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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

Hardware categories

- Features **This** rates the specification of a product by current standards. For example, a 1.5GHz PC with 256MB of RAM and 60GB 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 it is to install and use the software.
- Features **As with hardware**, this rating indicates how much the software package contains. An office suite that only came with a word processor 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 **Because we provide product charts** which rank hardware from 1 to 10 across a category, we do not provide 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

All the prices printed in *PC Advisor* are quoted by the manufacturer or distributor and exclude VAT. Prices are only intended as a guide, and you may see products on sale for less or more than our quoted price.

If you're interested in purchasing any of the products reviewed in *PC Advisor*, please contact the manufacturer or supplier direct, mentioning both the magazine and the issue in which you saw the product. If they won't supply the product as reviewed, please contact reviews@idg.com. Please note manufacturers are under no obligation to feature reviewed products on their website.



There's lot to keep you entertained and informed this month. You might have noticed our contribution to *Hot off the press* on page 34, where we have exclusive reviews of two Pentium 4-based notebooks and a brand new graphics card from AOpen. We plan to offer reviews here whenever we have products that just miss our reviews deadline, so don't forget to check each issue so you don't miss out.

Pent-up momentum

Our reviews pages show that it's not just notebooks that are getting ever faster. We also put Intel's latest Pentium 4 processor to the test on the desktop, with two 2.2GHz PCs speeding through our WorldBench 4 tests. But is high clock speed enough to win them awards? Find out on page 65.

Discotech

Continuing in our aim to bring you our verdict on the latest technology, we have reviewed a DVDRW drive from Philips. To find out what the benefits are, see page 68. We also have another device using the fast USB 2.0 standard, a CD-RW drive from Iomega. To see just how much faster it will allow you to burn discs turn to page 68.

Man's best friend?

For those of you who look to technology for fun as well as work, the Aibo should appeal. The latest addition to Sony's burgeoning family of 'entertainment robots' promises to be an even more intelligent cyber creature than the rest of the litter. To find out if Aibo could be the pet substitute for you, have a read of our review on page 64.

Folding money

This month sees us refreshing our Power and Budget notebooks chart. So if you want to ditch your desktop in favour of a more portable solution, look no further than page 108 for our selection of the best of the bunch in each price category.



The mother of all boards

For those still wedded to the desktop, but perhaps planning a bit of upgrading or even build-it-yourself, we explore the core component of any PC, the motherboard on page 81. As part of our regular *Technofile*, series we look at just what a motherboard does, and how it affects the performance of your PC, as well as listing the features of all the latest boards.



Tight security

Software also has some treats in store, with reviews of two new utilities packages from Norton. First up is SystemWorks 2002, which aims to combine all the tools you need to give your PC a spring clean, and to keep it in perfect working order in the future. To see if it's up to the job turn to page 74. One of the perils of computing is that by opening up your PC to email and the internet you make it vulnerable to viruses, but Norton claims it has the answer in the shape of its famous antivirus package. On page 77 we find out how AntiVirus 2002 works to keep your computer free from infection.



Airbrushed artistry

Once you've got your PC shipshape, then you'll want to set to work. If you need to edit images, then we've got a package that makes the task that little bit easier. Ulead PhotoImpact 7.0 is designed to help you make the best of your digital pictures – see page 74.



Next month

Next issue will be just as exciting, with reviews of all the latest monitors: 19in and 17in CRTs and flat-panels. *Technofile* will cover DVD technology, explaining the ins and outs of this new standard, particularly writing to DVD media. Plus our usual hardware and software reviews and Top 10 charts.

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