

CD DRIVES AND DVD WRITERS

CD drives		Last month's position	First reviewed	Price (ex VAT)	Warranty	Interface type	Data buffer size	Average access time	Read/write/rewrite speed	CD-R software	Dimensions (width x depth x height)	Packet-writing software
 1	Asus CRW-4816A 0870 429 3220 www.asus.com	1	Oct 02	£58	2-year	EIDE	2MB	100ms	48x/48x/16x	Ahead Nero 5.5	149x198x42mm	InCD
 2	Teac CD-W540EK 020 8906 9111 www.microwarehouse.co.uk	2	Jul 02	£83	2-year	EIDE	8MB	72ms	48x/40x/12x	Easy CD Creator	146x192x42mm	DirectCD
3	Cyber Drive CW078D 01256 707 070 www.cyberdrive.de	3	Oct 02	£70	1-year	EIDE	2MB	100ms	48x/40x/16x	Ahead Nero 5.5	146x192x42mm	InCD
4	LG GCE-8400B 0870 607 5544 www.lge.co.uk	4	Jul 02	£51	2-year	EIDE	2MB	100ms	40x/40x/12x	Ahead Nero 5.5	146x185x41mm	InCD
5	Cyber Drive CW058D 01256 707 070 www.cyberdrive.de	5	May 02	£62	1-year	EIDE	2MB	100ms	48x/32x/10x	Ahead Nero 5.5	149x207x43mm	InCD

DVD writers		Last month's position	First reviewed	Price (ex VAT)	Warranty	Drive type	Interface type	Data buffer size	CD-RW read/write/rewrite speeds	DVD read/write/rewrite speed	DVD average access times	Burning software
 1	Ricoh MP5125A-DP 020 8261 4031 www.ricoh-uk.com	1	Oct 02	£298	2-year	DVD+R/ DVD+RW/CD-RW	EIDE	2MB	32x/12x/10x	8x/2.4x/2.4x	140ms	Ahead Nero 5.5
 2	Philips DVDRW228 0800 896 324 www.philips.com/pcstuff	2	Oct 02	£254	2-year	DVD+R/ DVD+RW/CD-RW	EIDE	2MB	32x/12x/10x	8x/2.5x/2.5x	140ms	Ahead Nero 5.5
3	Sony DRX-120L 0800 2623 7669 www.sonyisstorage.com	3	Oct 02	£347	1-year	DVD+R/ DVD+RW/CD-RW	external FireWire	2MB	32x/12x/10x	8x/2.4x/2.4x	140ms	Recorder Gold
4	Pioneer DVR-A04 01753 789 500 www.pioneer-eur.com	4	Oct 02	£275	1-year	DVD-R/ DVD-RW/CD-RW	EIDE	2MB	24x/8x/4x	6x/2x/1x	200ms	VOB Instant CD/DVD
5	HP DVD200i 08705 474 747 www.hp.com/uk	5	Oct 02	£340	1-year	DVD+R/ DVD+RW/CD-RW	EIDE	2MB	32x/12x/10x	8x/2.4x/2.4x	125ms	HP RecordNow

All CD-R and CD-RW test media supplied by Imation (www.imationtd.co.uk)

CD DRIVES

1 Asus CRW-4816A

 Offering 48-/48-/16-speed (read/write/rewrite) facilities, the Asus is the fastest drive we've seen to date. The burst of speed is partly because the drive writes to CD-R discs using Partial-CAV technology, which reads the outer part of the disc at a different speed to the inner. With the emergence of high write speeds, advanced technology is required to keep a lid on the error rate. The Asus duly obliges with FlextraSpeed, which adjusts the write speed to suit the media type. Buffer underrun technology FlextraLink is present, as is DDSS II (double dynamic suspension system), which cuts down on vibrations. Mount Rainier support is another welcome addition, ensuring that Asus' CD-RWs are compatible with a wide range of drives. The Asus burned a 350MB CD-R in two minutes one second – 13 seconds faster than the Teac. CD-RW performance was equally impressive, taking just under three and a half minutes. Considering this wealth of technology, you would expect the Asus to be expensive, but at £58 it is one of the best CD-RW deals yet.

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DVD WRITERS

1 Ricoh MP5125A-DP

 Combining the versatile multiple-use DVD+RW format with the cheaper write-once facilities of DVD+R, the internal Ricoh MP5125A-DP offers up to 2.4-speed write and rewrite facilities. The resulting discs are compatible also with many standalone DVD players. Ahead Software's impressive Nero package is bundled with the Best Buy Ricoh and draws praise for its clear user interface, high success rate and unfettered speed.

Although the Ricoh finished second to the ultra-fast Philips DVDRW228, the difference between the two rarely amounted to more than five seconds. Considering that it took close to 17 minutes and 46 seconds to burn over 3GB of data to DVD+RW, this gap is virtually insignificant. CD burning was also well tuned, taking less than four minutes 55 seconds to copy 350MB of files to a CD-RW.

The Ricoh's sub-£300 price tag, strong software bundle and top performance proves that it is the Best Buy for aspiring DVD writers.

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CD DRIVES

2 Teac CD-W540EK

The CD-W540EK combines high performance and quiet

operation. Indeed, it's only the Teac's high price tag that prevents it from taking the top spot. The Fine Focus control keeps the laser positioned despite the spinning speed, while the Intelligent Speed Control keeps the success rate high by monitoring every CD to determine the quickest writing speed possible without risking errors. In operation these measures work beautifully, and the Teac copied CD-Rs and CD-RWs without missing a beat – it took just two minutes 14 seconds to write 350MB to disc in CD-R mode.



3 Cyber Drive CW078D

The CW078D delivers performance on a budget. On paper this is the second fastest drive in the chart. In truth, though, it couldn't match the Teac's technology.

Buffer underruns are dealt with effectively by Cyber Drive's ExacLink, but it offers little else in the way of cutting-edge features. In real world CD-R testing, the Cyber Drive wasn't quite as fast as the well-heeled Asus, requiring two minutes 48 seconds to produce a 350MB CD-R. CD-RW performance was better, taking three minutes 36 seconds to produce a result – half a minute faster than the Teac.



4 LG GCE-8400B

The LG is a competent performer that pulls in moderate test results, turning out a 350MB CD-R in two minutes 41 seconds and a CD-RW in four minutes 47 seconds. But

whereas the Teac can hold its own even when the competition upped the ante on write and rewrite speeds, the LG isn't as fortunate. Consequently, it looks a little overpriced and underspecified when compared to the Asus and Cyber Drive.



5 Cyber Drive CW058D

The CW058D may be the cheapest drive here, but its spec falls short of the rivals. The 32-speed recording rate is slow, but you get decent 12-speed rewrite and 48-speed read facilities. In our real world tests the CW058D kept the other drives within sight without pushing up the error rate.

It may appear to be a laggard on paper, but the CW058D offers plenty of performance for a modest price tag.



DVD WRITERS

2 Philips DVDRW228

On paper, the Philips' 2.5-speed rating should place it ahead of the glut

of 2.4-speed drives. In practice, the actual speed advantage is minor, but it doesn't prevent the DVDRW228 from notching up the best times in our tests, porting 3GB of data to DVD+RW in 17 minutes 41 seconds and generating a 350MB CD-RW in four minutes 53 seconds. Besides the standard buffer underrun protection, Philips keeps errors to a minimum with the help of Thermo-Balanced Writing, which adapts the method of burning to suit the type of media. For high performance and strong reliability the DVDRW228 stands as a first-class candidate.



3 Sony DRX-120L

The DRX-120L has one advantage over the competition – it's external.

If you need the portability of an external DVD writer, Sony's FireWire interface will prove invaluable. The absence of an interface card means that you'll need to have a FireWire port on your PC, but the relevant cabling is included, and the user-friendly software gets you quickly up to speed. The DRX-120L's performance is strong, and in testing the Sony came close to matching the ultra-fast Philips. This may be the most expensive drive in the chart, but compared to the usual pricing of external models, the premium is relatively small.



4 Pioneer DVR-A04

Pioneer sticks to the traditional DVD-R/-RW standard, which is the A04's downfall. Whereas the other drives are achieving write and rewrite rates of 2.4- or

2.5-speed, the Pioneer struggles to a meagre dual- and single-speed. The 12-/10-speed CD-R/RW facilities are similarly underspecified. The Pioneer stumbled to 19 minutes 37 seconds in DVD-RW mode. The Pioneer's software bundle is adequate, as is the modest price tag.



5 HP DVD200i

The DVD200i has the specs to compete with the best, running from its 2.4-speed DVD+R/+RW facilities up to the 2MB buffer and error protection technology. Competent though it may be, HP's software left it trailing behind the leaders, taking on average

an extra minute to complete the tests. A good buy for the wealthy beginner, the HP will seem limited to anyone used to the no-frills approach of other software bundles.

