

Apple desktop computer iMac

At long last, the new iMac has arrived. Apple has finally launched the fully revamped version of its best-selling personal computer. The latest model incorporates many of the most-requested features, while retaining plenty of the best traits that are found in existing higher-end Macs. But this is far more than just an update, as the latest iMac has been redesigned from the ground up.

Monitoring the changes

The most obvious change is that the iMac is now built around an LCD (liquid crystal display) flat-panel monitor, instead of a CRT (cathode ray tube) display, so it is smaller, lighter and uses less energy.

While this is hardly revolutionary, Apple's approach is innovative. Rather than build the components into the back of the screen, they are housed in the bulbous base. This not only means that the flatness of the display is retained, but also that the hard drive and optical drives run at full speed, avoiding the performance hit they take when mounted vertically.

The screen is attached to the base by a sturdy chrome-plated arm, which allows it to glide up and down and rotate 180 degrees. Its looks won't be to everyone's liking, but it's certainly as radical a rethink of computer design as the original iMac was nearly four years ago.

There are three models in the iMac range. The low-end system, at just under £1,000, has a 700MHz G4 processor,

→ The powerful hardware and Apple's latest OS and software make the new iMac an impressive package

CD-RW drive and a 40GB hard disk. However, it lacks the external Apple Pro speakers, instead relying on a mono speaker built in to the base. The mid-range machine, at £1,105, has the same CPU, a combo DVD-ROM/CD-RW drive and doubles the memory to 256MB of RAM.

Apple, though, expects the biggest seller to be its top-of-the-range £1,360 machine, as it features a faster 800MHz G4 processor, 256MB of RAM and 60GB hard disk. Most importantly, this iMac offers a SuperDrive – Apple's combined DVD-R/CD-RW from Pioneer – which, with Apple's iDVD software, enables you to create DVD movies.

The OS of choice

While you'll always be able to find a PC for less than a Mac, these iMac machines are unusually good value for Apple products – the price not only includes the LCD screen, but also a competitive set of features. In addition to the hardware specifications already mentioned, the iMac range offers a 32MB nVidia GeForce2 MX graphics card, three USB and two FireWire ports, built-in modem and built-in ethernet.

One of the reasons why Macs fail to woo more PC users is that they run a proprietary OS (operating system), rather than Windows, meaning they're incompatible with many applications. However, the OS that comes with this updated iMac is Apple's latest, Mac



OS 10.1. Versions of many leading applications – including Office – are now available for this OS, and it has been praised for its robustness.

The iMac also comes with an impressive software bundle, including AppleWorks and a range of 'digital hub' applications such as the aforementioned iDVD, iMovie and a package for digital photography called iPhoto.

Princely performance

Our benchmarks don't run in the Mac OS, so we can't give you direct speed comparisons with PCs. However, don't be fooled by figures. The 700MHz PowerPC G4 chip is no slouch, and will perform at roughly the same speed as a Pentium 4 with twice the clock speed. The 800MHz version in the top-of-the-range iMac is, in fact, faster than the entry-level Power Mac.

Verdict

The new iMac is unlikely to fulfil Apple's dream of doubling its market share, for the same reasons that no other Mac ever has – it runs the Mac OS rather than Windows, and it's far from the cheapest computer on the market. But its excellent screen, design and feature set, combined with the impressive software bundle, mean it's easily worth the money. ■

Alex Katz



← The screen is mounted on a versatile armature, while the base's tiny footprint makes it convenient for small spaces

iMac	
Specifications:	From: 700MHz PowerPC G4; 128MB RAM; 40GB hard disk; 15in flat-panel display; 24x/10x/32x CD-RW; nVidia GeForce2 MX graphics with 32MB DDR DRAM; 56K V.90 modem; 10/100 Base-T ethernet; 3 USB ports; 2 FireWire ports.
Apple:	0800 039 1010
Website:	www.apple.com/uk/imac
Price:	from £978 ex VAT
Build quality	10
Features	8
Value for money	8

Games console/DVD player Microsoft Xbox

Microsoft may be king in the operating system market, but that hardly makes it a likely contender for the console business. In gaming circles, however, there's rarely been quite as much drool spilled as there has been in anticipation of the Xbox. Although – as Microsoft is keen to stress – the Xbox is a dedicated gaming console, it is unusual in that it's based on PC technology. From the Pentium III-based processor and nVidia graphics chip to the internal hard drive, DVD-ROM and adapted USB ports, nobody who knows anything about PCs could possibly mistake the Xbox's heritage.

X-factor

The Xbox's 733MHz processor is backed up by 64MB of RAM which, although not that powerful by PC standards, in a

↓ Eagerly awaited, the Xbox won't disappoint avid gamers when it is released in March 2002



Microsoft Xbox	
Specifications:	733MHz processor; 233MHz graphics processor; 64MB RAM; 8GB hard drive; DVD-ROM; maximum 4 game controllers; 10/100 ethernet; 338x264x89mm.
Microsoft:	0870 601 0100
Website:	www.xbox.com
Price:	approx £255 ex VAT
Build quality	8
Features	7
Value for money	8

dedicated machine this isn't so much of an issue. The graphics chip is supplied by nVidia and is built on the GeForce3, with a few invigorating tweaks here and there. nVidia's

contribution doesn't stop there, however – a variation on the nForce chipset can also be found inside the Xbox.

The 8GB hard drive performs two functions: the first is caching game information, increasing the performance, while the second is to store saved game information. You can even rip your CDs on to the hard drive, although entering all the track names using the gamepad can be a little infuriating.

Although the gamepads use a custom connector, they owe a lot to USB and there's even a 10/100 ethernet port for network play or broadband gaming. The Xbox's PC background is also betrayed by its use of DirectX, which will give it a distinct advantage in the games market. DirectX is a programming interface that assists games authors. Since PC games developers are well accustomed with DirectX, adapting their skills for the Xbox should be easy.

Gaming heaven

All very impressive, but what does this mean in terms of user experience? First and foremost it means the Xbox delivers utterly astounding visuals and gaming worlds. It isn't set to hit these shores until March 02, but we managed to get hold of a US version and a couple of games – Halo and Project Gotham – to see what it had to offer. It may not be the most comprehensive games line-up ever, but it was by far enough to demonstrate that what we had here was something new.

Gotham, a car racing game, has a more arcade feel to it than Gran Turismo (the benchmark driving game on Sony's



↑ The little black Xbox holds some impressive components for a games station, and the experience they produce are at the very top end of the home gaming market

PlayStation platform). The physics – the creation of near-real-world physical properties inside a virtual environment – don't feel as 'real' as Gran Turismo, but it's almost there. The key to Gotham, however, and a marker of what Xbox combined with DirectX programming is capable of, is the absolutely stunning realisation. Maps of cities such as London are so lifelike that even the jaded PC Advisor staff were gob-smacked.

Angelic AI

Halo, however, is where the Xbox truly shines. At base, Halo is a bog-standard FPS (first-person-shooter) set in the far future. The action, though, is amazingly smooth. It's not possible to measure frame rates on the fly, but the image was rock solid with awesome texture and detail, making for really immersive play.

The artificial intelligence (how the computer-controlled agents react to you in-game) is also excellent, which is a refreshing change to most PC-based games. This is mainly down to the fact that the graphics chip handles the images, leaving the processor with the task of actually playing the game.

Verdict

All in all, Xbox is head and shoulders above the PlayStation 2, especially when playing games like Halo. A major downside is typical Microsoft money grabbing – if you want to watch DVDs on it you have to buy a separate controller (PS 2 does this out of the box). But make no mistake, Xbox is the new daddy of consoles, and puts PC gaming systems four times its price in the shade. ■

Rupert Collins-White and Will Head

Professional digital camera Pentax Optio 430



The Optio 430 from Pentax is little more than an upgrade from the Optio 330 – a previous Best Buy in our Beginner chart. The 3.34Mp (megapixel) CCD (charge-coupled device) has been increased to an impressive 4Mp, but the ensuing price hike pushes the Optio 430 into the Professional chart. It has a great set of

features for a micro-sized digital camera, but is it good enough to compete with the big boys?

Though small and light the 430 has a stainless steel body, which should protect it from knocks. Add a built-in lens cap and you get one of the hardest cameras we've seen. The 1.6in LCD screen is small but clear and, despite the many features, it's simple to navigate. There are configurations for flash, exposure and focusing as well as five shooting modes – including an interesting multiple exposure shot, allowing you to overlap images for interesting effects.

Serious users may be disappointed that there's no aperture or shutter priority, but will be impressed by the 3x optical zoom and smooth 2x digital zoom on such a

small camera. Like its predecessor, the Optio 430 reacts quickly to commands making it a joy to use, but we couldn't understand why Pentax has decreased the flash range slightly.

A 16MB CompactFlash Type I card means no support for IBM's Microdrive. We were disappointed that Pentax didn't bundle a 32MB card, as at the maximum resolution of 2,240x1,680 it can only capture five images. We'd also like to have seen a TIF or RAW mode option. However, image quality is excellent, with colour and detail easily rivalling the competition.

Verdict

Most serious users want large cameras and full manual control so the Optio 430 won't fit the bill. However, anyone with the cash to spend who wants one of the best pocket digital cameras on the market need look no further. ■

Spencer Dalziel

Pentax Optio 430		5 TOP 10
Specifications: 4Mp; max resolution 2,240x1,680; 16MB CompactFlash Type I card; lithium-ion battery; max 200 photos on 16MB; min 5 photos on 16MB; 92x31x59mm; 205g; 1-year return-to-base warranty.		
Pentax: 01753 792 731 Website: www.pentax.co.uk Price: £576 ex VAT		
Build quality	8	
Features	8	
Value for money	8	

Digital camera Sony Cybershot DSC-F707



Sony's Cybershot DSC-F707 joins the small elite at the very top of the consumer market. Costing between £850-£1,300, cameras in this category offer high resolution, good zoom range and plenty of features, ideal for those who demand top-notch results and total control over the photographic process. The DSC-F707 is, therefore, a

direct competitor to the Olympus Camedia E10, Canon PowerShot Pro90 IS and the Minolta Dimage 7.

Cameras of this type are never compact – the zoom range and aperture preclude this. However, the DSC-F707 fits nicely into the hand and the controls are easily accessible. Ease of use is improved by the electronic viewfinder, arguably the best short of a conventional optical type.

Needless to say, at this price, the CCD has a very respectable 5Mp (megapixel) resolution producing good picture quality. Plus there's a full range of exposure modes and the option of manual focusing.

We could say that what we've seen so far is what we'd expect of a camera in this class. But there are some less commonly

encountered features too, most notably the night-shooting modes. Using the so-called hologram AF, pictures can be framed and subjects focused on in darkness. Another less-than-universal feature is the ability to make audio recordings which are associated with still images.

Verdict

All our cameras are scored using a consistent scheme which has put the DSC-F707 ahead of all the cameras we've seen over the last six months. But this is not a cheap camera, which explains why it doesn't appear in our value-oriented chart, however it does cost considerably less than a number of patently inferior models. ■

David Bedford

Sony Cybershot DSC-F707	
Specifications: 5Mp (2,560x1,920); electronic viewfinder; 5x (38-190mm) optical zoom; max aperture f/2.0-f/2.4; built-in or external flash; 16MB Memory Stick; MGI PhotoSuite 8.1, MGI VideoWave III SE	
Sony: 0990 111 999 Website: www.sony.co.uk Price: £851 ex VAT	
Build quality	7
Features	9
Value for money	7

PC home entertainment system Evesham Axis PVR



With the comparatively diminutive viewing size of monitors, the PC has never been seen as the best platform for TV addicts. But for those who don't mind the small-screen experience, the Evesham Axis PVR (personal video recorder) has a few tricks up its sleeve to make it worth the sacrifice.

Using the colourful and intuitive Showshifter software, the PVR can, either at the touch of a button or at a preset time, record any programme to the hard disk – and the 60GB Maxtor drive offers enough room for an entire video library. Better still, if you want to leave the PC for a while, you can pause a live broadcast then come back later to start watching from where you left off. Offering powerful facilities that are only available elsewhere at a steep price, the PVR is both stable and easy to use.

The inclusion of a powerful PC helps the cause, and the 1.47GHz Athlon XP processor generates a healthy WorldBench 4 score of 114. The Panasonic DVD-RAM drive is cutting edge, allowing you to record as much as 4.7GB at a time. For the more budget conscious, the 16-/10-speed CD-R/RW drive gives you the choice of burning to cheaper CD media.

The excellent sound system, which comprises a Creative SB Live 5.1 paired with Cambridge SoundWorks' three-piece speakers, outclasses the graphics platform. However, the GeForce2 Ti video card is only beaten by its fastest competitors, and the 17in LG Flatron 795FT offers palatable picture quality.

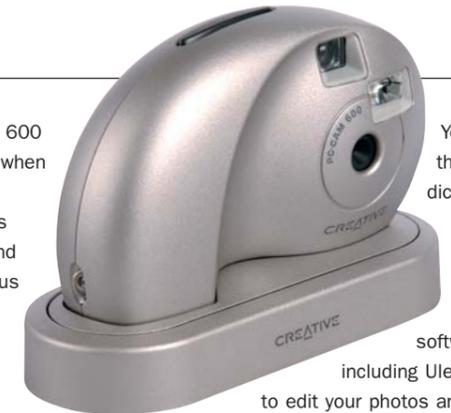
Verdict

For anyone looking to buy both a powerful PC and a complete home entertainment system that offers advanced recording and TV output plus extensive DVD and internet facilities, the Axis PVR does the lot. ■

Robin Morris

Evesham Axis PVR	
Specifications: 1.47GHz Athlon XP 1700+; Windows XP Home; 256MB DDR RAM; 60GB hard disk; 32x/16x/10x CD-RW; 6x DVD-ROM; 1x/2x DVD-R/RAM; 17in monitor; Creative Live 5.1; TV card.	
Evesham: 0800 038 0800 Website: www.evesham.com Price: £1,199 ex VAT	
Build quality	8
Features	9
Value for money	8

Webcam Creative PC-Cam 600



Half digital camera, half camcorder, webcams are versatile devices. However, few actually allow you to capture both video clips and stills on the move and transfer them to your PC with ease. Some webcams can act as standalone digital cameras, but only capture video when they're connected to your PC. However,

Creative's PC-Cam 600 can capture video when it isn't connected.

Creative favours smooth designs and this stylised nautilus shell is no exception. But the PC-Cam is also smart on the inside, packed with features offering sharp, colourful images.

The camera has four resolution settings from 320x240 pixels to 1,024x768 pixels but can take snaps at 1.3Mp (megapixels) with software enhancement. What's also impressive is that the PC-Cam 600 stores short video clips with audio when the camera is not connected to your PC.

The generous 16MB of memory allows you to store 200 digital stills at 640x480 pixels and two minutes 24 seconds of video at 30fps (frames per second).

You can also use the camera as a dictaphone to record around an hour of audio.

Creative has thrown in a great software bundle, including Ulead Photo Express to edit your photos and Microsoft Net Meeting for video-conferencing. The price tag of £115 isn't cheap, but this buys you pretty much everything you could ever want from a webcam and more.

Verdict

The sharp image quality and excellent software bundle alone are enough to place this a cut above the current crop of webcams. But it was the comprehensive features set and innovative design that sealed our high opinion of it. ■

Paul Rincon

Creative PC-Cam 600	
Specifications: progressive CCD; 1,024x768 max resolution; 1.3Mp resolution (software interpolated); 16.7 million colours; flash; 30fps video capture; 2-year warranty; 137x63x90mm; 277g.	
Creative: 0800 056 5732 Website: www.europe.creative.com Price: £115 ex VAT	
Build quality	9
Features	10
Value for money	9

Digital camera Toshiba PDR-M25

When it comes to megapixels per pound Toshiba regularly offers one of the best exchange rates around. With 2.2Mp (megapixels) for under £250 the new PDR-M25 is no exception. However, the rest of this package falls short of the mark, and subsequently it fails to enter our Beginner Digital cameras chart on page 114.

Its compact shape and central lens makes the PDR-M25 more attractive than its predecessors. We didn't like the plastic lens cap as it tended to come off easily, offering little protection.

It's designed as a point-and-click model for first-time buyers, so operation is simple. A four-way control pad is used in conjunction with a jog dial that provides settings configurations, image review, automatic and manual shooting.

At the maximum resolution of 1,792x1,200 you can store seven Jpegs on the supplied 8MB SmartMedia card, though this can be bumped up to 112 images on the lowest-quality setting. High-resolution photos were detailed, but we

did have concerns over some design flaws. Getting decent composition is difficult because the shot isn't taken until one or two seconds after the button is depressed, so you'll need a tripod or a very steady hand. We were impressed by the surprisingly good macro shots, but the focus lock didn't work too well.

Verdict

First-time users may appreciate the high resolution and simplicity this PDR-M25 offers. However, as an overall package it lacks enough good features to make it stand out in the highly competitive entry-level market, despite the low price tag. Equally, despite an inexpensive purchase cost, you'll have to dig into your pockets for batteries, a charger and an adapter. ■

Spencer Dalziel



Toshiba PDR-M25

Specifications: 2.2Mp; max resolution 1,792x1,200; 8MB SmartMedia card; 4xAA alkaline battery; max 112 photos on 8MB; min 7 photos on 8MB; 105x55x68mm; 230g; 1-year return-to-base warranty.

Toshiba: 01932 828 828
Website: www.toshiba.co.uk
Price: £247 ex VAT

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

USB storage media Sony Micro Vault

Sony's Micro Vault storage device is a modern day equivalent to the floppy disk. It's a tiny device that's about the size of a cigarette lighter, but comes in a range of capacities up to 128MB. It has a silver case that comes apart to reveal a USB connector, which you can plug into your PC.

Thanks to its size it is an ideal way to carry files between computers. However,

a storage device used to transfer data from one PC to another is useless if the second PC does not support the format.

But, if you use Windows 2000, Me or XP, you won't need any new drivers to use the Micro Vault. Once your PC detects the device it appears as a new drive, allowing you to drag and drop files with ease.

The Micro Vault, which is a flash memory device rather than a hard drive, proved to be more than fast enough for everyday use, taking 29 seconds to write 14.3MB of mixed test files.

We tested the 16MB version of the Micro Vault, but it also comes in sizes of 32MB, 64MB and 128MB. There's an added bonus for Windows 2000 and XP users in the form of software that allows you to partition or password-protect private data stored on the drive.

However, if you want to store multimedia files, you'll probably find anything less than 128MB of storage

restrictive. JMtek (www.usbdrive.com) now offers capacities of up to 1GB in its range of USB drives and its models are comparatively cheap. For example, the 128MB JMtek drive will cost roughly £70 less than the Micro Vault, and has the same capacity.

Verdict

The Micro Vault has no need for drivers and comes in a range of storage capacities, giving this compact format a real chance of catching on as an alternative to the floppy disk. However, Sony will need to lower its pricing for it to become an essential PC accessory. ■

Paul Rincon



Sony Micro Vault

Specifications: USB bus power (no power supply required); Windows 98/2000/Me/XP/Mac OS 9.0; 16MB, 32MB, 64MB, or 128MB; 26x13x92mm; 20g.

Sony: 0870 542 4424
Website: www.sony-europe.com
Price: £38 (16MB version) ex VAT

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

Mobile workstation and subnotebook Dell Precision M40 and Dell Latitude C400

With its latest two offerings Dell has the mobile professional firmly in its sights, although each product tackles the challenge of providing computing power on the move in a different way. The Precision M40 offers all the power of a workstation in a mobile chassis, while the Latitude C400 is a superportable subnotebook.

Dell Precision M40

The M40 is Dell's first attempt at a complete mobile workstation. The definition of a workstation has always been somewhat hazy, as it can range from nothing more than an overpriced PC, to a fully featured high-end powerhouse. Obviously Dell has designed the M40 to fit into the latter category, but thanks to the extras on offer this is also one expensive notebook at just under £2,500.

So what do you get for your money? Well, quite a bit as it turns out. Such as Certified 3D OpenGL graphics, courtesy



Dell Precision M40

Specifications: 1.2GHz Mobile Pentium III; 512MB RAM; 48GB hard disk; 32MB DDR-RAM graphics; DVD/CD-RW drive; built-in modem/ethernet; built-in Wireless LAN antenna; 15in screen; Windows 2000 (ships with XP Pro); 355x270x45mm; 3.8kg.

Dell: 0870 907 5668
Website: www.dell.co.uk
Price: £2,445 ex VAT

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

→ The Latitude offers far superior portability and a lower price, but at the expense of performance

of the 32MB DDR (double data rate) nVidia Quadro2 Go card. The 15in UXGA screen, capable of a maximum resolution of 1,600x1,200, is their ideal companion, displaying images with pin-sharp clarity.

The processor is a 1.2GHz Mobile Pentium III that, twinned with 512MB of RAM and a 48GB ATA-100, 5,400rpm (revolutions per minute) hard drive, pulled in a WorldBench 4 score of 112, which is up there with the best. There's also a built-in Wireless LAN antenna, network card and combo DVD/CD-RW drive. Plus a range of ports including FireWire, IrDA 1.1 for faster infrared communications and S-Video out.

The lithium-ion battery benefits from Dell's Express Charge technology, which allows you to recharge in about an hour. You can also take your choice of pointing devices as it has both a touchpad and trackpoint. To top it all off, the package includes one thing that may well tip the balance in its favour among business customers – a three-year, next-day, onsite service warranty.

Dell Latitude C400

As we mentioned, the C400 meets an entirely different business need, providing users with a really portable solution, at a much

← The Precision M40 offers full desktop capability in portable form, and even has a top-class warranty



lower cost.

Where the M40 weighs in at just under 4kg, the C400 is a sylphlike 1.63kg, making it a more comfortable option if you always carry your computer with you. The design is attractive, with a matt metallic dark grey finish, and a curvy case.

This cut in weight and price also means a cut in features, and the TFT screen measures just 12.1in, and can display up to a resolution of 1,024x768. You also have to deal with the fact that both floppy and CD-ROM drives are external and, once plugged in, make the unit much less streamlined.

As befits this lower-end notebook, the Pentium III processor is quite a bit slower than the M40 at 866MHz and you only get 256MB of RAM and a 20GB removable hard drive, all of which adds up to a WorldBench 4 score of 94. This isn't the fastest we've seen, but it's more than adequate to complete office tasks on the move. Graphics and audio are onboard, so don't expect top-quality results, but again these should be sufficient. There's a built-in modem and network card, and a basic range of ports, plus one free Type II PC Card slot, which you could use this to beef up functionality.

Verdict

While both these notebooks fall outside of our charts, the M40 due to price and the C400 as it doesn't fit into our categories, they are ideally suited to the business needs they were designed to meet. The M40 is a genuine mobile workstation, the likes of which we haven't seen before, while the C400 is a neat portable solution, backed by the same impressive warranty as the M40. Equally, if what you see here doesn't quite suit, both can be built to order in a range of specifications. ■

Ursula Tolaini

Server

Toshiba Magnia SG20

When you think about servers, the image of a big, beige box generally springs to mind. Toshiba's new Magnia SG20, however, is neither, in fact it looks more like a consumer DVD player than a serious piece of computer kit. The SG20 is also much more than just a pretty face. Inside you'll find the full complement of

network abilities, and it can even accommodate wireless networks.

Measuring just 340x269x69mm and finished in silver, the box offers a sparse interface – all you'll find around the front is a 16-character green LCD, a button to scroll the display and a power switch. Round the back, there are eight private ethernet ports, one public port for broadband internet connections, a modem port, PC Card slot and a parallel port.

Inside you'll find a 566MHz Celeron processor, 64MB of RAM and two 15GB 2.5in hard drives (with a twin 30GB model also available). Access to the drives is convenient, via a removable panel on the top, allowing quick and easy replacement. The dual drive configuration means you can either set one to mirror the other for backup, or use the space, providing additional storage.



The device is configured through a web browser. Setup is simplified by Toshiba's wizard, which walks you through the settings and adds the appropriate links to your desktop.

From the admin screen, you can control the box's functions. Supporting email, intranet, print services, file sharing, backup, firewall, web caching and remote access, the SG20 provides most of the services necessary for a small network. With an 802.11b wireless PC Card, it'd also function as a wireless gateway.

Verdict

Although it seems expensive for the hardware, you're also getting a lot of custom software as well. Linux isn't one of the easiest systems to set up and run, but with Toshiba's solution, everything can be done through a web browser. ■

Will Head

Toshiba Magnia SG20

Specifications: 566MHz Celeron processor; 64MB RAM; 2x 15GB 2.5in hard drives; 8 private, 1 public ethernet ports; modem; parallel port; PC Card slot for wireless card; 16 character display; Linux; 340x269x69mm; 4.95 kg.

Toshiba: 0870 444 8944
Website: www.toshiba.co.uk
Price: £1,099 ex VAT

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

Uninterruptible power supply

APC Back-UPS CS 500

There are few things less exciting than backup; but UPS (uninterruptible power supply) is one. However, it becomes more interesting once you've lost work to a power surge or failure, so perhaps you should think about it before you actually need one.

A UPS contains a (big) battery and an inverter, to turn DC current to AC. You plug the UPS into the mains and your PC and

monitor into the UPS. Should the power fail, then the UPS will switch to battery power, and keep you system running.

The period of grace offered depends on the size of battery and the amount of equipment you've got plugged into it. At the very least it should provide enough time to cleanly shut down your machine, and at the best could see you through a major power cut.

APC's Back-UPS CS 500 is designed for small- to medium-sized networks. It can power up to three devices, plus offering surge protection, to prevent damage due to sudden increases in power.

It communicates with the PC via USB, so you can monitor the battery status in the Control Panel Power applet. The



bundled PowerChute application shuts down you PC in the event of power loss.

We tested the unit with a 300W-rated PC and a 19in monitor. The manual suggested up to nine minutes of support, but we

got about seven and half minutes. Obviously, the amount of time you get depends on how much power you require.

Verdict

If you're running a server, or you just want to protect your hardware then the Back-UPS is an affordable and simple solution. It should provide enough power to see you through minor power cuts and also provide ample time for a safe shutdown. ■

Will Head

APC Back-UPS CS 500

Specifications: output capacity 500VA/300W; input 230V; output 230V; surge protected; alarm; hot swap batteries; lightning, surge and modem protection; unattended shutdown; 91x284x165mm; 6.3kg.

APC: 0870 845 8520
Website: www.apc.com
Price: £85 ex VAT

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