Power and Budget notebooks
Dell Inspiron 8200 and Evesham Voyager 5700 EXCLUSIVE

This month we've lined up two notebooks from Evesham and Dell. At first glance the Voyager 5700 from Evesham and the Inspiron 8200 from Dell don't have much in common. The 5700 is aimed at the Budget market and the 8200 is a Power notebook whose predecessor sits at fourth place in its relevant notebook chart.

But what sets both apart is that they contain the latest mobile processors from Intel and AMD. A Mobile Pentium 4 running at 2.2GHz powers the Inspiron 8200, while the Voyager 5700 uses a 1.67GHz Mobile Athlon XP 2000+ chip. Obviously, this isn't a like-for-like comparison, as the systems contain different components. But by testing these two notebooks we can get an idea of the performance of the latest processors from the respective chip makers.

Evesham has packed some serious features into the 5700 for a reasonable price, so it's great value for anyone on a strict budget. This is the first time we've seen 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM at this price point, but we expect other manufacturers to follow in Evesham's footsteps. Joining the generous memory allocation is another budget first – a roomy 40GB hard drive that uses Fujitsu's Silent Runner technology, ensuring it's a quiet operator.

One Dell of a machine
Dell's previous Inspiron 8200 only came with 256MB of DDR RAM, so it's good to see this version pack in 512MB. Dell has also leapfrogged the competition by providing a capacious 60GB hard drive. This will give users ample room for storing digital video footage and it also has a FireWire port for fast transfer of movie data.

We ran both systems through our WorldBench 4 tests and weren't surprised with the results. There was only five points difference between the notebooks, with the Inspiron achieving a score of 100 and the Voyager attaining 95. So AMD is still managing to squeeze more performance out of fewer megahertz. While the Evesham's clock speed is over 500MHz slower than Dell's the chip is five points behind in our tests – a tiny margin.

But performance isn't everything and the Dell certainly has more to offer than a high WorldBench score. It has a crystal-clear 15in screen capable of a maximum resolution of 1,600x1,200. But what's even better is that it uses ATI's latest mobile graphics chip, the Mobility Radeon 9000, fitted with 64MB of DDR RAM. This means graphics performance is close to that on offer from desktop PCs, which is great for those who use graphics-intensive applications or want to play games.

The Dell has just two USB ports to complement the FireWire interface, but it does offer a combination DVD/CD-RW drive and an optional port replicator. Software is the useful Microsoft Works. Sadly, the Dell is let down by its one-year warranty.

Voyage of discovery
Evesham's Voyager 5700 doesn't have a standalone graphics card, so it can't match the performance of its budget rival from ACI which uses the GeForce4 420 Go, but the integrated 32MB DDR Pro Savage graphics is the next best thing.

The two-tone metallic blue and silver case is solid as a rock, giving a firm backing for the sturdy keyboard and great protection for the 14.1in TFT screen. We were also impressed with the line-up of a FireWire and four USB ports, but a floppy drive is conspicuous by its absence.

Verdict
When Evesham and Dell turn out new notebooks they are always worthy of our full attention and these new models are no exception. The 5700 and 8200 are packed with the latest features and break the boundaries of our Budget and Power notebook charts. Let's hope the competition can keep up with this furious pace. ∎

Spencer Dalziel

Dell Inspiron 8200

Specifications: 2.2GHz Mobile Pentium 4; 512MB DDR RAM; 60GB hard drive; 64MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9000 graphics; 15in 1,600x1,200 TFT display; 24x/24x/10x/8x DVD/CD-RW combo; 56K modem; lith battery; 331x276x44.5mm; 3.6kg.

Dell: 0870 152 4699
Website: www.dell.co.uk
Price: £1,749 ex VAT

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality									8		
Features									8		
Value for money								7			

Evesham Voyager 5700

Specifications: 1.67GHz Mobile Athlon XP 2000+; 512MB DDR RAM; 40GB hard drive; 32MB integrated S3 graphics Pro Savage; 14.1in 1,024x768 TFT display; 24x/8x/8x/8x DVD/CD-RW combo; 56K modem; lith battery; 325x275x44mm; 3.75kg.

Evesham: 08707 287 070
Website: www.evesham.com
Price: £1,049 ex VAT

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality									8		
Features								7			
Value for money									8		

Professional digital camera
Sony Cybershot DSC-F717 EXCLUSIVE

Sony's new Cybershot DSC-F717 is the fourth generation that uses the company's unique L-shaped body design. You rest the cylindrical lens barrel in your left hand, leaving your right to tilt and operate the body. It takes a little getting used to, but allows easy shooting from both waist-height and over the heads of crowds.

The F717 greatly resembles the F707 it replaces, featuring the same lens, CCD (charge coupled device) and body, albeit with a new silver coat. If you look a little closer, though, you'll discover many subtle but worthy enhancements.

Focal point
The camera is dominated by the Carl Zeiss 5x optical zoom, equivalent in coverage to 38-190mm on a 35mm camera, with a highly respectable 2cm macro mode. Manual focusing is offered by the electrically assisted ring at the end of the lens, although the F717 can now also use it to operate the zoom in autofocus mode, which works surprisingly well.

In terms of raw pulling power the F717 is now beaten by the 7x and 8x optical zooms of its 5Mp (megapixel) rivals, the Minolta Dimage 7Hi and Nikon Coolpix 5700. But Sony has one crucial advantage: a bright optical aperture of f2.0-2.5, compared to f2.8-3.5 on the Minolta and f2.8-4.2 on the Nikon. This allows it to capture at least double the light, so faster shutter speeds can be used under dim conditions.

Sony has also borrowed a unique feature from its range of camcorders by fitting the F717 with a pair of IR (infrared) 'torches' to illuminate nearby subjects even when it's pitch black. Using IR to take pictures is a bit of a novelty, but it's genuinely useful for composing your subject in a darkened room before firing the flash. The F717 also features Sony's laser hologram which projects patterns on to the subject to aid focusing.

The 5Mp CCD delivers images with 2,560x1,920 pixels – sufficient detail to make great-looking 13x10in inkjet prints. The average image size at best quality is 2MB, which means you'll get around 16 on the supplied 32MB Memory Stick – nice to see Sony finally matches its competition on supplied storage.

An uncompressed 15MB Tiff mode is offered, but sadly the updated electronics don't include a CCD Raw mode. On the plus side, the F717 supports the improved printing capabilities of the Exif (exchangeable image file format) 2.2 standard.

The main dial on the body again offers Program, Manual, Aperture and Shutter Priority modes with 13 aperture settings and 46 shutter speeds from 1/2,000 to 30 seconds. New to the F717 are switchable AF (autofocus) areas and a fully automatic setting that hides advanced options from beginners.

One of the best new features is a live histogram facility which reveals the tonal range as you're composing – useful for optimising image quality. The F707's dummy flash mount has sensibly been replaced by a proper hotshoe, video clips are now only limited by memory, while the maximum sensitivity has doubled to 800 ISO. Sony's superb info-lithium battery still shows exactly how many minutes of power remain on the 1.8in screen or EVF (electronic viewfinder), but now lasts even longer with 225 minutes of recording.

Quick off the blocks
Without having to extend any optics the F707 was already a fast starter, but the F717 is quicker still and ready for action in less than two seconds. It's also the first camera with a USB 2.0 interface, although our images only transferred 50 percent faster. Clearly the Memory Stick is the limiting factor, but Sony has faster ones in the pipeline.

Indeed the Memory Stick is about the only down side to the camera. Despite aggressive price drops, this type of storage media still cost at least 50 percent more than CompactFlash or SmartMedia and unforgivably its maximum capacity remains 128MB.

That said, the F717 is an extremely impressive camera that produces the most detailed pictures we've seen from any professional 5Mp model. As always, you may prefer the feature set and styling of other models, but overall the F717 is one of the best digital cameras under £1,000 and is therefore highly recommended.

Verdict
Sony's DSC-F717 may only feature a few subtle improvements over the earlier F707, but comes out as the best quality 5Mp camera we've tested. The optics are superb and features like the live histogram, AF illuminator and Night modes are wonderful. The relatively high cost and low capacity of Memory Sticks let the Cybershot down, but the F717 remains one of the best digital cameras at this price point. ∎

Gordon Laing

Sony Cybershot DSC-F717

Specifications: 5Mp resolution (2,560x1,920 pixels); 5x optical zoom; 32MB Memory Stick; max 16 high-quality photos; 1.8in on tilting body and electronic viewfinder; rechargeable info-lithium; 120x67x148mm; 659g.

Sony: 0800 230 220
Website: www.sony.co.uk
Price: £765 ex VAT

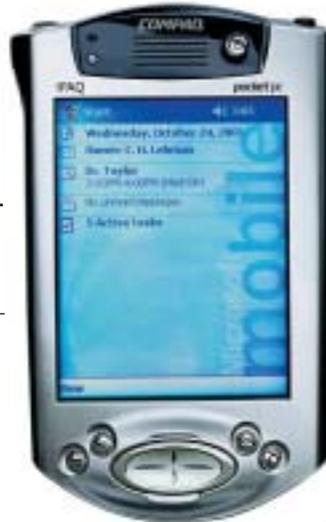|	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality										9	
Features										9	
Value for money								7			

Personal digital assistant
HP iPaq 3970

People may have bought the iPaq in droves, but the PDA's (personal digital assistant's) designers know that the technology inside has to stay ahead of cheaper alternatives to survive. The new iPaq 3970, sold under the HP banner despite the Compaq livery, contains a number of unique elements that make it the best Pocket PC available today.

Most noticeable is the screen. It's a new transflective type, which means that you'll be able to see it clearly when outdoors, unlike other Pocket PCs on the market today. It looks fantastic and the colours are incredibly vivid.

The 3970 is the only PDA to have 48MB of flashable ROM in addition to the 64MB of RAM. The iPaq has 20MB of ROM earmarked for you to store important files, so you can keep permanent copies ready for retrieval should the battery run down and clear the RAM.

Inside is Intel's latest chip for PDAs, the XScale running at 400MHz. But this sounds more impressive than it is. Although Intel's most recent processor gives the PDA a kickstart over slower rivals, Microsoft needs to release a new version of the Pocket PC software before its power can be fully exploited. Battery life is good – around two working days in our tests. One other handy extra is the preloaded copy of Nevo. This works with the iPaq's enhanced infrared port to turn the device into an all-in-one remote control for TVs, DVDs and the like.

The integrated Bluetooth chip, which works with Bluetooth-enabled mobile phones and notebooks, gives you web access on the move and also enables wireless synchronisation.

Verdict
The iPaq's screen beats anything we've seen, plus there's Bluetooth, lots of storage, an SD (Secure Digital) slot, a 400MHz chip and remote control software. However, £509 is a bit steep. ■

Stan Everett

HP iPaq 3970

Specifications: 400MHz Intel XScale; Pocket PC 2002; 3.8in 240x320 transflective TFT screen; SD card slot; 64MB RAM; 48MB flash ROM; enhanced infrared; Bluetooth; 133x84x16mm; 190g.

HP: 0845 270 4222
Website: http://thenew.hp.com
Price: £509 ex VAT

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality									9	
Features									9	
Value for money							7			

Personal digital assistant
Asus MyPal A600

The launch of Intel's new XScale processor has seen a flurry of activity in the PDA (personal digital assistant) market. Although not as great as a new release of Pocket PC, manufacturers are still keen to get new products on to the shelves.

This latest model by Asus, despite bearing a silly name, is definitely one to look out for. The MyPal's matt metal finish is appealing and, although it doesn't offer the built-in wireless capabilities seen on other models, at just 10mm thick you can forgive it.

With a 400MHz PXA250 processor, not only can the A600 satisfy basic PDA functionality like diary and contact management but it can also turn its hand to more demanding applications such as playing movies.

It's always been possible to watch movies on a Pocket PC device before, but dropped frames would always hamper a user's viewing pleasure. The A600 has managed to overcome this problem, providing a much smoother picture. This may not be a killer application, but it is still a welcome bonus.

The processor's 400MHz rating may seem like an incredible or silly amount of power to have in a PDA, depending on your standpoint. Like a colour screen, a powerful processor isn't a must – but if you can have one with little sacrifice you might as well.

The A600 is suitably equipped in other areas too. There's 64MB of RAM, with a Secure Digital/Multimedia Card slot for expansion. There's also an optional CompactFlash card adapter, providing greater flexibility. The 3.5in screen offers a standard resolution of 240x320 pixels with up to 65,000 colours.

Verdict
At £425 the MyPal A600 is reasonably priced and it's the slimmest model we've seen to pack in Intel's XScale processor. If you don't need wireless and want something sleek and small then it's worth a look. ■

Will Head

Asus MyPal A600

Specifications: 400MHz Intel XScale; 64MB RAM; 32MB ROM; SD/MMC slot; 3.5in 240x320 screen; 75x125x10mm.
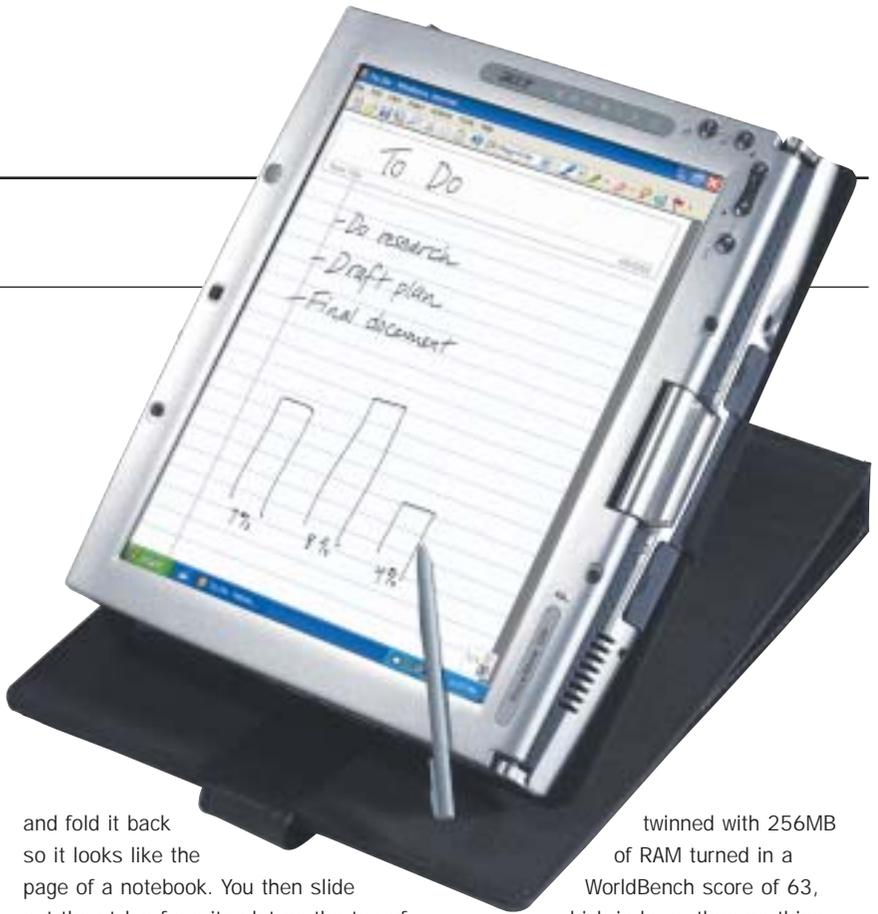
Asus: 08707 442 456
Website: www.asus.com
Price: £425

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality								8		
Features							7			
Value for money							7			

Tablet PC

Acer TravelMate 100

Tablet PCs are the next big thing – or at least that's what Microsoft would have you believe. The company is pouring marketing money into persuading us that standard desktops and notebooks are old hat, and that pen-based computing is the way forward. Aiding Microsoft in its quest is Acer with the TravelMate 100, so we've got our hands on this Tablet PC to see what all the fuss is about.

Microsoft has a dream

Bill Gates has been showing off his vision of the future in the shape of the Tablet PC for a few years now. This November finally sees it becoming a reality, but Microsoft is only targeting the devices at a limited, business-oriented market. It has another product up its sleeve for consumers. Called Mira, this is essentially a standalone wireless flat-panel display that can be used as an interface to your desktop PC anywhere in the house.

Tablet PCs are being sold into corporate markets as a replacement for existing ultra-portable notebooks. The main benefits of the operating system are the ability to write notes on screen in real-time and the sheer portability of the devices. Microsoft envisages users jotting down notes during meetings and then automatically transferring them to email or Word.

In practice the implementation of this handwriting recognition technology is patchy. The idea is simple. With the TravelMate you can pop two buttons on the base of the 10.4in TFT (thin film transistor) screen, twist it 180 degrees and fold it back so it looks like the page of a notebook. You then slide out the stylus from its slot on the top of the screen and write into Microsoft's Windows Journal utility. This allows you to capture handwritten notes, diagrams and tables in much the same way as you would using pen and paper. You can then organise and store them electronically.

Of course this isn't the first time you have been able to capture handwriting on screen. Both Pocket PC and Palm OS-based devices have allowed you to write directly to the device for quite some time, but this is the first time that it really seems to work.

Hard pill to swallow?

So why do we say it is patchy? Well, because not all Tablet PCs are created equal. The TravelMate 100 is relatively good at capturing text, but using the stylus on the touch-sensitive screen is a tortuous process, reaction times are slow and you have to be extremely heavy handed to raise a response. Before you give up on the Tablet PC as a concept, though, we have seen models from other manufacturers that were a joy to use, seamlessly capturing text on a highly sensitive screen. But more of that in future issues.

The cranky touch-screen isn't our only problem with the TravelMate 100 – it is a far from speedy performer. The Acer's 800MHz Mobile Pentium III processor twinned with 256MB of RAM turned in a WorldBench score of 63, which is lower than anything even in our Budget notebook chart (see page 126).

It has an 8MB Silicon Motion Lynx3DM graphics card and a 20GB hard drive, so this isn't a high-performance machine. But then it isn't meant to be and it does have other benefits. The TravelMate weighs just 1.44kg and measures only 251x208x25.4/29.4mm (screen folded in/out). It also has support for wireless 802.11b networking and smartcard security. External USB floppy and CD-ROM drives can be added as optional extras.

Build quality is far from solid and the screen seemed shaky, so we're not sure how well it will stand up to months of swivelling. Also, we could only swap screen orientation from landscape to portrait via Control Panel.

Verdict

Tablet PC is either going to be a huge success or a real donkey that Microsoft would prefer to forget. But we can't predict which is the most likely scenario. If hardware manufacturers can come up with reliable, robust devices that support the operating system for an attractive price and businesses can find a real use for it then it's a winner. But we're not quite convinced by the TravelMate or the need for it in the business-oriented market. ■

Ursula Seymour

Acer TravelMate 100

Specifications: 800MHz Mobile Pentium III; Windows XP Tablet edition; 256MB RAM; 20GB hard drive; 10.4in TFT screen; 1,024x768 max res; 8MB SMI Lynx 3DM+ graphics; 251x208x24.5/29.4mm; 1.44kg.

Acer: 01753 699 200
Website: www.acer.co.uk
Price: approx £1,700-2,000

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Build quality	5
Features	8
Value for money	5

Sound card and speakers

Creative SoundBlaster Audigy 2 Platinum and Creative Inspire 6.1 6700

Only a year has passed since Creative launched a new standard in consumer sound cards with the Audigy, but already it is improving upon it with the release of the Audigy 2. To test its power of the SoundBlaster Audigy 2, Creative also gave us a look at its new 6.1 channel Inspire 6700 speakers. The consumer card is miles ahead of the competition and left us jaws agape at the new benchmark it has set for PC audio.

Would you listen to that

The Audigy's 24bit/96KHz DAC (digital-to-analogue converter) and ADC (analogue-to-digital converter) lends depth and range to the audio. Even with an audio CD quality is enhanced. The signal-to-noise ratio has been increased to 106dB for a crisper sound quality and the it now comes with 6.1 channel surround sound support.

It's also capable of processing the high 24bit/192KHz quality of the upcoming DVD Audio standard. DVD Audio discs can hold more information than CD audio and are capable of higher sound quality. Since there are hardly any devices that can handle DVD Audio on the market yet, the

Audigy 2 saves you a small fortune if you want to listen to the best quality music. The card even has EAX Advanced for a better audio gaming environment and THX certification from Lucasfilms so it can provide cinema-quality sound at home.

As if this weren't enough Creative has enhanced the software bundle and included Steinberg's Asio 2.0 (audio stream input/output) support for low latency on audio or Midi recordings. This minimises the gap between the activation of a sound signal and you hearing that signal played back to you via the PC. High latency can make using your PC as a home recording studio virtually impossible.

Setup is harder than most sound cards because the package features an internal breakout box that sits in a 5.25in drive bay, so you'll need a spare bay if you want to fit it. The box is useful though as it saves you having to reach round the back of your PC to plug things in and comes with midi, auxiliary, SPDIF, FireWire and optical ports.

Speaking clearly

The Inspire 6700 speakers include six all-black satellites with stands and a large subwoofer. A switch at the back allows you to up-mix 5.1 input sources to 6.1 channels, but you need to use Creative's Multi-Speaker Surround technology, which comes bundled with the Audigy 2. There's a new volume control in the bundle with master volume, mute and an additional treble and bass level for instant adjustment.

The power levels are standard enough with the satellites churning out 8W RMS (root means square) and the subwoofer capable of 22W RMS, but the new front

centre speaker can handle 20W RMS for some extra oomph. Not bad at all for some sub-£100 speakers and all the more impressive with the 6.1 channel support, so it's fair to say there's currently nothing else on the market to equal the Inspire 6700.

Verdict

The quality of the DVD Audio is great. Unfortunately the mix on the DVD Audio was 5.1 channel rather than the full 6.1, but it was amazing to hear music we already knew but with a 5.1 channel mix. For the full 6.1 channel sounds we listened to the feature showcase demo supplied with the Audigy 2 software and the quality is undeniable.

We highly recommend the Audigy 2 card, but if you're paying out for this really decent sound card it could be worth holding back on the speakers until some more powerful 6.1 models emerge. That said, if you're on a budget then buy the speakers and wait for the price of the Audigy 2 to drop. Beware though: cable chaos is inevitable and it will take a serious effort to keep this setup tidy. ■

Spencer Dalziel

Creative SoundBlaster Audigy 2 Platinum

Specifications: 24bit ADC; sampling rates up to 192KHz; Dolby Digital 6.1 channel support; DVD Audio-compatible; SNR 106dB; Asio 2.0 support; FireWire; Advanced EAX; breakout box supplied.

Creative: 0800 376 954
Website: www.creative.com
Price: approx £169 ex VAT

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality									8		
Features									8		
Value for money										9	

Creative Inspire 6.1 6700

Specifications: 6.1 channel surround speakers; 5 satellites (8W RMS); 1 x large centre satellite (20W RMS); 1 x subwoofer (22W RMS); 40Hz to 20KHz frequency response.

Creative: 0800 376 954
Website: www.creative.com
Price: £83 ex VAT

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality									8		
Features										9	
Value for money									8		

Beginner digital camera
FujiFilm FinePix F401 Zoom

The FinePix digital camera range from FujiFilm heralded the combination of snazzy compact style with superb functionality, not forgetting good digital photography for a reasonable price and a total out-of-the-box solution. FujiFilm introduces another FinePix contender and this time the manufacturer is aiming its new camera at novice users on a budget.

The FinePix F401 Zoom combines all the features you'd expect from FujiFilm and, after putting it through its paces in our Test Centre, we can safely say this is one of the best all-round starter digital cameras on the market at the moment. That's not to say that the F401 is not without its faults – it doesn't offer the amazing true megapixel-per-pound ratio found in the ultra-cheap Nikon Coolpix 2000, but it's still a worthy buy.

Ready for your closeup
The FinePix F401 Zoom has an effective range of 2.1Mp (megapixels) but the third-generation Super CCD (charge coupled device) manages to extract 4Mp from the sensor. It's worth noting that this is without the aid of interpolation, which means that the photography retains a natural look rather than ending up suffused with unnatural colours. The picture quality is, without a doubt, better than that of other 2Mp cameras in this category with fine detail shining through on high resolution shots. With this quality on show it's a shame FujiFilm doesn't offer a TIF option to complement the JPG shots.

The 3x optical zoom is standard fare on beginner cameras these days, but the 3.6x digital zoom is a better offer than you'll find on most low-end devices. That said, every magnification on a digital zoom degrades and pixellates the shot so we recommend sticking with the optical zoom and simply moving closer to the object or person you wish to photograph.

Other specifications that impressed us are the ISO equivalent settings. If you're taking photographs reaching a resolution of 1,280x960 you can set the camera up to an equivalent film sensitivity setting of ISO 1600 – an impressive feat even on

high-end digital cameras. This means you can shoot low-light conditions without flooding the frame with a glaring flash. The backlash for digital cameras with high sensitivity is electronic noise interference – that is, noise produces a grainy, dirty effect on the image. However, FujiFilm compensates for this by including noise reduction technology on the FinePix. We took some shots at the ISO 1600 speed equivalent and were impressed with the lack of noise interference, so the technology is obviously doing a good job.

The movie capability now comes with sound but, of course, if you want to truly take advantage of this feature it'll require the largest SmartMedia storage card money can buy and not the 16MB card that is bundled with the F401 Zoom.

To be fair, the 16MB SmartMedia card is a generous bundle at this price point. In fact, the whole bundle is generous because this version contains the Premium kit – it includes an adapter for the rechargeable lithium battery, docking station with USB connection, good software and a useful case. Our only complaint is that the small lithium battery doesn't have the life span of larger models so it's worth investing in a spare battery.

Complete lightweight
While the FinePix F401 Zoom lacks the stylistic grace of its more expensive sibling, the F601, it retains the brushed steel finish and the autoslide lens cap for protection. The compact chassis is almost square and weighs a mere 185g – if you

like to feel you've got an expensive piece of kit in your hand then the F401 may disappoint. For anyone looking for a shirt pocket or handbag camera, though, this is a great choice.

The flash is built in rather than pop up and FujiFilm has kept the navigation buttons down to a bare minimum to appease first-time users. That isn't to say that the F401 doesn't cover some good configuration options for various photographic conditions – it just means that the camera has been carefully designed not to frighten off people used to point-and-click photography.

Verdict
As a Beginner digital camera, the FujiFilm FinePix F401 zoom is at the expensive end of the scale so it's not the best value-for-money device out there. However, FujiFilm packs in a lot of decent features and enthusiasts looking for a bit more from their first digital camera won't be disappointed. ■

Spencer Dalziel

FujiFilm FinePix F401 Zoom										

Specifications: 2.1Mp (4Mp with Super CCD); max res 2,304x1,728; 16MB SmartMedia card; USB docking cradle; 1 x rechargeable lithium battery; 85x28x69mm; 185g; max 122/min 9 photos on 16MB.

Fuji: 020 7586 1477.
Website: www.fuji.co.uk
Price: £329 ex VAT

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality										9	
Features										9	
Value for money									8		

Lindows PC
Evesham Quest Li

To make your PC anything more than a boring beige box you're going to need an operating system and generally this is going to be a flavour of Microsoft's Windows. It works (most of the time) and you should have no problems finding applications or exchanging files. However, the cost of Windows makes it prohibitive for very cheap systems.

The Lindows operating system offers a solution. Using Linux as the underlying OS, it provides support for what its manufacturer terms 'bridge Microsoft applications' and supplies a quick and easy way to find and install new software. All for less than a copy of Windows.

First thing to note: if you expect Lindows to look and behave like Windows, then you'll be disappointed. Secondly, there aren't that many supported bridge applications. Word and Excel 2000 installed and ran without problems, but PowerPoint (despite being supposedly

supported), Access and Outlook (which are not) wouldn't run.

If you need other applications, then they're available through Click-N-Run – which allows you to find and install software. You'll need a web connection, though, and some of the applications are quite big so a 56K modem may not do the trick.

Specification wise, you can't really fault the Quest Li. For £213 you get an 800MHz Via Eden processor, 40GB hard drive, 256MB of RAM, keyboard and mouse. Video and audio are onboard, there are four USB ports and integrated network and a modem. There's no monitor, but there is TV-out.

Verdict
If you're looking for a cheap way to run Windows applications or a Windows

lookalike then you'll be disappointed by the Evesham Quest Li. On the other hand, if you want an affordable PC and are prepared to invest the time to learn the new operating system then you may find that it's just what you're after. ■

Will Head

Evesham Quest Li										

Specifications: 800MHz Via Eden; 256MB RAM; 40GB hard drive; CD-ROM; onboard graphics and audio; 4 x USB ports; 10/100 ethernet; no monitor.

Evesham: 0870 160 9500
Website: www.evesham.com
Price: £213

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality							6				
Features							6				
Value for money										9	

Personal digital assistant
Sony Clie PEG-SJ30

Sony's ever-expanding range of Clie handhelds is not just growing at the high end of the market. The company is now taking the entry-level PDA (personal digital assistant) seriously, with two new models, the SL10 and SJ30. The latter is the colour model and, costing around £40 more than the Palm m130, it literally blows the competition out of the water.

The value-for-money SJ30 is every bit as good as, if not slightly better than, the recently expired £300 Clie T625C. Its advantages over this and just about every other Palm device on the market, except for Sony's own high-end models, are numerous. The screen is remarkably clear and bright and boasts Sony's standard 320x320 resolution. At just 104mm long, the SJ30 is also significantly more compact that most other PDAs, although it is marginally thicker than the T-series devices. It's provided with a stylish light-grey screen protector with a locking mechanism that is a dramatic improvement on its predecessors.

The SJ30 runs Palm OS 4.1 and comes bundled with Sony's standard add-on software, including Documents To Go Standard edition, PictureGear Pocket, Clie Paint and World Alarm Clock.

Our only criticism of the SJ30 is that it isn't supplied with a HotSync cradle.

Synchronisation to a PC is through a USB cable that plugs into an adapter clipped on to the bottom of the device, where the power cable to recharge the lithium-ion battery also plugs in. This means HotSyncing has to be activated through software, rather than by pressing a button on a cradle, which is somewhat clumsy. A cradle is available, but it'll cost you an extra £40.

Verdict
The SJ30 may not have everything you'll get on a more expensive PDA, but it offers an amazing amount for the price. It's the best low-cost colour PDA you can buy. ■

Alex Katz

Sony Clie PEG-SJ30										

Specifications: 33MHz DragonBall VZ; Palm OS 4.1; 16MB RAM, 8MB Flash memory; infrared/IrDA port; Memory Stick slot; TFT colour display with backlight; 320x320 pixels; 65,536 colours; built-in lithium-ion battery.

Sony: 08705 424 424
Website: www.sony.co.uk
Price: £203 ex VAT

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality										9	
Features									8		
Value for money										9	

Power notebook
Toshiba 5200-801

Toshiba has come up with yet another covetable notebook in the shape of the 5200-801, although at this price you'd expect it to turn heads. This high-end model is one of the few portable PCs to sport a price tag of almost £2,500. The 5200's striking metallic blue case makes it stand out from the black plastic crowd. It falls firmly into the desktop replacement category, but its bulky dimensions enable it to pack in plenty of power.

The Toshiba has a 2GHz Mobile Pentium 4, 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and nVidia's latest mobile graphics chip, a 64MB GeForce4 460 Go. This added up to a creditable WorldBench score of 101. The 15in TFT display is capable of a top resolution of 1,600x1,200. And even at this maximum image quality is still pin sharp.

So far so typical, so what sets the 5200-801 apart? First up there's the handy remote control, which allows you to turn the PC on at a distance, as well as control volume, CD and DVD playback and flick through menus and applications. There's also an LCD touch control that doubles up as the touchpad. This allows you to take control of menus using the buttons on screen. We found this patchy in use, but we were using a preproduction model. The system also comes with a built-in DVD-RW drive so you have a high capacity backup drive to complement the 60GB hard drive. Integrated Bluetooth enables wireless communication with similarly specified devices.
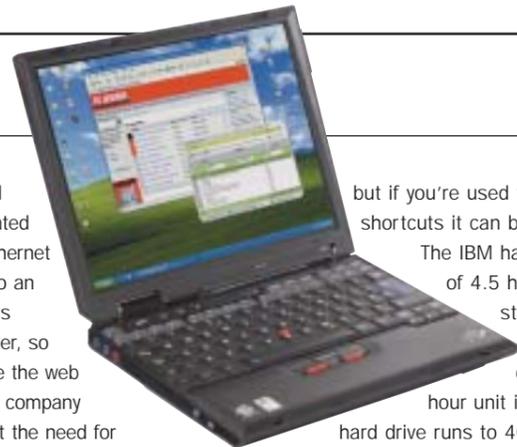
Verdict
This is an expensive notebook for those who want the cutting-edge in portable technology. It's a high performance model with looks and plenty of extra features that make it far from run of the mill, but whether they are enough to justify the extra cost will depend on how much you value these benefits. ∎

Ursula Seymour

Toshiba 5200-801										

Specifications: 2GHz Mobile Pentium 4; 512MB DDR RAM; 60GB hard drive; 15in TFT screen; max res 1,600x1,200; integrated Bluetooth; 64MB nVidia GeForce 4 460 Go; touch-screen touchpad; remote control; DVD-RW drive [speeds to come]; 3.5kg; 280x45x325mm.

Toshiba: 0870 444 8944
Website: www.toshiba.co.uk
Price: £2,127

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality										9	
Features										9	
Value for money						6					

Subnotebook
IBM X30 TK04BUK

Buying a subnotebook used to mean compromising on plenty of features, but with models like IBM's new X30 you can have a small yet powerful and featured-packed device. The screen may be small, but the specification is definitely high-end. The 1.2GHz Mobile Pentium III chip and 256MB of RAM produced an adequate WorldBench 4 score of 97.

Not only will you find integrated modem and ethernet but there's also an internal wireless 802.11b adapter, so you can browse the web or navigate the company network without the need for cables. One point to note, however, is the lack of hardware switch to disable it. This could be a problem if you haven't turned it off before boarding a plane.

The X30's chassis is tough without being overly bulky and should stand up to a hard life on the road. There are all the usual IBM touches – for example, the ability to single-handedly open the two catch lid and the small keyboard LED situated in the top of the screen so you can type in low light conditions. There are annoyances, too, such as the absence of a Windows key. A minor point, but if you're used to using the shortcuts it can be a pain.

The IBM has a claimed life of 4.5 hours with the standard battery, plus an optional eight-hour unit is available. The hard drive runs to 40GB and there's plenty of expansion opportunities with one PC Card slot, one CompactFlash II slot, FireWire, USB and infrared.

Verdict
At £1,877 the X30 isn't for everyone – but those that can afford it shouldn't be disappointed. It offers good performance and features and is sturdy enough for a life of constant travelling. However, if you plan to use it on a plane make sure you've turned off the wireless networking before boarding. ∎

Will Head

IBM X30 TK04BUK										

Specifications: 1.2GHz Mobile Pentium III; 256MB RAM; 40GB hard drive; 1 x PC Card & 1 x CompactFlash II slot; 802.11b wireless; ethernet; modem; FireWire; USB; infrared; 271x222x30mm; 1.6kg.

IBM: 0800 169 1458
Website: www.pc.ibm.com/uk
Price: £1,877

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality									8		
Features									8		
Value for money								7			

MP3 player
Creative MuVo

Creative is no stranger to innovation and its latest product, the MuVo, certainly lives up to this reputation. It is without doubt the simplest, easiest-to-use MP3 player we've ever seen. With no cables and no software required, you can be listening to your music within minutes.

The MuVo's design is ingenious. The tiny and amazingly lightweight device splits into two sections. One contains the AAA battery that provides power for up to 12 hours, while the other half plugs directly into your PC's USB port. If you're running Windows Me, 2000 or XP, the device automatically mounts as a removable drive (drivers are supplied for Windows 98 users). Simply drag and drop MP3 or Windows Media files on to the drive, unplug it, reattach it to the battery pack and start listening. That's all there is to it.

There are six buttons on the device for Play/Pause, volume control and so on, and a decent set of stereo earphones are provided. As the MuVo is USB Mass Storage compliant, it can also store any other files you like.

It could be said that the MuVo is too simple, as it lacks some features that you'd expect from even the most basic MP3 players. For example, you can't reorder the songs on the device. Tracks are played in the order in which you copy them and the order of play is stored in an invisible file. Even if you delete a track and then copy it again at a later date, this order is maintained. The only way to alter the order without changing all the songs in the list is to use the formatting software to erase the device and then start all over again.

Verdict
But these are minor criticisms for what is a truly innovative and cool product. The MuVo only costs marginally more than a standard 64MB USB keychain, but it doubles up as a perfectly adequate MP3 player. Its biggest limitation is its 64MB capacity – enough for about an hour of music – meaning you can never stray too far from your computer. ∎

Alex Katz

Creative MuVo										

Specifications: 64MB RAM; 1 x AAA battery; 73x35x16mm; 28g; MP3 and WMA support; stereo minijack; more than 90dB signal-to-noise ratio; 73x35x16mm; 28g.

Creative: 0800 376 954
Website: www.creative.com
Price: £85 ex VAT

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality								7			
Features								7			
Value for money								7			

Melody/radio/MP3 player
MadWaves Madplayer

The Madplayer is hard to describe. The easy bit is that it's an MP3 player and portable FM radio; harder to convey are its music abilities. A cross between a Casio keyboard and DJ deck, this device composes music for you and then lets you manipulate it to create your own distinctive tune. First off you have to select a genre, which have grandiose names like Jungle Ragga and Ambient. You are then presented with a graphical interface that reminds us rather of Donkey Kong.

On the screen is a representation of a road, divided into six lanes of traffic. Each lane represents a different line of the music – one for the drums, one for the bass, one for the lead and so on. In each lane you can change the speed and pitch of the sample being played or change the sample altogether, gradually constructing your own version of the default tune. Once you're happy you can save it to the 32MB SmartMedia card to keep forever. It can also be transferred to your PC via the USB link. It's all a bit strange at first, but the Madplayer is easy to use after a bit of playing and good fun too.

The digital audio side of things is as we'd expect – use Windows Media Player to rip tracks and USB to get them on to the player. The supplied 32MB memory card is the ideal size for the atrociously named Generative music you compose, as the files sizes are small but woefully inadequate for playing an album's worth of CD-quality MP3s.

Verdict
Madplayer is a strange product but one that's fun and easy to use once you understand how to alter the tunes. The FM radio is an interesting bonus, but we'd have preferred a larger memory card for the more useful MP3 player. ∎

Jason Jenkins

MadWaves Madplayer										

Specifications: MP3 and WMA player; music composer; USB port; 32MB SmartMedia card; FM radio; headphones with microphone; needs 2 x AA batteries.

Firebox.com: 0870 241 4289
Website: www.firebox.com
Price: £213

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality									8		
Features										9	
Value for money						6					

Motorola Bluetooth headset

Hands-free kits for mobiles are usually let down by one major factor – the cord. Having a small, discreet headset and microphone is great, but routing the cord ruins the look as well as the use of the device. A cordless kit means you can keep the phone in your pocket or bag and simply use the headset to make and receive calls when on the move. Bluetooth is ideal for such an application. In theory it ensures interoperability between different manufacturers' phones and headsets.
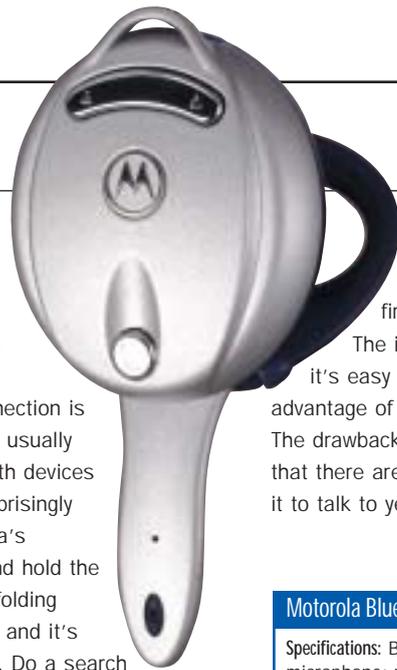
Ericsson was one of the first with a Bluetooth headset, although the look was more *Star Trek* than stylish. Motorola has decided it's time for it to embrace the standard, despite having no Bluetooth-enabled phones in its current line-up.

We tested Motorola's kit with an Ericsson T68i from Virgin Mobile to see how it works in practice. As it's wireless, you need to keep it recharged. Thankfully it uses a standard Motorola charger,

so if Motorola does bring out a Bluetooth phone it's one less thing to carry around.

The initial connection is the one thing that usually lets most Bluetooth devices down, but it's surprisingly easy with Motorola's headset. Press and hold the button, open the folding boom microphone and it's ready to be found. Do a search from the handset, enter the pass code and it's ready to go.

This headset is very easy to use. If a call comes in, simply open the boom mic to answer. To make a call, pressing the button will redial the last number. Alternatively, if you've got voice dialling then you can choose who to phone simply by saying their name.

Verdict
Motorola's headset is a good first excursion into Bluetooth. The initial setup is simple enough, it's easy to use and has the distinct advantage of being small and lightweight. The drawback, and it's a little strange, is that there aren't any Motorola phones for it to talk to yet. ■

Will Head

Motorola Bluetooth headset										

Specifications: Bluetooth headset; folding boom microphone; rechargeable battery; 48x54x15mm excluding mic; 26g.

Motorola: 08000 151 151
Website: www.motorola.co.uk
Price: £111 ex VAT

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality									8		
Features								7			
Value for money									8		

Iomega Zip 750

In the days before CD writers became inexpensive and ubiquitous, Iomega's little blue drives were flavour of the month. They may have been able to store only 100MB on a disk, but that was still over 70 times more than the humble floppy.

Time moved on, Zip expanded to 250MB but by then CD had taken hold with its 650MB capacity. The rewritable front was never that successful, but the

cheap cost of CD-Rs meant that users were happy to burn once – even if they only filled a fraction of the disc.

Iomega has a hand in the CD-RW market but it's still supporting Zip, now decked out in silver and sporting a 750MB capacity. Quite why 750MB was chosen is a bit of a mystery – it's not quite the magic gigabyte, but 50MB on top of the largest CD capacity. Zip is about more than just capacity, though. Rewrite – a process that never seems to work that well with CDs – is handled seamlessly.

Iomega is also touting speed, claiming a 50-speed read/write/rewrite for the drive. Of course, to hit the maximum you need to be connecting via USB 2.0 as 1.1 simply won't keep up. Test results, though, were a little disappointing. Copying a 495MB file proved no problem and took just four minutes. But transferring around

3,500 files totalling 309MB took a massive 15 minutes 46 seconds. If you've got any 250MB disks lying around, you'll be pleased to know the new drive will happily read and write them. Compatibility with 100MB disks is read-only, however.

When you consider media costs £30 for a pack of three 750MB Zip disks versus around 150 blank CDs for the same price doesn't compare well.

Verdict
When it comes to ease of use, Zip beats CD hands down – simply drag and drop your files. But with high-cost media and poor performance with small files, it's only really suitable for those who place ease of use over performance and value for money. ■

Will Head

Iomega Zip 750										

Specifications: external disk drive; 750MB capacity; USB 2.0 connection; compatible with 250MB/100MB disks (100MB read-only); external power supply; 107x1667x20mm.

Iomega: 020 7365 9527
Website: www.iomega.com
Price: £145 ex VAT

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality									8		
Features							6				
Value for money				4							

Kodak EasyShare DX 4330

The EasyShare range from Kodak is aimed purely at first-time buyers and the DX 4330 is one of the more expensive models in the range. If you want ease of use and picture quality at an affordable price then this camera is worth a look. The 210g DX 4330 is a compact camera that could do with a sturdier body if it's to cope with the rigours of family holidays.

The 3.1Mp (megapixel) CCD (charge coupled device) is generous for a novice camera and the DX 4330 has no trouble taking decent photos. The 3.1Mp translates into a maximum resolution of 2,160x1,440 and the JPG shots can be stored on the 16MB of internal memory. Kodak sensibly added a slot for Secure Digital and multimedia storage cards should users wish to upgrade the memory. This is a good idea because the movie and sound option is only worthwhile if you have 128MB.

As the DX 4330 is designed as a fully automatic camera, manual configurations for diverse photographic conditions are limited. The maximum ISO speed equivalent is only 200 so this camera won't work well in low light without a flash. That said, you can control exposure and there are scene presets on the jog dial.

Navigating the camera couldn't be easier. There's only one menu screen on the clear 1.8in LCD and a four-way pad on the lefthand side is used to operate the controls. We liked the inclusion of separate review and delete buttons on the hardware and there's also Kodak's share button so shots you like can be tagged for email or printing. The camera is only let down by a lack of extras in the box. There's no recharger or adapter and the lithium battery isn't rechargeable.

Kodak EasyShare DX 4330										

Specifications: 3.1Mp; max res 2,160x1,400; 16MB internal memory & Secure Digital card slot; 3x optical zoom 1 x lithium battery; 110.5x39x66mm; 210g; max 48/min 12 photos on 16MB.

Kodak: 0870 243 0270
Website: www.kodak.co.uk
Price: £246 ex VAT

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality							6				
Features							6				
Value for money									8		

Verdict
Despite some flaws, the one thing we couldn't fault on the EasyShare DX 4330 was the picture quality. It might not feel that sturdy but the end result is good photography at a reasonable price. ■

Spencer Dalziel

Networked attached server
Iomega NAS P405U

Although best known for its command of the consumer personal storage market, Iomega has raised its sights sharply with the release of its NAS product range which is aimed squarely at the business user. NAS (network attached storage) appliances are highly optimised file servers, offering superior speed and efficiency to general purpose servers which are designed to perform a multitude of functions. This translates into faster data access times for network clients. NAS appliances' 'closed box' architecture makes for extremely high reliability, minimising downtime. And if a main server does go down, a NAS server will still be accessible.

Serving your needs

A NAS server is very flexible: it offers a common pool of storage that can be shared by multiple servers and clients, regardless of their file system or operating

system. NAS appliances connect directly to your existing LAN (local area network) and transfer data over standard network access protocols, TCP/IP or IPX, using standard file sharing protocols. No additional software or client licences are required for clients to access storage, which makes NAS cost-effective.

NAS is simple to install – you can add storage in minutes simply by plugging in a network cable, applying power and configuring a few settings. There is no server reconfiguration, no network downtime and, compared to other types of servers, it also offers a low TCO (total cost of ownership).

Iomega's seven NAS appliances form an extensive range. There's a sub-£1,000 entry-level model with limited storage space and capabilities for small firms and individuals, with the larger and more feature-complete models aimed at bigger outfits such as SMEs and workgroups.

The high-end Iomega NAS P410m solution offers Raid 0 all the way through to Raid 5+, hot-swappable drives, gigabit ethernet, dual autosensing fast ethernet and up to 480GB worth of storage. The other NAS boxes (sporting a 'u' suffix) have their own operating system based on Unix and are accessible from almost any platform, including all Windows versions and Mac OS versions starting with 7x.

We looked at the P405U, a 1U rack mount server with dual 10/100 ethernet, four 7,200rpm (rotations per minute) 80GB drives and support for multiple Raid levels. The NAS P405U ships with 320GB of raw storage, but when configured as a Raid level 5 device the available storage drops to 220GB.

Just like that

Setup is swift: plug it into the network and power up. The NAS Discover program seeks out the new server and displays its current settings. If you use DHCP on your network there's not much more to do. You have to assign authorised users to the storage device. You can assign read and write privileges, divide the disk space into more manageable volumes and create protected folders. After that, all you have to do is map each user's workstation to the NAS device.

The unit supports browser-based administration, providing embedded web pages for adding, changing or removing users and groups, assigning them to specific storage areas and allowing them specific access privileges.

Verdict

Iomega's NAS P405U device is an easy way to inexpensively add hundreds of gigabytes of storage to your network. It requires little or no training to install and administer, has good security provisions and won't cause conflicts with other network devices. ■

Roger Gann

Explaining NAS

If you've got a company network, you'll undoubtedly have a server to handle tasks such as storing files, sending and receiving email and sharing resources like printers. This approach is fine for a small network, but as demands increase the one-server-for-all-jobs approach becomes less effective. If the server crashes, or you need to do some maintenance, you'll also be stuck until it's ready to go again.

NAS (network attached storage) devices cannot multitask. Instead, their sole aim is to provide storage on a network. Simply plug it in, allow people access and you're ready to go. You don't need to shut down the main server and if you need to increase the amount of storage, then the impact on users will be minimal. NAS isn't suitable for everyone, but if your network's growing and you need to add more storage it's worth investigating.

Iomega NAS P405U

Specifications: 320GB file server.

Iomega: 0800 973 194
Website: www.iomega.com/nas
Price: £2,170 ex VAT, other models from £809 ex VAT

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality										9	
Features									8		
Value for money										9	

Multifunction device
Lexmark X75

MFDs (multifunction devices) have always offered good value for money, but with the X75 Lexmark takes this to new heights. For less than £100 you get a combined colour scanner, copier and printer.

The X75 is a USB device so connection is simple and installation is a breeze thanks to the easy-to-follow onscreen instructions. Specifications may not be the best but at this price it's hard to complain: top print resolution is 1,200x1,200dpi (dots per inch), scanning offers 600x1,200 resolution and 48bit colour depth, and copies can be either colour or mono. Scanned images went through at a good speed and the software is designed with ease of use in mind for the absolute novice.

We couldn't reach the claimed print speeds of 11ppm (pages per minute) for mono and 6ppm for colour, but the actual speeds of 7ppm for mono and 4ppm for colour weren't too far off the mark. We were impressed with the draft mode print quality for black text. That said, you have to bump up the quality for acceptable colour output.

The X75 also isn't such good value when it comes to consumables, so we guess that's where Lexmark is making its money. At 5p per page of mono printing, you won't want to be churning too much out. The X75 has a compact footprint and is lightweight at 4.6kg, thanks to the use of a CIS-based (contact image sensor) scanner. Its small size makes it ideal for a home or small office that is pressed for space.

Lexmark X75

Specifications: Windows Me/98/2000/XP; max res printing 2,400x1,200dpi; 7ppm mono; 4ppm colour; max optical scanner res 600x1,200dpi; A4 scanning area; 48bit colour depth; USB; colour/black cartridge £22.30/£20.43; 8.1p per colour page; 5.1p per mono page; 460x337x168mm; 4.6kg.

Lexmark: 08704 440 044
Website: www.lexmark.co.uk
Price: £82 ex VAT

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality								7			
Features										9	
Value for money								7			

Verdict

You get what you pay for and no more with the Lexmark X75. It's not cheap to run and you can get better quality for your money, but it's a fairly unique product at this price and size so it'll fit some users' needs perfectly. ■

Spencer Dalziel

Digital projectors
NEC LT260 and Toshiba TLP-561

Although LCD (liquid crystal display) technology has been the traditional mainstay of the projector market, increasingly models are starting to grasp the potential of Texas Instruments' DLP (digital light processing) technology.

Employing an intricate network of tiny mirrors that tilt at different angles to control the amount of light hitting a spinning colour wheel, DLP has the potential to produce a sharper and cleaner image. Indeed, contrast ratios (where a higher figure indicates a greater range and depth of colour) on DLP projectors tend to be two to three times greater than on LCD models.

NEC LT260

But does this mean anything in practice or is it mere marketing hype designed to sell more products to unsuspecting customers? This month we compare two projectors, the NEC LT260 with DLP technology and Toshiba TLP-561 with LCD technology, to see if there's really any difference. It soon became clear that DLP is far from marketing hype. Thanks to its innovative

use of this new technology, NEC's LT260 gets our *PC Advisor* Gold award this month and we're reckoning on a high chart placing next month.

NEC has also built 802.11b wireless networking support. The necessary card fits into a PC Card slot, which can double up to hold stored presentations when you are on the move. This keeps the NEC's weight down to a highly portable 2.9kg.

The LT260 is once again the new benchmark for supreme image quality. Thanks to the DLP technology and its fantastic 1,300:1 contrast ratio the picture is sharp and focused, while the high brightness rating of 2,100 Ansi lumens ensures that images are clean and vivid even in less-than-perfect conditions.

In confined spaces, the LT260's image isn't perhaps the largest, but over a longer distance the NEC excels – a 500in picture is possible with the projector placed at a distance of 24.64m from the wall. The projector is also quiet and its discreet operating noise of 32dB can be dropped to a virtually inaudible 29dB in Economy mode. Another benefit of this mode is that it saves power and the decreased brightness of 1,650 Ansi lumens is almost undetectable.

Toshiba TLP-561

Toshiba's TLP-561 is our next contender. This model is in a different class from the NEC; it's aimed at a market looking for a budget solution, rather than those prepared to pay for the latest technology. But with this proviso in place it does a good job. It's user friendly and the onboard help system guides you through the entire process of optimising the image. The colourful menu system is also easy to follow.

The contrast ratio is a meagre 400:1, while the 1,300 Ansi lumens brightness rating is enough for most environments. Operating noise of 34dB is quite tolerable, although if it's a lightweight projector you want the Toshiba's 3.9kg frame may be off-putting.

Closer inspection of the picture generated by the Toshiba reveals both the good and the bad about short throw lens projectors. The good is that, in a confined space, the technology is perfect for making an impact. At a distance of 3.5m from the wall, the projector's 90in image is startling. On the other hand, the Toshiba's maximum range of 3.63m makes it less suitable for larger venues.

And if it's a crisp, focused image you're after then the TLP-561 isn't ideal. To be fair, this is down to the LCD technology as much as the short throw lens. Although the fuzzy picture and cold colour palette don't bear comparison with the NEC LT260, the Toshiba's output is no worse than that of the other sub-£2,000 projectors.

Verdict

The NEC with its DLP technology wins hands down, proving the worth of this innovation, but Toshiba still fares well if you are looking for a budget model based on old-fashioned LCD technology. ■

Robin Morris

NEC LT260

Specifications: brightness 2,100 Ansi lumens; 220W lamp (life of 1,500 hours, replacement bulb £298); 2.9kg; max res 1,024x768; 260x275x92mm; no DVI connector.

NEC: 0845 404 020
Website: www.nec.co.uk
Price: £2,999 ex VAT

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality								8		
Features										10
Value for money								8		

Toshiba TLP-561

Specifications: brightness 1,300 Ansi lumens; 150W UPH lamp (life of 2,000 hours, replacement bulb £300); 3.9kg; max res 1,024x768; 260x352x96mm; no DVI connector.

Toshiba: 01932 828 828
Website: www.toshiba.co.uk
Price: £1,950 ex VAT

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Build quality								8		
Features							7			
Value for money									9	