium 4; 512MB DDR RAM; 120GB hard drive; combo DVD+RW/CD-RW drive; 18in TFT flat-panel; 128MB ATI Radeon 9800; Creative Audigy2; Altec Lansing ATA 995 5.1; Windows XP Home; Microsoft Works 7.0; 3-year onsite warranty

Good points

Brilliant design; flat-panel monitor; three-year warranty

Bad points

Not as fast as other PCs at this price; awkward to remove and fit components; bulky subwoofer

Build quality



Features



Value for money





Wireless PDA RIM BlackBerry 7230

With Wi-Fi hotspots springing up in hotels, airports and cafes, email on the move is catching on. But hotspots are just that – spots not total coverage. For truly mobile email the only viable solution is GPRS, which works over the GSM mobile phone network but is faster, always on and can handle data files.

Research In Motion's BlackBerry is a PDA with a built-in GPRS modem, so there's no dialling in, email is delivered to your handset automatically and sent when you press send.

You can sign up for a T-Mobile Instantemail address, or forward multiple email addresses to the BlackBerry. But you can't read attachments.

As well as being a handheld email terminal, the BlackBerry is also a conventional mobile phone – so you can make voice calls and send and receive text messages on it. And it has all the PDA applications you'd expect – diary, contacts database, to-do list, memo pad, alarm clock, calculator and game (BrickBreaker, a version of the classic Breakout).

These applications are written in Java, an independent language developed to run on any machine, but they are effectively proprietary. But when using the desktop synchronising software they prove no less compatible with Windows XP than Pocket PC applications.

Unlike most PDAs, BlackBerry does not have a touchscreen and stylus – a big plus in our opinion

Down to business

Previously, BlackBerry has only been available as a business tool, providing access to corporate email and data using expensive server software that needed an IT professional to set up. So this is the first time RIM has offered a consumer device in the UK. It is currently only available with a T-Mobile account, but we are talking about shoe-horning all your communications needs into one *Star Trek*-sized device.

Unlike most PDAs, BlackBerry does not have a touchscreen and stylus, a big plus in our opinion. You navigate using a thumbwheel at the side which you also press to select. Situated below is an escape button. The tiny Qwerty keyboard is surprisingly useable despite its small size. It's good enough for composing short emails and a breeze for text messages.

After one charge the battery lasted for a week comprising a few brief phone calls, several dozen text messages, well over 50 emails and

a high score of 4585 on BrickBreaker. And we used it for two days in France so we know roaming works just fine.

What's not to like?

Setting up a new Instantemail address was simple, but forwarding emails was another matter. RIM says it has done all the hard back-office work for the most popular ISPs – AOL, MSN, Freeserve et al – and you can set up others, but it had to talk us through setting up forwarding from AOL. And to get your company emails forwarded

there's a layer of complexity only an IT professional would tackle.

We have a few other minor niggles too: the Cancel button is easily pressed by mistake just picking up the device, and clicking the thumbwheel without rolling it requires a precise but gentle touch – not something you're thinking about if you're in a hurry.

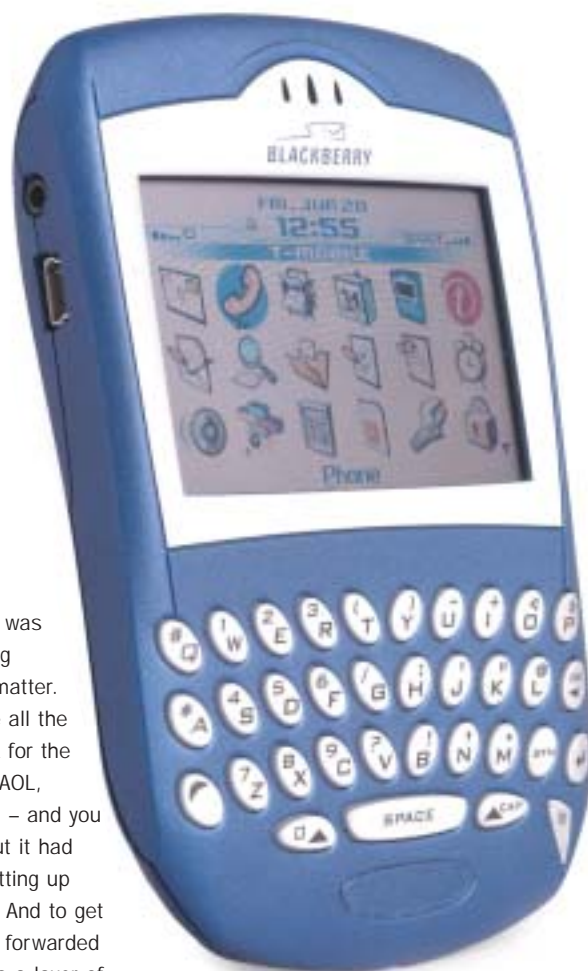
And the alarm doesn't work when the device is off, unlike many mobile phones. So if you're using BlackBerry as a travelling alarm clock you have to leave it on overnight and hope your sleep isn't disturbed by your stalker, spouse or bozo colleague who doesn't appreciate the time difference in New York.

It would also be good to see BlackBerry offered by a variety of mobile operators, not just T-Mobile. But these really are minor issues. To use the BlackBerry is to love it.

Verdict

BlackBerry is the closest we've seen to a universal handheld communicator: email, SMS, mobile phone and PDA all in one pocket-sized package with a decent colour screen and no stylus to lose. If there was a foolproof easy way of integrating private and company email accounts it would be truly magical. ■

Andrew Charlesworth



RIM BlackBerry 7230

- ☐ RIM: 01784 477 465
- ☐ www.blackberry.net
- ☐ £199 ex VAT colour, £129 ex VAT mono, T-Mobile contract (from £13.99 a month), £10 a month email service charge

Specifications

triband (900/1,800/1,900MHz)
32bit ARM processor; GSM/GPRS;
16MB flash memory; 2MB SRAM;
240x160 TFT colour display; 136g;
113x74x20mm; Qwerty keyboard;
embedded GPRS modem;
rechargeable lithium-ion battery

Good points

Email, phone, text and PDA in one pocketable package; excellent value for money

Bad points

Not easy to forward personal email; very difficult to integrate company email

Build quality



Features



Value for money





Power PC

Carrera SSC Extreme FX

exclusive Every once in a while a PC comes along that stands out from the competition and this time it's the Extreme FX. This model packs some of the best components money can buy. At £1,359 it's expensive but it offers amazing value for money and is covered by a generous warranty.

The black styling of the Extreme is perfectly matched by the cordless optical Logitech peripherals and sleek flat-panel. Fortunately it performs as well as it looks and this is down to the stunning specification list.

Powering the FX is one of Intel's brand-new Pentium 4 chips running at a speedy 3.2GHz. Carrera complements such a good processor with a serious amount of memory – 1,024MB of DDR RAM to be exact. Add to this the 200GB hard drive – the largest that has ever been through our Test Centre – and it's no wonder the FX returned a WorldBench 4 score of 140.

As an entertainment PC the FX offers only the best. The excellent 6.1 channel Inspire speakers output the best audio possible thanks to the high-quality Audigy2 card. In terms of graphics, you're treated to nVidia's most powerful graphics

card, the GeForce FX 5900 Ultra. As such, the Extreme FX ate through our video encoding and graphics tests in no time.

We can't tell you how many frames per second the FX would manage on a 1,600x1,200 resolution as the Sharp flat-panel's maximum setting is only 1,280x1,024. However, it scores over 120fps at this resolution and only dedicated gamers would miss the higher figures. As it is, the 18in pivot flat-panel offers a bright colour scheme and sharp text.

There's no DVD-RW drive and the software bundle is limited but the ultra-fast CD-RW drive, 10 USB and three FireWire ports make up for this.

Verdict

There's little to fault on the FX and if you really need a DVD-RW drive then it's worth paying extra for one. This futureproofed PC should last many years before it starts showing its age. ■

Spencer Dalziel



Carrera SSC Extreme FX

- ☐ Carrera SSC: 0870 066 0682
- ☐ www.carrera.co.uk
- ☐ £1,359 ex VAT

Specifications

3.2GHz Pentium 4; 1,024MB DDR RAM; 200GB hard drive; combo CD-RW drive; 18in Sharp LL-H1813 flat-panel display; 256MB nVidia GeForce FX 5900 Ultra; Audigy2; Creative Inspire 6700 6.1 channel speakers; Windows XP Home; 3-year onsite, 2-year RTB warranty

Build quality



Features



Value for money



Budget notebook

Multivision Solus 1010

When it comes to giving you the most for your money there are few manufacturers that can compete with Multivision. And with the release of the Solus 1010, Multivision has done it again. If you want a Budget notebook jam-packed with features and specifications then look no further.

With a black-and-silver finish the Solus looks sober enough for a work environment and stylish enough to complement any home surrounding. It's powered by AMD's fastest notebook chip – the 2500+ Mobile Athlon – has 512MB of DDR RAM and comes with a 60GB hard drive. With such impressive specs we expected the Solus to achieve a speedy WorldBench 4 result and it didn't disappoint – 118 points is one of the highest Budget notebook scores.

While there's no floppy disk or DVD writer the CD-RW drive has fast burning speeds so you'll be backing up data in no time with the bundled burning package, Easy CD Creator.

In terms of visual display the Solus excels. The 15in screen has a maximum resolution of 1,400x1,050 and it looks great with the 64MB

ATI Mobility Radeon 9000 graphics coursing through it. It's just a shame that audio is no match for the visuals.

There's a decent array of ports on the 1010 from high-quality S-Video to a VGA-out option. That said, if you intend to attach more than two USB peripherals you'll have to pay out for a USB hub. Aside from that, there's little wrong with the Solus. While it doesn't come with Microsoft Works Suite 2003, Ability Office is a useful bundle and the system's covered by a two-year collect-and-return warranty. It also has a nifty set of hardware buttons providing easy access to CD and MP3 playback.

Verdict

There are deals out there with equally great specifications and features but none that comes in at such a low price point. If your focus is on what power you can buy for £799, then you'll be hard pushed to find a better deal than this. ■

Spencer Dalziel



Multivision Solus 1010

- ☐ Multivision: 0870 066 0882
- ☐ www.multivision.co.uk
- ☐ £799 ex VAT

Specifications

2500+ Mobile Athlon; 512MB DDR RAM; 60GB hard drive; 64MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9000 graphics; 15in 1,400x1,050 TFT display; 24x/24x/10x combo CD-RW drive; 56K modem; lithium-ion battery; 328x283x26.5mm; 3.1kg

Build quality



Features



Value for money





Mobile phone Samsung V200

The V200 is the mobile phone Samsung has been advertising in connection with the new *Matrix* film and it's an equally lavish production.

Expensive on contract but an absolute must-have with nearly all the bells and whistles in place.

The 96g V200 may be lightweight but, thanks to its large battery, it's a tad chunkier than most phones. The cell, which offers an extended life, is indispensable due to the V200's rich, juice-sucking feature

set. We're talking specifically about its MMS (multimedia messaging service) and built-in swivel digital camera.

MMS allows you to send audio, Midi, graphics and animations to compatible phones and email addresses. This is complemented by one of the highest quality built-in digital cameras we've seen on a mobile. You can store up to 100 images and the 180-degree swivelhead gives you full scope to take pictures of yourself – if that's the sort of thing that floats your boat.

Pay out for a V200 on contract and you'll be rewarded with GPRS (fast, always-on data connection) and triband capabilities so it can be used anywhere where there's GSM reception. The silver clamshell case has a dual display so you don't have to open it up to see who's calling and the internal display quality is fantastic thanks to the enhanced 65,000 colours. You're given 40 voices on the polyphonic ringtones and this delivers a full orchestral score.

The only negative aspect to the V200 is the lack of support for downloadable Java games but, with so many other features to keep you occupied, we doubt you'll miss it.

Verdict

A good sturdy phone from Samsung that speaks quality and features. It's surprisingly easy to get to grips with and, though it's not the best value for money, it's worth buying for its sheer commitment to style. ■

Spencer Dalziel

Samsung V200

- Samsung: 0800 521 652
- www.samsungelectronics.co.uk
- £199 ex VAT (with contract)

Specifications

Triband GPRS mobile phone; 120x160 pixel 65,000 colour display; MMS; 640x480 digital camera; 5-hour battery life; 40-voice polyphonic ringtone; infrared modem; predictive text; 48x23x91mm; 96g

Build quality



Features



Value for money



Personal digital assistant Sony Clie PEG-SJ22

Sony has once again updated its family of Clie handheld organisers. The SJ22 is the new entry-level model and, while it doesn't feature any new and exciting technology, it once again redefines this product category in terms of price.

Demonstrating Sony's legendary gift for product naming, the SJ22 replaces the SL10 while utilising the SJ30's features. Confused? Let us explain. The previous entry-level model, the SL10, had a monochrome screen and was powered by standard AAA batteries. Its big brother, the SJ30, used a colour screen and a rechargeable lithium-ion battery.

Now those two products have been phased out, Sony has taken the SJ30's mid-range features and made them available as an entry-level product. So for just £126 the SJ22 offers an impressive array of features. Principal among these is its excellent 320x320 pixel backlit display – the first time colour has been available at this price point.

Onscreen text and graphics don't look as good as on the higher-end Clies and Palms that run Palm OS 5.0. But Sony uses a utility called

High Resolution Assist so most applications can take full advantage of the increased pixel count.

Aside from some minor differences, the SJ22 is physically identical to the SJ30: compact and stylish with a cover that flips behind the device when in use. It's not supplied with a HotSync cradle, but its redesigned attachment makes it a doddle to plug in both the power and USB cables.

The software bundle includes the usual Palm OS applications as well as a suite of Sony software for viewing still images or video, managing data on a Memory Stick expansion card. There's an alarm clock too. Sadly missing is Documents To Go, a package for viewing Office documents which is usually bundled with most personal digital assistants.

Verdict

Sony has once again surpassed itself, producing what must be the best value PDA on the market. For less than £150 inc VAT, this product will fulfill the needs of most PDA users. Its closest competitor costs nearly £100 more. ■

Alex Katz



Sony Clie PEG-SJ22

- Sony: 08705 424 424
- www.sony.co.uk
- £126 ex VAT

Specifications

Palm OS 4.1; DragonBall VZ 33MHz processor; 16MB RAM; 8MB ROM; infrared/IrDA port; Memory Stick slot; TFT colour display with backlight; 320x320 pixels; 65,536 colours; lithium-ion rechargeable battery

Build quality



Features



Value for money



Professional digital camera
Canon EOS-10D

Canon's EOS-10D is the successor to the earlier EOS-D60. While both are 6Mp (megapixel) digital SLRs, there's plenty of worthy improvements on the new model. Perhaps most impressive is the 10D's street price of around £1,000 ex VAT, which makes it Canon's most affordable digital SLR to date.

The EOS-10D may share the same resolution Cmos sensor as its predecessor, but Canon claims it has improved the manufacturing process. You get 6.3Mp images with 3,072x 2,048 pixels – sufficient quality to make good-looking 15x10in inkjet prints or 10x7in format at 300dpi (dots per inch).

While this doesn't sound that much greater than the 5Mp sensors used on many cheaper cameras, the 10D's sensor is physically much larger thereby delivering far lower image noise. Images also have a wider aspect ratio of 3:2 – the same as 35mm film – unlike the squarish 4:3 shape of consumer cameras.

Sensory overload

The Canon stores images on Type I or II CompactFlash cards, but unfortunately you've got to supply your own. It's compatible with IBM's Microdrive and also supports FAT32 formatting, allowing cards greater than 2GB to be used. You can manually choose between six levels of Jpeg compression and at the best quality you're looking at images measuring around 2.5MB. A RAW mode is also offered and the 10D can record these and Jpegs simultaneously.

Like all EOS cameras, the 10D can take any Canon EF mount lens although, since its sensor is physically smaller than a frame of 35mm film, their focal length is effectively multiplied 1.6 times. However, this is normal for all digital SLRs at this price range – to enjoy a full-frame sensor you'd need to spend three to five times more.

One of the best things about the EOS-10D is apparent the instant you pick it up. Unlike the plastic-styled D60, the 10D sports a more solid, magnesium alloy body. Indeed, this is the same material used on the high-end EOS-1Ds. The 10D's design has also been refined with more curves and improved ergonomics.

Round the back is a bright 1.8in LCD display although, like most digital SLRs, this is just for playback – composition is with the optical SLR viewfinder. On the top you'll find an improved

LCD status panel with an orange backlight. At the side are ports for the electronic cable release, PC sync for lighting (along with a pop-up flash and Speedlight hotshoe at the top), and a USB 1.1 interface that supports direct printing. It's a shame there's no support for FireWire or USB 2.0, but there is a TV output which is unusual for a digital SLR. The Canon is powered by a supplied rechargeable lithium-ion pack which should be good for at least 500 shots.

The Canon is powered by a supplied rechargeable lithium-ion pack which should be good for at least 500 shots

Sensitivity runs between 100 and an impressive 3200 ISO, while the burst mode can capture up to nine full-quality Jpegs at 3fps (frames per second). Borrowing from the higher-end 1Ds, the 10D also offers manual colour temperatures from 2,800 to 10,000K (kelvin), along with support for Adobe RGB colour space. Autofocus and tracking have also been improved.

In our tests the 10D's images looked great with plenty of detail and virtually no electronic noise. To be fair the earlier D60 delivers much the same resolving power, but Canon's made significant feature and ergonomic improvements.

Verdict

With its tough magnesium body and many high-end features, the 10D feels closer to the high-end 1Ds than the older D60 model. As mentioned, the killer improvement is price. With an RRP of £1,276 ex VAT and street prices around £200 lower, the EOS-10D is Canon's most affordable digital SLR yet. It's sure to tempt film owners, not to mention those previously considering a high-end prosumer digital camera. ■



Affordable option

Along with program and full auto modes, there's shutter and aperture priority, manual and six scene presets to choose from. Shutter speeds range from 1/4,000 to 30 seconds and there's a bulb option with effective noise reduction.

Canon EOS-10D

- ☐ Canon: 08705 143 723
- ☐ www.canon.co.uk
- ☐ £1,276 ex VAT (body only)

Specifications

6.3Mp; 3,072x2,048 pixels output; 3:2 aspect ratio; takes any Canon EF lens (not supplied); 1.6x field of view; takes CompactFlash Type I or II cards (not supplied); can use IBM Microdrive; 2.5MB image@best Jpeg quality; 1.8in LCD & optical SLR viewfinder; rechargeable battery & recharger supplied; 149x106x75mm; 790g ex battery & lens; 1-year warranty

Good points

Affordable Canon digital SLR; magnesium-alloy body; improved ergonomics; excellent handling; many high-end features borrowed from professional models

Bad points

Sensor size means focal lengths are multiplied by 1.6x; professionals may want more than 6Mp; no video capture facilities

Build quality



Gordon Laing



Beginner digital camera Kodak LS633

Kodak announced the world's first OLED (organic light emitting diode) display for a digital camera at March's CeBit tradeshow and it has finally released some product samples. We got our hands on the compact LS633 which really does impress – and not just with its amazing 2.2in OLED screen.

Kodak's consumer-friendly approach and low price tag are great bonuses too. Though they put the LS633 in our Beginner category it's no cheap-and-cheerful model. A combination of brushed and plain metal on the chassis screams compact chic and robust design. We have no doubt this will be a popular model and it should easily withstand any knocks while travelling.

The 2.2in OLED display has to be seen to be believed. Thanks to its unique technology the screen can be viewed in any lighting condition – including direct sunlight – and from almost any angle. It delivers a crisp image that makes setting up photos a dream.

However, there's more to the LS633 than the display. Its 3.1Mp (megapixel) CCD (charge coupled device) has a maximum resolution of 2,041x1,533, which is about right for the money

you're spending, and a 3x optical zoom on a Schneider-Kreuznach lens. The Kodak's storage stretches to 16MB of internal memory – not enough to get the most from the camera. Fortunately there's a slot for Secure Digital and Multimedia cards, although the customer must buy one.

If you're keen on manually setting up each shot the LS633 will disappoint – it's primarily for first-time buyers who want a point-and-shoot model. That said, there are some metering, focus, ISO and exposure options on the comprehensively laid out menu system. It's just a shame that the navigation joystick sits on the left rather than the right of the LS633.

Verdict

Shots capture sharp detail and the palette of intense colours can occasionally look too unnatural. All in all, though, the LS633 remains one of the best all-round packages for newcomers to digital photography. ■

Spencer Dalziel



Kodak LS633

- Kodak: 0870 243 0270
- www.kodak.co.uk
- £248 ex VAT

Specifications

3.1Mp; max res 2,041x1,533; 16MB internal memory; rechargeable lithium-ion battery; 114x31x55mm; 260g; 50/17 max/min photos on 16MB; 1-year warranty

Build quality



Features



Value for money



Beginner digital camera Benq DC4500

In the digital camera market most consumers are hooked on the old wives tale that the more megapixels per pound, the better the camera. This is simply not the case so we were naturally suspicious when the Benq DC4500 turned up for review. A 4Mp (megapixel) digital camera that only costs £247 ex VAT? There must be something amiss. But try as we might, we could find only niggling faults with this superb beginner model.

The DC4500 is unwieldy to use but when it comes to quality snapping it has all the right credentials. It touts a 4Mp CCD (charge coupled device) with a maximum resolution of 2,272x1,704dpi (dots per inch) and has a 3x optical zoom complemented by a 3x digital zoom.

Benq uses HIT interpolation technology to bump up the output to 6Mp and we found shots taken on this resolution to be surprisingly free of unnatural colour while packed with crisp detail. You can save shots as Jpegs or TIFs but, with only a 16MB CompactFlash card, you can't save even one high resolution shot as a TIF because there isn't enough space for it.

With only two AA batteries, the juice runs out quickly though they are nickel rechargeable cells and come with a charger – not something we often see at this price point. We recommend you buy a further two batteries to cover you on longer photoshoots.

We expected the easily navigable menu system to be bereft of features but the DC4500 has some good settings for different photographic conditions. While you won't find exacting manual tweaks there are several presets for white balance, exposure, ISO and metering. If you shy away from individually setting up each shot you can put everything on automatic for ease of use.

Verdict

The DC4500 is no head turner – it's bulky and lacks the wow factor. However, you can't go wrong when you're getting this much detail for such a low price. ■

Spencer Dalziel



Benq DC4500

- Benq: 01442 301 000
- www.benq.co.uk
- £247 ex VAT

Specifications

4Mp; max res 2,272x1,704dpi; 16MB CompactFlash card; 2 x AA nickel rechargeable batteries; 321g; 109x48x81mm; 181/13 max/min photos on 16MB; 1-year warranty

Build quality



Features



Value for money



Budget notebook

AJP 8080-Centrino

Once upon a time, adding integrated wireless to a portable would guarantee a price tag that kept it firmly in the Power notebook category. But with the introduction of Intel's Centrino processor all that looks set to change. Its integrated 802.11b technology allows manufacturers to build wireless functionality into their models at a fraction of the cost.

AJP's 8080 is one of the first Centrino-based models we have seen in the Budget notebook category and it manages to bring us the technology without pushing up the cost. At under £900 ex VAT this system represents good value for money.

However, corners have been cut – the 8080 is far from a top performer. Its 1.3GHz processor twinned with 256MB of DDR RAM only managed to pull in a WorldBench score of 92. This leaves it trailing behind its higher-powered competitors and it doesn't even manage to match its Centrino rival, the Toshiba Tecra S1 (reviewed May 03, page 40), which scored 115.

This discrepancy could be down to the different choice of graphics. While Toshiba fitted the Tecra S1 with a standalone ATI Mobility Radeon 9000 and 32MB of memory, the AJP has to make do with integrated Intel graphics that share the main system memory.

But it's not all bad news for the AJP – this sleek, well designed notebook drew admiring glances and its metallic grey finish make it an attractive addition to any office. Despite sporting a 14.1in screen with a maximum resolution of 1,024x768, the 8080 remains pretty portable at 2.4kg and just 30mm thick.

Other bonuses for the mobile user are external audio/video controls and an external on/off button for the wireless function – ideal for when you are on a plane and need to switch off this feature quickly. There's also a claimed battery life of 4.5 hours, thanks to the energy-saving Centrino processor.

Backup is handled by a combo DVD/CD writer, while storage comes in the form of a 40GB hard drive. There is also the useful addition of a smartcard reader that can handle Multimedia, Secure Digital, SmartMedia or Memory Stick cards.

Software is thin on the ground, as you might expect when taking the 8080's price and specification into consideration – all you get is Windows XP Professional. The warranty lasts for three years, but parts and labour are only covered for the first year then it's labour only.

Verdict

If you're after wireless facilities the 8080 provides it in a sleek package at an even more attractive price – just don't expect a fast performer or top-notch graphics. AJP had to cut corners somewhere to bring this technology down to such an affordable level. ■

Ursula Seymour



AJP 8080-Centrino

- ☐ AJP: 020 8208 9710
- ☐ www.ajp.co.uk
- ☐ £875 ex VAT

Specifications

1.3GHz Pentium M; 256MB DDR RAM; 40GB hard drive; integrated Intel graphics; integrated 802.11b wireless technology; 24x/10x/10x CD-R 8x DVD-ROM combo drive; 14.1in screen max res 1,024x768; Smart Card reader; 318x277x30mm; 2.4kg; 3-year warranty; Windows XP Professional

Build quality



Features



Value for money



External drive case

Lindy USB 2.0 Drive Case

If you like the idea of upgrading your PC but don't want to delve inside the tower then Lindy has the perfect product for you – an external 5.25in drive case. It will take any standard IDE 5.25in or 3.5in drive and connects via USB 2.0. FireWire versions are also available if that's your choice of interface, as well as cases for 2.5in notebook drives.

To add a new drive to your computer simply put it in Drive Case, connect it up, plug in the power and you're ready to go. No drivers are needed with Windows XP and the drive appears as normal in Windows Explorer. To test the speed of the connection we used a 52-speed

CD-R drive.

Burning 336MB of mixed file (5,226 in total) took just two minutes two seconds – very fast even for an internal drive.

Verdict

If you want to add extra hard drive space or upgrade your CD writer without removing the case then Lindy's solution is ideal. The case also provides an easy way to share a device between a number of PCs (like a DVD writer) or transfer large files from one place to another. ■

Will Head



Lindy USB 2.0 Drive Case

- ☐ Lindy: 01642 754 000
- ☐ www.lindy.co.uk
- ☐ £60 ex VAT

Specifications

External 5.25in drive housing; USB 2.0; compatible with 5.25in and 3.5in drives; external power supply; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 256x165x55mm

Build quality



Features



Value for money





Budget notebook Shepley 410SE CB

Notebooks that offer desktop performance but are still light enough not to wrench your arm out of its socket when carried around are starting to become more common. They are also coming down in price, as Shepley's latest offering proves.



The 410SE CB is essentially a desktop replacement notebook that can be used on the move without too much fuss. And at £999 ex VAT it offers a lot for your money. The good-quality TFT screen stretches to a resolution of 1,400x1,050. It might measure 15.1in but this doesn't turn the Shepley into a hulking brute – it weighs in at a mere 3.3kg.

Shepley hasn't used a dedicated mobile processor in the 410SE CB, instead opting for a 2.66GHz Pentium 4 desktop chip. Performance-wise, this makes the 410SE a pretty powerful device – at a resolution of 1,024x768 it scored a speedy 121 in our WorldBench 4 tests. When the resolution was upped to 1,400x1,050 it still managed 116 and when we ran the test after disconnecting the notebook from the mains it achieved 111.

There's a generous 512MB of DDR RAM and the hard drive can store a full 60GB of information. In terms of backup there's a combo CD-RW/DVD drive and also an internal floppy drive – something that's seldom found in notebooks these days. However, with no wireless LAN or Bluetooth capabilities, the Shepley isn't the most futureproofed notebook available.

Shepley 410SE CB

- ☐ Shepley: 0870 758 6445
- ☐ www.shepleydirect.co.uk
- ☐ £999 ex VAT

Specifications

2.66GHz Intel Pentium 4; 512MB DDR RAM; 60GB hard drive; 64MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9000V; 15.1in 1,400x1,050 TFT display; 24x/24x/10x/8x combo CD-RW/DVD; floppy drive; 56K modem; lithium-ion battery; 331x281x40mm; 3.3kg

Build quality



Features



Value for money



Verdict

Beefy specifications are backed up by good performance in the 410SE CB. Even if you don't want to lug it about too much it would still make an ideal desktop replacement thanks to its large screen. It's also fairly portable if you fancy using it on the move, however the lack of built-in wireless could prove a problem if you want to hook it up to a wireless LAN. ■

Ben Camm-Jones



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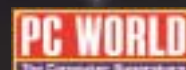
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Budget notebook

Packard Bell EasyNote E

Purchasing a Budget notebook from a large manufacturer means you're unlikely to get the best specifications and features money can buy. You tend to pay out for a fuller package that smaller companies can't match, including a varied software bundle and post-sales support covered by a large customer service infrastructure. And so it is with Packard Bell's EasyNote E. It may lack the value for money offered by other machines in our chart but there are some excellent touches.

Budget notebooks are rarely more consumer-friendly than the EasyNote, although we were surprised it didn't achieve a higher WorldBench 4 score given the decent specification list. It's powered by 512MB of DDR RAM, has a fairly capacious 40GB hard drive and utilises AMD's 2400+ Mobile Athlon chip so it benefits from PowerNow technology to optimise battery life.

We loved the inclusion of a DVD-RW drive. It may not come with any free media but buy a few discs and you can back up an impressive 4.7GB of data on each one. Packard Bell claims the EasyNote E is a home entertainment model

and here it falls short. The 32MB shared graphics pales in comparison to standalone cards and simply can't cope with the majority of today's games. It's also a shame that the 15.1in screen doesn't offer a resolution beyond 1,024x768. That said, it's not a problem for watching DVDs.

There are some nice touches on the EasyNote, however. Connectivity isn't a problem with four USB 2.0 ports and a FireWire connection plus high-quality S-Video for hooking up to your TV. There's also a four-in-one card reader and a generous software bundle that includes Works Suite 2003.

Verdict

If you want more bang for your buck you can get it elsewhere, but if you're after a well-rounded package then the EasyNote is a good buy. While it might be expensive it's the sort of model that a first-time buyer should consider. ■

Spencer Dalziel



Packard Bell EasyNote E

- Packard Bell: 01628 512 456
- www.packardbell.co.uk
- £1,020 ex VAT

Specifications

2400+ Mobile Athlon; 512MB DDR RAM; 40GB hard drive; 32MB shared graphics; 15.1in 1,024x768 TFT display; 24x/16x/8x/8x/4x/2x DVD-RW drive; 56K modem; lithium-ion battery; 326x277x37mm; 2.8kg

Build quality



Features



Value for money



A3 inkjet printer

Canon Bubble Jet i6500



Canon Bubble Jet i6500

- Canon: 0870 514 3723
- www.canon.co.uk
- £289 ex VAT

Specifications

Optical res 4,800x1,200dpi; USB or parallel connection; 17/12ppm mono/colour printing; black cartridge = £8.99; colour cartridge = £6.99 each; 310 black page coverage, 2.9p per page; 390 colour page coverage, 5.3p per page; 100-page input tray; 573x334x196mm; 7kg

Build quality



Features



Value for money



Canon knows how to combine its own technology with great print quality and speedy delivery in its Bubble Jet printers. The A3 i6500 is no exception. You won't get the best value for money in terms of running costs, but it's surprisingly cheap to purchase.

The i6500 connects via parallel or USB. Its plain boxy case isn't much of a looker, but it's what's on the inside that makes this model beautiful. It offers wide-format borderless printing with a good photo quality output thanks to the high 4,800x1,200 maximum resolution. Since the i6500 is capable of achieving this resolution in hardware, rather than resorting to interpolation, its prints aren't suffused with unnatural colour.

Canon achieves the 4,800x1,200dpi resolution by its own MicroFine droplet ink nozzle technology that delivers five picolitre-sized ink droplets evenly over the page. The impressive results speak for themselves, but take extra care when installing the cartridges and printhead. Unlike a lot of inkjet cartridges

on other manufacturers' models, the i6500's inks aren't in a sealed unit and can spill easily.

The ink is contained in four cartridges and this is much more economical than having to replace tri-colour cartridges when only one colour has run out. That said, 2.9ppp (pence per page) is still costly for monochrome printing and 5.3ppp colour printing is about average.

We couldn't match the quoted print speeds from Canon but the i6500 maintained good rates on difficult print jobs. We printed a full-page A3 photo at the highest resolution and got stunning results back in only three minutes 12 seconds. Bumping up the quality settings eradicates some of the banding and dull colour problems.

Verdict

The i6500 is fast where it counts and produces excellent photo-quality shots up to A3. Look elsewhere if you need cheap running costs, but if you want professional-looking shots with great detail then the i6500 might just be up to the job. ■

Spencer Dalziel

Budget notebook

HP Pavilion ze4305EA

HP's Pavilion won't win any prizes for style or speed, but before you bin it it's worth a look thanks to its incredibly low price. Normally when you buy from a big brand name like HP you are paying a premium for the label, but the £595 ze4305EA bucks this trend. The reason for this low cost is because the HP's components are far from cutting edge. Its processor is the Mobile Celeron, which has never been known for producing top speeds. And this 1.8GHz model is no exception, pulling in a WorldBench score of just 82, over 20 points lower than anything else in our Budget notebook chart (see page 228).

Add to this a measly 20GB of hard drive storage, integrated ATI graphics and you begin to understand how HP can offer such a competitive price. However, if speed, storage and top-notch graphics aren't important to you then the lightweight HP is still worth a look. Its 14.1in screen is capable of a top resolution of 1,024x768, which is in line with its rivals. Quality wasn't the best, though, as images looked washed out and the brightness had to be cranked up to the max for top results.

The Pavilion comes with a DVD drive but, as there's no DVD or CD writer, your backups will have to be small enough to fit on to a floppy disk – this is one of the few modern

notebooks to still feature this stone-age accessory.

Looks-wise this notebook reminds us of an early iteration of Apple's ugly circa-1999

iBook – remember when they came in fruity flavours rather than ice white? This one sticks to silver and blue, however.

The software bundle is better than most as you get both Windows XP Home and Microsoft Works Suite 2003, so there is plenty to get you started. The warranty is one-year collect-and-return, although you can extend this at extra cost should you wish.

Verdict

There's not much to recommend this notebook apart from price, but that's no small consideration. This well-built workhorse can handle everyday tasks with ease – and without putting too big a dent in your wallet. The addition of some kind of backup drive (other than a floppy) would make it more desirable, but then again this would push up the price. ■

Ursula Seymour

This well-built workhorse can handle everyday tasks with ease – and without putting too big a dent in your wallet



HP Pavilion ze4305EA

- HP: 0845 270 4222
- www.hp.com/uk
- £595 ex VAT

Specifications

1.8GHz Mobile Celeron; 256MB DDR RAM; 20GB hard drive; 14.1in screen; max res 1,024x768; 8x DVD-ROM drive; floppy drive; integrated ATI Mobility graphics card with up to 64MB memory; 3.1kg; 329x272x38mm; Windows XP Home; Microsoft Works Suite 2003; 1-year collect and return warranty

Build quality



Features



Value for money



Only high-end workgroup printers come with built-in networking capabilities – otherwise you're stuck with either parallel or USB. Even on a small network that means the PC that's connected to the printer has to be on for everyone to print.

With Lindy's Print Server, however, you can do away with a dedicated PC and hook any printer directly into the network. Setup is relatively simple, although the Quick Guide is far from easy to understand.

Print server

Lindy 10/100 USB Print Server

Once everything's connected you use the supplied software to locate the print server and configure its network settings. From there it's simply a case of installing the print driver for your selected printer and adding a network port so you can talk to it. You can then control it as if it were connected directly to your PC. With two USB and one parallel port, you shouldn't be stuck for connections.

Verdict

Despite its appalling Quick Start guide, Lindy's Print Server is easy to set up and configure. If you want a simple and affordable way to network your printer then it's an ideal solution. ■

Will Head

Lindy 10/100 USB Print Server

- Lindy: 01642 754 000
- www.lindy.co.uk
- £101 ex VAT

Specifications

10/100 print server; 2 x USB, 1 x parallel port; TCP/IP, IPX, NetBEUI, AppleTalk, LPR and SMB network support; supplied configuration utility; Windows 95/98/Me/NT/2000/XP

Build quality



Features



Value for money



External sound card

Creative SoundBlaster MP3+

Not so long ago Creative released the Extigy, its first external audio solution for notebook users. While we had nothing but praise for the audio quality and functionality of the Extigy, this large piece of kit was always going to remain on the desk rather than become a useful device when travelling.

Then before Creative could come up with something smaller, M-Audio stepped into the ring and stole its thunder with the first truly mobile external audio kit for notebooks called the Sonica (see April 03 issue). Well, just a couple of months down the line and Creative hits back with the cheaper SoundBlaster MP3+.

We can't knock the wide array of audio ports on this small USB device but it doesn't quite have the premium sound quality offered by M-Audio's Sonica. That said, ways to enhance your notebook audio are few and far between so the SoundBlaster MP3+ remains a worthy buy.

In effect, the SoundBlaster MP3+ is a small rectangular external sound card that adds 16bit/48KHz CD-quality audio to notebooks or PCs. Notebook audio is notoriously bad so this is a huge advance, but it doesn't compare to the 7.1 channel support plus DVD audio quality 24bit/96KHz audio playback that comes with M-Audio's Sonica Theatre.

At the front of the SoundBlaster MP3+ is a volume control with a headphone socket and a microphone-in option. Round the back are line-ins so you can hook up audio players, line-outs for hooking up speakers and an optical-in and out for a mini disc player or digital speakers.

Without a shadow of a doubt there's a huge benefit for anyone giving presentations in a large room where audio as well as visual display is required.

Notebook sound simply doesn't cut it so the crisp sound offered by this kit is a must.

Aiding the SoundBlaster MP3+ is Creative's excellent software support. We've yet to come across a sound solution manufacturer that puts as much effort into its software as it does its hardware. Not only is Creative's package consumer friendly, it's also powerful and allows for plenty of audio manipulation thanks to some interesting programs.

The audio cleanup facility takes the pops and hisses out of low-quality tracks and time scaling slows down or speeds up audio playback without distorting the original pitch. If you've ever tried to transcribe a seminar or presentation from a recorder then this tool will become crucial.

Verdict

Notebook users who want the very best in external audio for music, DVDs and gaming should opt for the more expensive M-Audio solution. However, for those who simply want to improve notebook audio for minimal cost then the SoundBlaster MP3+ is where to put your money. ■

Spencer Dalziel



Creative SoundBlaster MP3+

- Creative: 0800 376 954
- www.europe.creative.com
- £31 ex VAT

Specifications

External USB sound card; 16bit/48kHz analogue-to-digital converter; optical output/input; line input; line output; headphone socket; microphone socket; USB cable supplied; 120x70x24mm; 110g

Build quality



Features



Value for money



Infrared adapter

Lindy IrDA Adaptor

Bluetooth – great idea, but it's not yet taken off. If you're tired of waiting for hassle-free wireless

connections then take a step back in time to infrared. Until recently the majority of notebooks had a small infrared window, allowing you to talk to other similarly equipped IrDA devices. But manufacturers have been taking them away, so if you want to talk to your PDA or mobile phone then a wire is your only option.

Unless, of course, you opt for Lindy's IrDA Adaptor. We successfully dialled up from an infrared-equipped mobile phone and exchanged data with a PDA. No extra software was needed and it was easy to set up.

Verdict

If your notebook maker has cruelly robbed you of your infrared port, or you want a quick and easy way to transfer data on a desktop PC, then Lindy's IrDA Adaptor is ideal. It's cheap and does the job well. It may be a step backwards technology wise, but if it works who minds? ■

Will Head

Lindy IrDA Adaptor

- Lindy: 01642 754 000
- www.lindy.co.uk
- £25 ex VAT

Specifications

USB IrDA adapter; IrDA 1.0, 1.1 and 1.2 compatible; supports SIR, MIR and FIR modes; bidirectional; 4Mbps max transfer; no power supply required; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP

Build quality



Features



Value for money



Webcam

Logitech QuickCam Cordless

Webcams are great for capturing the area around your PC, but if you want to stray more than a couple of metres you're going to come unstuck (or rather unplugged). With Logitech's QuickCam Cordless, however, you can roam as far as you want – well, providing it's not more than 25m away.

The set consists of a base station that connects to your PC via USB and a wireless camera that runs off batteries or the mains. It's finished in sleek black plastic and looks fantastic. In use, however, it's anything but.

The camera is let down by incredibly unstable software. We tried installing it on two PCs – on the first it refused to work at all and on the second frequent software crashes meant it was hardly usable.

Even the initial setup crashed. When trying to connect to the camera and display an image, the Fix It button, ironically, broke it. Even when we finally got it working, it wasn't happy for very long. After recording a couple of minutes of video it failed and our movie masterpiece was lost forever.

It's finished in sleek black plastic and looks fantastic. In use, however, it's anything but

The software also, rather presumptuously, installs Yahoo Messenger for you which then constantly bugs you to sign up for a screen name on startup. We're sure Yahoo Messenger is wonderful but we would rather

choose our own instant messaging application, thank you very much.

The 25m range is also rather optimistic. We did get it to work at this distance, but the picture was grainy and there was lots of interference. It also doesn't work well on the move, producing frequent glitches if you walk too quickly.

Verdict

The QuickCam is a great design magnificently let down by poor software support. Logitech may be able to improve this with an update, but in its present form it's next to useless. For such an expensive device we expect far more. ■

Will Head



Logitech QuickCam Cordless

- ☐ Logitech: 020 7309 0127
- ☐ www.logitech.com
- ☐ £153 ex VAT

Specifications

Cordless webcam; 2.4GHz wireless with 4 channels; 25m range; 640x480 software interpolated image; 510x492 Cmos sensor; 30fps; battery or mains power; base station 180x38x86mm; camera 90x38x190mm

Build quality



Features



Value for money



Flat-panel display

Sharp LL-T19D1

Flat-panels may not be falling in price as they were 12 months ago, but the availability of a 19in screen for less than £500 is evidence that this sector continues to throw up some great deals. In real terms, the Sharp LL-T19D1 offers almost as much viewing space as a 21in CRT monitor, but its 6.9kg frame makes it easier to move. And while it may not be as svelte and stylish as some of its rivals, the Sharp's rugged construction makes it more durable than most.

Unsurprisingly at this price level, the LL-T19D1 isn't big on extras. But although you miss out on features such as USB, integrated speakers or pivot support, you do get three inputs (one DVI and two RGB), so you can connect up to three PCs at once.

High specs tend to sell PC components, but users can have too much of a good thing. For example, with brightness ratings on flat-panels – the LL-T19D1's 300 candelas makes it too bright for standard use. Sharp has recognised this so there's a button that drops the brightness, simultaneously lowering power consumption.

The Sharp doesn't match Samsung's SyncMaster 181T for overall performance. This could be a result of the 0.297mm pixel pitch. It could also be down to the fact that Sharp's native resolution (1,280x1,024) is identical to most 17in and 18in flat-panels. Since the LL-T19D1 is spreading the same number of pixels across a larger area, the resulting image looks more stretched.

Verdict

If you need the full 19in of workspace this is a good screen at an excellent price. However, since the Sharp uses the same native resolution as most 17/18in models, few users are likely to get a true advantage. ■

Robin Morris



Sharp LL-T19D1

- ☐ Sharp: 01923 434 647
- ☐ www.sharp.co.uk
- ☐ £493 ex VAT

Specifications

19in flat-panel; native res 1,280x1,024; 0.294mm dot pitch; 700:1 contrast ratio; 170/170-degree viewing angle; 300cd/m2; 25ms response time; 423x222x392mm; 6.9kg; digital connector; 3-year onsite warranty

Build quality



Features



Value for money



Flat-panel display Teco Relisys TL775

The Relisys TL775 is Teco's latest addition to its Lifestyle range and it's first foray into DVI (digital visual interface) connectivity. There's no doubting the nice styling thanks to the black-and-silver finish, which is complemented by a luminous blue glow around the menu navigation pad. But is it good enough to cope with the tasks we threw at it on our Test Centre?

The TL775 sports a maximum resolution of 1,280x1,024 and a dot pitch of 0.264mm. Brightness is okay thanks to the 450:1 contrast ratio and the 250 candelas, but not exceptional. Again, the 140-degree viewing angle is nothing special but it's wide enough to cram a few people round the screen to watch a DVD. The one specification that did impress was the 16ms response time – we didn't notice any blurring on the screen when displaying moving graphics or DVDs. We did see slight pixellation but the accurate colour palette compensated for this.

At a mere 6.5kg the TL775 is extremely light for a 17in flat panel and dimensions are compact so it won't take up much desktop space. We also liked the rubberised material on the wide footstand – there's no chance of slippage while adjusting the screen.

Teco opted for a DVI-only connection, although it sensibly included a VGA-to-DVI cable for customers who don't have the benefit of a DVI connection on their graphics card. Setup is simple and there's no need to manually calibrate the screen settings. That said, there are some basic options and we had to check the slim manual to see what they were – the menu only displays icons and not explanatory text.

Round the back is an audio connection for the built-in speakers. Sound isn't great – we'd describe it as tinny at best – but, to be fair, if you're getting a flat-panel to save on desk space the last thing you want is messy cabling and external speakers taking up precious room.

Verdict

The TL775 is a good, stylish display. However, in the aggressive 17in flat-panel market it doesn't have the value for money or performance to make it stand out from the crowd. ■

Spencer Dalziel



Teco Relisys TL775

- Teco: 0870 0137 602
- www.relisys.co.uk
- £349 ex VAT

Specifications

17in flat-panel; max res 1,280x1,024; 0.264mm dot pitch; 450:1 contrast ratio; 140-degree viewing angle; 250cd/m2; 32bit colour; 3-year warranty; 417x166x419mm; 6.5kg

Build quality



Features



Value for money



Digital projector Plus U4-131SF

This is the first product we've reviewed from projector specialist Plus, but if the versatile U4-131SF is anything to go by this is a manufacturer that deserves close inspection. This is a projector that scores high points across the board.

The 1.5kg U4-131SF is perfect for carrying over long distances. Executives will be equally enthused by its appearance and the chic yet business-like casing will make it a prized addition to any boardroom. Neither does it need a huge amount of space to create a large picture – in a modestly sized meeting room this projector produces generous-sized images.

It's not the quietest device, but operating noise is rarely a significant factor in an office environment. In any case, its 37dB can be cut to 33dB by using the Eco mode.

The U4-131SF has some impressive specs and its brightness rating of 1,500 Ansi lumens ensures a clear image regardless of the environment or weather conditions. The 1,500:1 contrast ratio is also good, giving an extremely

high level of colour depth. This is particularly evident when displaying Windows images – the pure colour palette and sharp text make this a dream for office applications and presentations. Resolution support is up to scratch as well, with the unit offering XGA (1,024x768) as standard.

If the projector does have a weakness it's in video playback. Despite our best attempts at adjusting the image, video clips were dark and gloomy. It's good enough to use during presentations, but this projector won't suit home cinema enthusiasts.

Verdict

As an office projector, the U4-131SF is excellent. From its large picture and lack of weight to the sharp Windows output and versatile brightness rating, this makes an excellent acquisition. ■

Robin Morris



Plus U4-131SF

- Plus: 01603 481 100
- www.plus.uk.com
- £1,400 ex VAT

Specifications

1,500 Ansi lumens; 150W lamp (life of 2,000 hours); replacement bulb £200; 1.5kg; max res 1,024x768; 190x239x53mm; DVI connector; contrast ratio 1,500:1; 37dB; 3-year warranty

Build quality



Features



Value for money

