

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

Hardware categories

- **Features** This rates the specification of a product by current standards. For example, a 2GHz PC with 512MB of RAM and 80GB hard drive would score highly.
- **Build quality** 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.

Software categories

- **Ease of use** Describes 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** Lots of features, good performance and a low price tag will result in a good score.



Scoring

- **Software** Overall ratings for software take into account the three main assessment categories above and any other factors that are covered in the detailed review.
- **Hardware** Our product charts rank hardware from 1 to 10 across a category, so we do not give overall scores. To gauge how well a hardware product has fared against the competition, look at where it falls in the relevant Top 10 chart.

All our rankings are based on a calculation of features and performance compared to price, so the highest-scoring products also represent the best value for money. For those products not featured in our charts, anything we consider particularly outstanding is awarded a Recommended logo. Charts are introduced, amended or removed as and when necessary to cover any emerging hardware sectors, advances in technology or changes in the industry.



The Best Buy and Recommended awards

A Best Buy product offers a superlative combination of features, performance, value for money and customer service. Those that earn a Recommended award are almost as good, offering great value, quality and performance.

Prices

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Just when you thought it was safe, Intel and AMD have been at it again. Not content with the multigigahertz processor already on the market, the two manufacturers have been upping their chip speeds once again in an effort to outperform each other. We've taken a look at Intel's new 2.8GHz Pentium 4 and AMD's 2600+ Athlon. To find out how the two CPUs got on, turn to page 58.

Future projection

If you thought the PC market was becoming staid and stagnant then we have two new products that are certainly different. First up is Sharp's new projector, combining 802.11b wireless networking with projector functionality. If you've ever found yourself having to clumsily switch laptops mid-presentation then the Sharp PG-M25X (page 60) will provide that swish flawless presentation.

Secondly, there's the Ink Link from Seiko Instruments, which allows you to turn handwritten notes into computer-readable files. No more drawing (badly) with a mouse – simply clip the Ink Link on to your notepad and everything you write will be stored on your PC. To find out what we thought, turn to page 60.

Mobile merging

With the marriage of PDAs (personal digital assistants) and mobile phones still in the honeymoon period we've also taken a look at the newest kid on the block. HP's Jornada 928 WDA offers the functionality of both mobile phone and Pocket PC. If you're still not convinced, turn to page 62 for the full review.

Room to manoeuvre

With PCs getting ever faster, manufacturers are looking for different ways to make their products stand out. Shuttle's approach with the SS51G XPC (page 68) is to provide a fast, fully functional PC in a box half the size of a desktop PC. Stylish and with an innovative cooling design, this low-noise box will sit happily in the lounge as well as the office.

If you want the functionality of a desktop but only have room for a notebook then AJP's latest machines could be just what you're looking for. The 5600P (page 70) bundles the new 2.6GHz Pentium 4 chip into a notebook chassis along with a whopping 1GB of memory – more than enough for the most demanding of users. The 8880 (page 69), on the other hand, combines business and pleasure with its internal TV card, so you can sit back and catch up on *Neighbours* as you work away on those spreadsheets.

Director's cut

If you fancy yourself as the next Guy Ritchie, or simply believe that it's unfair to bore friends and family with four hours of unedited holiday footage, turn to page 73 for Matrox's latest video-editing card. For less than the full price of Adobe Premiere 6.5, Matrox has bundled it with a real-time editing card so there's no excuse for not cutting your footage down to size.

On the software front this month we've taken a look at the latest incarnation of Corel's graphics suite (page 80). If you're new to the world of photo- and image-editing then Corel has plenty to offer in a reasonably priced package.

Money matters

Accounts may be a pain, but for some they're a necessity. To help you we looked at two new applications from MYOB (page 85) and Sage (page 86). Whether you're running a one-man operation or have staff to support there should be something there for you.

Finally, if your inbox is overflowing and you can never remember where you saved that file, help is at hand from Creo. Six Degrees (page 82) aims to sort out the mess by creating relationships between files, people and email. If you're not one for regular housekeeping then it could help you out of a tight spot.



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