

Sony Aibo ERS-220

Entertainment robot

Sony's hi-tech, highly intelligent robot – the Aibo – just got a whole lot smarter. Sony's latest release, the snappily titled ERS-220, marks a move away from the cutesy image of previous models that were targeted at 'the most discerning tech-savvy robotic enthusiast'. Gone are the floppy ears and wagging tail, replaced by an array of flashing lights, hard lines and a sleek, silver body.

Previous generations in the Aibo family were more like animals in their appearance and, sporting names like Latte and Macaron, these lovable robots were certainly endearing. The ERS-220, on the other hand, wouldn't look out of place on the set of *Dr Who*.

Smart thinking

For those who don't know, Sony's Aibo is a robot with artificial intelligence. This means it doesn't just perform a preset routine, but learns as it grows. It's taught through praise and punishment, so how it turns out relies on your parenting skills.

While this may sound entertaining, it would be unfair to term the Aibo ERS-220 a toy, given the amount of work that has gone into its design and software. Equally, the price tag places it out of reach of most people's disposable income.



→ Sony has moved away from the cute, dog-like Aibo: the ERS-220 looks more sleek and hi-tech

More for your money

This latest Aibo release hasn't just had its looks updated – Sony has also included plenty more features and modes. It has expanded the ERS-220's vocabulary, so it can now recognise up to 75 words. The LED quota has also been upped to 21, so the extra flashing lights means Aibo can express its emotions more clearly. A camera in Aibo's nose allows it to take pictures, while the addition of a retractable head light means it can find its way in the dark. There's even a surveillance mode, so you can put Aibo on guard and it will take a photo of any intruders – a great security tool – providing they don't steal your Aibo as well.

Software selection

To cater for its customers' different requirements, Sony has produced three software packages, or Aibo-ware, with varying features and functions.

Aibo Explorer provides a fully grown Aibo – perfect for owners too impatient to rear their robot from an infant. The adult Aibo still develops a personality, but it starts off fully autonomous. Explorer also includes the surveillance mode, saving pictures in Jpeg format on Aibo's Memory Stick.

Sony's Aibo Life 2.0 package provides you with an infant Aibo that you must rear and care for yourself. This software version also offers a choreography mode, which allows you to teach your Aibo actions to perform, and a training mode so you can assign names to preprogrammed motions.

Finally, there's Aibo Navigator 2.0, which lets you control your Aibo from a PC via a

← This new release of Sony's Aibo continues the reign as most stylish and entertaining robot – just be prepared to pay out a hefty sum



wireless connection. You can see and hear what Aibo can, and control its functions, such as the spotlight.

If you're desperate to get your hands on the latest Aibo, then prepare to fork out a fortune. Orders are being accepted via Sony's site (www.eu.aibo.com), but unless you've got £1,080 to spare, you may have to stick to less expensive means of entertainment.

Verdict Aibo is clever and, although not as cute as its predecessors, the ERS-220 is the most advanced model yet. The only down side is the price – at over £1,000 it's unlikely that they will be taking over from the real thing any time soon. ■

Will Head

Sony Aibo ERS-220	
Specifications:	64bit Risc processor; 32MB RAM; 16 degrees of freedom; camera; microphone; speaker; infrared distance sensor; acceleration sensor; vibration sensor; touch sensor (head, face, legs, paws, tail); temperature sensor.
Sony:	020 7365 2938
Website:	www.eu.aibo.com
Price:	£1,080
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Build quality	8
Features	7
Value for money	7

Evesham Evolution 2.2 & Hi-Grade Ultis PV4-2200 A03

Power PCs

This month we give the Pentium 4 another chance to show what it's made of, but this time Intel's fastest processor – running at a massive 2.2GHz – is twinned with DDR (double data rate) RAM, rather than the more expensive Rambus it used to require. We've put two PCs to the test – the Evesham Evolution 2.2 and Hi-Grade Ultis PV4-2200 A03 – to see just what they have to offer.

Evesham Evolution 2.2

Evesham has opted for Via's P4X266 chipset for the Evolution 2.2, which is also a DDR-based solution. Using the same 2.2GHz Pentium 4 processor as the Hi-Grade, Evesham managed to rack up 122 points in WorldBench 4.

Evesham has thrown in not one, but two 60GB hard drives set in a Raid 0 configuration. While it's unlikely you'll ever need 120GB worth of space, there is a speed advantage to the configuration.

In common with Hi-Grade, Evesham has opted for Creative's latest Audigy card. This supplies top-notch sound, especially when twinned with the Creative DTT2200 surround setup, and adds a FireWire port. If you fancy doing some digital video-editing, then there's certainly enough power available.

When it comes to graphics, gamers won't be disappointed by the WinFast GeForce3 Titanium 500 card. Those short of desk space will appreciate the

↓ The Hi-Grade has a good hardware line-up, with top-of-the-range graphics and decent audio



→ The Evesham Evolution 2.2 offers a massive 120GB of hard disk space and a stylish flat-panel display

17in LG 782LE

flat-panel, which offers a superb display. Although it only offers a maximum resolution of 1,280x1,024, it more than makes up in image quality. The DVI (digital video interface) connection also ensures maximum quality and a rock-steady image.

Optical drives take the form of a 16-speed DVD-ROM from Samsung and a Miria 40-/24-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW. The machine comes preloaded with a copy of Windows XP Home and Star Office which, although free, is a nice addition. Topping off the package is a five-year warranty – two-year onsite, three-year return-to-base.

Hi-Grade Ultis PV4-2200 A03

With 256MB of DDR RAM and a 64MB GeForce3 Ti 500-based graphics card, the Ultis managed a WorldBench score of 120 – not a bad performance, but it can't rival the cream of the Athlons. Worse still, AMD's competitive pricing ensures that this £1,599 system looks an expensive alternative to the chart-topping Mesh Matrix.

Nobody could accuse Hi-Grade of skimping on hardware components. The graphics card, for instance, is one of the fastest on offer, and its nVidia Titanium chip will make short work of the latest games titles. The monitor – a sharp 19in Flatron with 0.24mm dot pitch – offers a vivid, steady picture, while its top resolution support of 1,600x1,200 at 85Hz delivers an extensive viewing area.



The audio system teams Creative's latest Audigy card with the meaty DTT2200 speakers, and drive facilities range from the capacious 60GB hard drive to 16-speed DVD-ROM and 40-/16-/10-speed CD-RW. Connectivity is another strength – not only does the Ultis feature four USB ports, but also offers FireWire.

Housed in the latest Hi-Grade casing, the Ultis is ideal for upgrading, and its spacious innards lend easy access to the range of hardware components. Even the keyboard is an excellent wireless model, although the low-key software bundle may prove disappointing.

Verdict Both the Evesham and Hi-Grade machines are highly commendable, offering top-notch performance and components. However, their high price tags keep them off our wish list, and at the bottom of our Top 10 Power PCs chart (turn to page 90). ■

Will Head and Robin Morris

Evesham Evolution 2.2	
Specifications:	2.2GHz Intel Pentium 4 processor; 512MB DDR RAM; 2 x 60GB hard disks; 17in flat-panel; 40x/24x/10x CD-RW; 16x DVD-ROM; Windows XP Home; two-year onsite, one-year RTB warranty.
Evesham:	0800 038 0800
Website:	www.evesham.com
Price:	£1,999
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Build quality	9
Features	8
Value for money	5

Hi-Grade Ultis PV4-2200 A03	
Specifications:	2.2GHz Intel Pentium 4 processor; 256MB DDR RAM; 60GB hard disk; 19in monitor; 40x/16x/10x CD-RW; 16x DVD-ROM; Windows XP Home; one-year onsite, two-year RTB warranty.
Hi-Grade:	020 8532 6100
Website:	www.higrade.com
Price:	£1,599
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Build quality	8
Features	8
Value for money	6

Time Machine 2000+ PQ Flex

Power PC

Despite showing plenty of potential, the Time Machine 2000+ PQ Flex, just couldn't come up with the goods when we put it to the test. Although Time opted for AMD's speedy Athlon XP 2000+ chip, running at 1.67GHz, backed up by 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and a 64MB GeForce3 Ti 500 graphics card, it only managed to pull in a WorldBench 4 score of 113.

Setting aside this poor result, the rest of the setup is typical of our Power PC chart. It has an 80GB hard drive – not the most generous on offer, but we challenge you to fill it up fast – a 16-speed DVD-ROM and 10-/16-/40-speed CD-RW for backups. There's an Audigy sound card with 5.1 surround sound speakers, and a 19in LG Flatron 915FT Plus monitor. However, it doesn't have any of the extras that set apart truly special PCs, such as a frontal USB port, flat-panel display or easy-access case.

In fact when we tried to open up the Time it was a challenge. It was only after removing the front panel and applying plenty of elbow grease that the side panel would budge. The inside of the case is tidy, although a cable was shoved into one of the free 3.5in bays, which might be a problem if you want to add a device in this slot.

In Time fashion, this PC comes with a mass of software titles, ranging from games to cookbooks. These are a bonus if you are a first-time buyer, but the office suite, which forms the backbone of any bundle, is the free Star Office package.

Verdict It's a shame Time couldn't make the PQ Flex shine, as it had all the hallmarks of a winner. However, its lacklustre performance pulled it down. That said, the system as a whole is creditable, and the software will keep beginners amused. ■

Ursula Tolaini and Spencer Dalziel



Time Machine 2000+ PQ Flex **6** TOP 10

Specifications: Athlon XP 2000+ processor; 512MB DDR RAM; 80GB hard drive; 16x DVD-ROM; 10x/16x/40x CD-RW; 19in monitor; Windows XP Home; three-year RTB warranty.

Time: 0870 830 3116
Website: www.timecomputers.com
Price: £1,399

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

Sony PCV-RX1

Power PC

The PC may be moving away from the traditional grey breeze block design, but it still requires a company with Sony's artistic flair to produce the RX1. With a host of secret panels, flashing lights and finely curved edges, the RX1 demands a closer look.

However, deflecting attention away from the PCV's specifications is probably a wise move. The Sony runs into the same problem afflicting all manufacturers faithful to Intel's Pentium 4 family – the almost prohibitive pricing of the processors pushes up the cost, while failing to match the high performance of AMD's Athlon XP processors. And, if the 1.7GHz processor isn't the fastest on the market, the massive 80GB hard drive and 256MB of Rambus (again an expensive but essential addition to any Pentium 4 system) should have been enough to better its rather meagre WorldBench score of 105.



Verdict Performance freaks won't be bowled over by the RX1, and neither will the prudent consumer. This PC hardly offers the impressive hardware specifications that would justify a position at the top of our chart. It does, however, offer attractive design which will win favour among those who value style above substance. ■

Robin Morris

Sony PCV-RX1

Specifications: 1.7GHz Intel Pentium 4; 256MB Rambus; 80GB hard disk; 40x/16x/10x CD-RW; 16x DVD-ROM; 15.1in LCD panel; Windows XP Home; one-year C&R warranty.

Sony: 0870 542 4424
Website: www.sonymstyle.co.uk
Price: £1,400

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

Compaq iPaq H3850

Personal digital assistant

Compaq has released a new version of its popular iPaq PDA (personal digital assistant) – the H3850 – and we have to say we were impressed. This portable unit is great to use, with a gorgeously vivid colour screen and incredibly fast performance. Sadly, the iPaq was hampered by a common fault from this company – a high price.

If you happen to have deep pockets, though, the H3850 has plenty to offer. It is decorated with an attractive black and silver finish, although it employs Compaq's jacket expansion method which, when you add on extra modules, really bulks up the device. The jackets are not the only way to expand the iPaq – you can also add extra memory via the SD (secure digital) slot although, unlike Toshiba's PDA, there is no Type II CompactFlash slot.

The standard unit measures 84x133x16mm, making it a touch larger

than our Best Buy from Toshiba (see the Top 10 chart on page 130). It is also 10g heavier than Toshiba's offering at 190g.

Apart from its slightly larger dimensions, the Compaq iPaq has plenty in common with the Toshiba Pocket PC e570. It uses the same 206MHz Intel StrongARM processor, which provides super-fast performance. This device also employs 64MB of RAM, with 32MB of ROM onboard.

The iPaq's 240x320 16bit colour screen is one of its strongest points, as we have never seen such a bright and vibrant display on a PDA. Thanks to its lithium-polymer battery it should be able to keep the screen alive for 14 hours, or at least that is what Compaq claims.

On the applications side you get everything you'd expect from Pocket PC

2002, such as versions of Word, Excel, an email package and web browser.

Verdict The iPaq H3850 is an impressive device, offering power, speed, a wide range of applications and a top-quality screen. However, all of this comes at a high price. ■

Ursula Tolaini

Compaq iPaq H3850 **3** TOP 10

Specifications: 206MHz StrongARM processor; 64MB RAM; 32MB ROM; 16bit 240x320 colour screen; Microsoft Pocket PC 2002; lithium-polymer battery; 84x133x16mm; 190g; one-year P&L warranty.

Compaq: 0845 270 4000
Website: www.compaq.co.uk
Price: £449

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

Canon PowerShot S40

Beginner digital camera

The Canon PowerShot S40 is compact, reasonably priced, laden with advanced features, and produces high quality photo-images.

Being shaped like a small brick, the S40 isn't ergonomically satisfying, but it's robust and comfortable to hold. The bluish-grey camera has a strong metal body and Canon has opted for a sliding front cover to protect the lens, which offers better protection than a cap.

The 4Mp (megapixel) CCD (charge-coupled device) provides a maximum resolution of 2,272x1,704. There are four preset resolutions, three Jpeg compressions and a RAW mode that saves images without any processing. With video and audio capture taking up precious storage space you'll need to pay out for a better endowed Flash card – the 16MB CompactFlash card only holds four RAW or seven maximum resolution shots.

Fortunately, it supports Type II CompactFlash and IBM's Microdrive.

The image quality of the S40 is excellent. We took a series of shots on default settings and found detail was accurate and colours strong without over-saturation. Advanced users can tweak manual configurations such as colour balance and exposure control, while the uninitiated can use the automatic settings. For a camera packed with features it's surprisingly easy to navigate the menu.

Verdict Those who like their digital cameras portable and powerful will love the PowerShot. Professionals may balk at the compact size and lack of a hot shoe for an external flash, but we felt other



additions redeem this camera. It's Windows XP-compatible, can be directly plugged into a Canon BubbleJet

printer via a USB cable, and it has an optional underwater case. ■

Spencer Dalziel

Canon PowerShot S40 **1** TOP 10

Specifications: 4Mp; max resolution 2,272x 1,704; min resolution 640x480; 16MB CompactFlash; lithium-ion; movie/audio capture; 3x optical zoom/3.6x digital zoom; 112x42x58mm; 260g; 7 photos on 16MB; 165 photos on 16MB; one-year warranty.

Canon: 0800 616 417
Website: www.canon.co.uk
Price: £469

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

Philips DVDRW208



DVD+RW drive

There was a time when the 650MB of storage offered by the humble CD-R drive seemed like a huge and ample capacity. However, now that multigigabyte hard drives are the norm, the amount of space available on a CD just isn't enough.

Read-only DVD is well established – there's only one standard and you know that if you buy a DVD then your drive should be able to play it. When it comes to writeable DVD, however, it's all a bit of a mess with DVD-R, DVD-RAM, DVD-RW and DVD+RW all fighting it out to become the standard format.

Philips has joined the DVD+RW camp with its DVDRW208 – a decision that brings a couple of advantages. First, DVD+RW discs are rewriteable, which means you can reuse them. Second, DVD+RW is compatible with domestic DVD players, so you can burn your home

videos to disc, and play them back on these devices.

The Philips drive can also read and write CD-R and CD-RW, giving greater flexibility. The drive is rated at eight- and 2.5-speed for DVD read and write respectively and 32-/12-/10-speed for CD, CD-R and CD-RW.

In terms of performance, writing the content of a Video-CD took five minutes 42 seconds for CD-R and six minutes 54 for CD-RW. Burning the same amount to DVD+RW took four minutes 51 seconds. Writing 336MB of mixed files took four minutes 28 seconds on CD-R, four minutes 51 seconds for CD-RW and three minutes 33 seconds for DVD+RW.

Sonic MyDVD is bundled with the Philips drive for video DVD creation. However, building an eight minute DVD took 39 minutes 22 seconds in total – with nearly 35 minutes taken just to

encode the video into the correct format before burning, although this will be dependent on the speed of your PC.

Verdict DVD+RW compatibility with other devices makes it an appealing format. Although the Philips' drive is expensive at £499, it's not that bad when you compare it to the price of the first CD-R drives. ■

Will Head

Philips DVDRW208	
Specifications:	DVD+RW drive; 8x DVD; 2.5x DVD+RW; 32x CD; 12x CD-R; 10x CD-RW; EIDE interface; Nero Burning ROM; InCD; Sonic MyDVD.
Philips:	01756 702 892
Website:	www.pcstuff.philips.com
Price:	£499
Build quality	8
Features	9
Value for money	8

Iomega CD-RW 16x10x40x External

External CD-RW drive

After much hype and controversy, USB 2.0 has finally launched itself off the starting blocks. The stalls at this year's Comdex trade fair in Las Vegas were teeming with products sporting the interface, which suggests that it is fast closing the gap on its rival, FireWire.

Add to this its endorsement by Iomega, one of the biggest names in data storage, and you've yet another sign that USB 2.0 is set to become the high-speed connection of the future. Iomega's first

product to feature the interface is a 40-/16-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW.

At a hefty 2kg, this is very bulky – and a far cry from the current batch of slimline drives. However, the sleek design and translucent purple colour scheme will ensure that it looks good on your desktop.

All the USB 2.0 devices we've tested have delivered impressive performance – and the Iomega CD-RW was no exception. The drive wrote 336MB of mixed files to a CD-R in three minutes 27 seconds – faster than most current internal EIDE drives.

Its performance with CD-RWs was just as nippy, taking just under five minutes to write the same files to a rewritable disc.

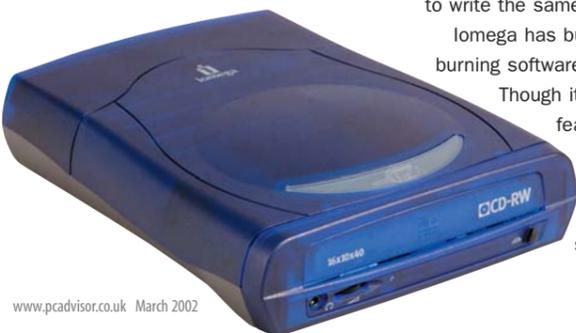
Iomega has bundled its Hotburn burning software, which is easy to use.

Though it lacks the advanced features of Nero, we enjoyed the simplicity of the package. The £189 price tag might seem steep for a CD burner, but

it's nothing unusual when compared with the prices of other USB 2.0 products.

Verdict The price may seem high, but the connection standard is still new. In terms of performance, it's money well spent: this drive burns faster than a cupboard dowsed with petrol. If you want to upgrade to USB 2.0 now, we can't think of a better way to part with your cash. ■

Paul Rincon



Iomega CD-RW 16x10x40x External	
Specifications:	USB 2.0 or 1.1 interface; 40x/16x/10x (read/write/rewrite); 402kg; 268x152x381mm; one-year warranty.
Iomega:	020 8365 9527
Website:	www.iomega.com
Price:	£189
Build quality	8
Features	9
Value for money	9

HP CP1160

Colour inkjet printer

Most of the colour inkjet printers we see in the *PC Advisor* Test Centre are low-cost models aimed at home consumers. However, if your printing requirements are a little more demanding, there are plenty of highly specified models which aim to offer superior performance and features.

The CP1160 is one such printer, and occupies a place near the top of HP's range. The long, blue-grey unit adopts the window-box shape also common to Epson's high-end models. Unusually for HP, however, the CP1160's documentation was lacking in detail.

We knew this was going to be a speedy model from the minute we gave the command to print. The CP1160 responded immediately, firing out pages at 8ppm (pages per minute) in mono and 4ppm in colour when set at draft mode. Unfortunately, the image quality at this low

resolution was disappointingly grainy and faint.

When you bump up the resolution, the speed drops dramatically to 1.5ppm in mono and 0.3ppm in colour. This might seem pretty slow, but the image quality is well worth the wait. At the top resolution of 1,200x600dpi (dots per inch), bright, faithfully reproduced colours and pin-sharp graphics leap off the page at you.

The HP's price tag of £266 makes this one of the most expensive inkjets on the market and, overall, we simply didn't feel the image quality and speed was enough to justify a cost this high. Thankfully, the consumables are very affordable at 2p for a page of mono and 5p for a page of colour.

Verdict If money is no object, then the CP1160 is a fast workhorse capable of delivering professional results. ■

Paul Rincon



HP CP1160	
Specifications:	1,200x600dpi max resolution; 8MB RAM; claimed print speeds: 17ppm (mono), 6ppm (colour); ink costs: £19.14 (mono), £22.83 (colour); USB/parallel; 488x380x185mm; one-year warranty.
HP:	0870 547 4747
Website:	www.hp.com
Price:	£266
Build quality	7
Features	9
Value for money	4

Mustek BearPaw 2400TA

Flatbed scanner

Mustek's previous BearPaw scanners didn't impress us. Though cheap, the specifications were miserly compared to their rivals and they didn't garner great results. The BearPaw 2400TA, on the other hand, is a huge improvement, and the cost remains remarkably low. Not only does it come with top-end specifications at an attractive price, but it also has a built-in transparency adapter.

The maximum optical resolution of 1,200x2,400dpi (dots per inch) doesn't improve on Mustek's previous offering, but

this is more than enough for everyday scan jobs. In fact, you'll only need it for reproducing high-quality photo-images – scanning at 300dpi or 600dpi should suffice for most other scans.

Back in May 01 we berated Mustek's last model, the 2400, because the 48bit colour depth was interpolated. The resulting scans were suffused with too much artificial colour, which took out all the detail higher resolutions should provide. However, this time round Mustek has opted for a true 48bit colour depth and the difference is marked. The detail shines through and the colour palette is more realistic. Our only bone of contention is the lack of speed and slightly overcast look on the default mode.

Installation on the BearPaw is automated and the software bundle, which includes Photo Express, is user friendly. While the simplified

approach is great for first-time buyers and novices, it might not be ideal for users requiring a variety of manual configurations.

Verdict It's good to see a Mustek flatbed scanner achieve the potential that was promised by previous models. The improvements in quality, value for money, specifications and features really pay off. ■

Spencer Dalziel



Mustek BearPaw 2400TA	
Specifications:	1,200x2,400dpi optical resolution; 19,200dpi enhanced resolution; USB; Windows 98/2000/Me; A4 scanning area; 48bit true colour depth; 427x297x94mm; 2.2kg.
Mustek:	0870 870 4457
Website:	www.mustek-europe.com
Price:	£65
Build quality	7
Features	8
Value for money	9

Canon EOS D30

High-end digital camera

Most of the digital cameras reviewed in *PC Advisor* cost under £1,000. They are aimed at enthusiasts or business users, such as estate agents and insurance assessors, who only need to take 'functional' photographs. The Canon EOS D30 camera is in a quite different league and has a price tag to match. This Canon device will interest both the professional photographer and the very serious amateur who demands quality and scope for creativity.

What sets the EOS D30 apart from most cameras is that it's a true SLR (single lens reflex) design which takes interchangeable lenses. And although £2,142 (including the lens) may seem expensive, most cameras of this type cost a lot more. Here, for the first time at this price level, is a digital camera which will feel instantly familiar to anyone who is used to a good quality 35mm SLR.

Despite being large and heavy, the EOS D30 feels right and everything is in the correct position.

Moving on from the basic form factor to the detailed specification, you may not see a vast amount of difference between the EOS D30 and some more bargain devices. What you're paying for is quality, and this is reflected in the superiority of the image produced. Admittedly, the headline figure of 3.11Mp (megapixels) falls short of that of many cameras costing a third as much. However, if we exclude the resolution – and this is only important for huge prints – we have yet to see better photographs from a digital camera.

Verdict If you're prepared to carry a seriously heavy camera and you're not put



off by the price tag, the Canon EOS D30 is highly recommended.

If you want high-quality results, the feel of a 35mm SLR, and need to be in control, you're unlikely to be disappointed. ■

David Bedford

Canon EOS D30

Specifications: 3.1Mp CCD; SLR viewfinder; 7x zoom; f/3.5-f/5.6 aperture; built-in or external flash; 16MB CompactFlash; Adobe Photoshop 5.0.

Canon: 0800 616 417

Website: www.canon.co.uk

Price: £1,873; £269 for 28mm-200mm lens.

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

Wireless-Ready Multimedia Home Gateway

Wireless networking

Actiontec may not be a household name here, but it's well established in the US and has expanded its range to include broadband as well as wireless devices. The Wireless-Ready Multimedia Home Gateway plugs directly into your existing broadband setup – be it cable modem or ADSL – allowing you to share bandwidth among a number of PCs. It won't, however, plug directly into the USB ADSL modem supplied with the majority of consumer ADSL installations in the UK.

As the Wireless-Ready bit implies, the gateway supports 802.11b wireless connections – providing you shell out an extra £100 for an Actiontec wireless PC Card. The gateway provides two PC Card slots, one takes the wireless card and the other is for future expansion. Actiontec has mused about this future functionality, mentioning things like print server, Voip (voice over IP) and Bluetooth, although there are no firm plans yet. If you don't have a broadband connection, or you're using a USB solution, then you can still use the gateway by hooking it up to the PC that receives an internet connection.

In addition to the wireless port, there's a four-port 10/100Mb hub, so wired PCs can play too. The gateway offers DHCP (dynamic host configuration protocol), which means no fiddling around assigning manual IP address to every connected PC, plus a basic firewall.

Configuration is handled via a web interface and the bundled documentation is detailed, covering how to set up TCP/IP on all recent flavours of Windows.

Verdict Actiontec's gateway lets you conveniently share your existing broadband connection. It seems like great value for money, but you'll need an extra £100 for the PC Card if you want to use it wirelessly. ■

Will Head



Wireless-Ready Multimedia Home Gateway

Specifications: Broadband router; 4 10/100Mb ethernet ports; 1 10Mb Broadband port; 2 PC Card slots; web based management.

Actiontec: 0118 902 6890

Website: www.actiontec.com

Price: £130 (wireless PC Card £100)

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