Reviews

Remember tablet PCs? It seemed like such a good idea when Bill Gates showed one off at Comdex two years ago. And as a concept it wasn't so bad: use a touchscreen rather than a mouse and write directly into applications.

But tablet PCs didn't come without problems. First, models were expensive. Obviously with any new technology you expect to pay a premium, but the tablet PC wasn't such a departure from your bog-standard notebook – just bolt on a touchscreen and some sort of turning mechanism for the display if you want it to function as both notebook and tablet. This brings us to the flimsy tilt-and-turn screens sported by many designs – not what you expect from £2,000-worth of kit. Pure tablets didn't have this problem but the lack of a full keyboard meant their use was severely limited. They were little more than an expensive executive accessory.

Finally, processors to power these slim, light designs simply weren't available. Mobile Pentium 4 chips may have offered the necessary horsepower, but it used far too much juice and generated too much heat for a tablet design. The next best thing, Mobile Pentium III, had long since run out steam and just couldn't provide anything like decent performance.

This month sees a return of the tablet PC. So will it be any different this time around? Well, thanks to Centrino the issue of performance and power consumption has been resolved. You can now get decent performance from a slim and light design. Prices have also come down with models such as Acer's TravelMate C110 (see page 60) available for around £1,300.

Things are finally looking up for tablet PCs. If someone could just sort out the fiddly tilt-and-turn screen mechanism then there might be life in this idea yet.

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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 3GHz PC with 1GB of RAM and a 250GB 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 only came with a spreadsheet would score poorly.
• **Value for money** We're looking for lots of features, good performance and a low price.

Prices
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PC ADVISOR GOLD

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

204 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.