

CD DRIVES AND DVD WRITERS

CD drives		Last month's position	First reviewed	Price (ex VAT)	Warranty	Interface type	Data buffer size	Average access time	Read/write/rewrite speed	CD-R software	Dimensions (width x depth x height)	Packet-writing software
1	Teac CD-W540EK 0870 729 2111 www.globaldirect.co.uk	1	Jul 02	£80	2-year	EIDE	8MB	72ms	48x/40x/12x	Ahead Nero 5.5	146x192x42mm	InCD
2	LG GCE-8400B 0870 607 5544 www.lge.co.uk	2	Jul 02	£79	2-year	EIDE	2MB	100ms	40x/40x/12x	Ahead Nero 5.5	146x185x41mm	InCD
3	CyberDrive 32x12x48x 01256 707 070 www.cyberdrive.de	3	May 02	£62	1-year	EIDE	2MB	100ms	48x/32x/12x	Ahead Nero 5.5	149x207x43mm	InCD
4	La Cie CDRW FireWire 40x12x48 020 7872 8000 www.lacie.co.uk	NEW	Sep 02	£181	1-year	FireWire	4MB	130ms	48x/40x/12x	Easy CD Creator	275x200x59mm	DirectCD
5	AOpen ESW-884 01296 737 957 www.aopen.nl	NEW	Sep 02	£95	1-year	USB 2.0/1.1	2MB	150ms	24x/8x/8x	Ahead Nero 5.0	144x145x21mm	InCD

DVD writers		Last month's position	First reviewed	Price (ex VAT)	Warranty	Drive type	Interface type	Data buffer size	CD write formats	DVD write formats	Average access times	Software
1	Philips DVDRW208K 01756 702 892 www.pcstuff.philips.com	1	May 02	£249	1-year return to base	DVD+RW/CD-RW	EIDE	2MB	CD-R, CD-RW	DVD+RW	120ms	Ahead Nero 5.5, Sonic MyDVD
2	Pioneer DVR-A03 01753 789 500 www.pioneer.co.uk	2	May 02	£330	1-year return to base	DVD-R	EIDE	2MB	CD-R, CD-RW	DVD-R/DVD-RW	180ms	VOB Instant CD, Sonic MyDVD 2.3
3	Panasonic DVD Movie Studio 0845 600 3535 www.panasonic.co.uk/eshop	3	May 02	£399	1-year return to base	DVD-R	EIDE	1MB	N/A	DVD-R/DVD-RAM	65ms	Vertas Primo DVD, Power DVD
4	HP dvd100i 0870 547 4747 www.hp.com	4	May 02	£357	1-year return to base	DVD+RW/CD-RW	EIDE	2MB	CD-R, CD-RW	DVD+RW	125ms	HP MyDVD, HP DLA, HP RecordNow
5	Sony DRU110A 0870 511 1999 www.sony.com	5	May 02	£329	1-year return to base	DVD+RW	EIDE	2MB	CD-R, CD-RW	DVD+RW	120ms	Sonic MyDVD, B's Clip, B's Record Gold

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

CD DRIVES

1 Teac CD-W540EK

Teac's CD-W540EK displays plenty of flair and contains a slew of advanced features designed to deliver a consistently high level of performance, which is why this impressive drive hangs on to its Best buy award for a third month running. Not least of which is the 48-speed read rate with which, even as a straight CD drive, the Teac can hold its own. The problems of extreme spinning speeds are met by a Fine Focus control to keep the laser exactly positioned, while the Intelligent Speed Control assesses each CD individually to determine the highest writing speed possible without risking errors. Write Proof technology and an 8MB data buffer are also useful additions.

In operation these measures worked beautifully, and the Teac copied CD-Rs and CD-RWs without missing a beat. The fast write times eclipse previous drives – just two minutes 17 seconds were required to write 350MB of files to disc in CD-R mode. The Teac's CD-RW performance was almost as good, with it needing only four minutes and 39 seconds at 12-speed.



DVD WRITERS

1 Philips DVDRW208K

Philips' DVDRW208K once again stays at the top of the DVD writer chart, with last month's £81 price drop making it an even better deal. This flexible DVD+RW drive can store 4.7GB of data on a single-sided rewritable disc as well as writing CD-R and CD-RW media.

Performance wise, the Best Buy Philips was the fastest drive when it came to burning DVDs. Copying a 3GB DVD took just 17 minutes 58 seconds and the resulting disc would play in a Philips consumer DVD player. Copying the PC Advisor October 01 cover CD-ROM – a total of 344MB – took four seconds on CD-R and four minutes 53 seconds on CD-RW. Philips has bundled Nero 5.5 for data disc creation and Sonic MyDVD for video authoring, providing everything you need to get going straight away. The main down side of DVD+RW is that it only supports rewritable discs, which are more expensive than single-use writable media.

However, with a speedy performance and a low price, the DVDRW208K keeps its Best Buy award for another month.



CD DRIVES

2 LG GCE-8400B

The LG might lack some of the Teac's finer features, but for solid, affordable 40-speed access the GCE-8400B comes into its own. Rejecting the traditional BurnProof technology, LG has created its own standard for minimising errors, namely SuperLink. Perhaps predictably, the LG doesn't quite match the Teac's star performance, although its times are still significantly ahead of the 24- and 32-speed drives. Some blank media would have been appreciated, but in light of the LG's excellent £79 price tag, it is hard to expect more.



3 CyberDrive 32x12x48x

The third-placed CyberDrive offers fast CD-R and CD-RW burning times, taking just three minutes 10 seconds to write our 336MB mixed test files to a disc and four minutes 56 seconds to transfer a single large file to a CD-R. Rewriting speeds were just as impressive. The 32x12x48x comes with CyberDrive's ExacLink technology, which reduces the chance of buffer underruns and wasting CD-R discs. Once you've combined the CyberDrive's low price tag of £62 with its speedy performance and decent software bundle, you can see why this drive is such a bargain.



4 La Cie CDRW FireWire 40x12x48

With its hefty 2.27kg frame, you're not going to want to carry the La Cie around for long periods of time. Nonetheless, it's easy to connect and disconnect thanks to its high-speed FireWire interface. Speed was good, with 350MB recorded in two minutes 21 seconds, while a spare CD-R and CD-RW and a copy of Easy CD Creator make up the rest of the bundle.



5 AOpen ESW-884

With a slender 400g frame, the ESW-884 is the portable CD-RW choice. The AOpen uses the new USB 2.0 standard and offers backwards compatibility with USB 1.1. You will have to sacrifice speed, though: its eight-speed CD-R/RW capabilities hardly push the limits of technology. Technically, the drive is extremely basic, and there's little besides the JustLink error prevention feature to boost performance.



DVD WRITERS

2 Pioneer DVR-A03

Pioneer has opted for the DVD Forum-approved route with the DVR-A03, which offers DVD-R and DVD-RW capability along with CD-R and CD-RW. DVD-R is a 4.7GB write-once medium offering very good compatibility with consumer DVD players and drives. Copying a 3GB DVD to DVD-R took 36 minutes 28 seconds, and the Philips DVD player had no problems playing the disc. The Pioneer DVR-A03 is a good solution if you want to take advantage of cheaper write-once discs, and require the added flexibility of rewritable and CD burning facilities. Unfortunately, you pay for it in performance.



3 Panasonic DVD Movie Studio

Panasonic bundles more than the other drive manufacturers in its DVD Movie Studio. Inside you'll find the LF-D311 drive, a FireWire card, Pinnacle Studio 7.0 SE, Pinnacle Express, Power VCR, Power DVD and Primo DVD. The LF-D311 drive can write DVD-R as well as DVD-RAM, which is a better solution for storing data, and also offers the largest capacity at 9.4GB for a double-sided disc. Unfortunately, however, there's no CD burning capability and this important omission, along with some slightly below-par performance, lets down an otherwise respectable bundle.



4 HP dvd100i

HP's dvd100i is a DVD+RW drive with CD writing capabilities. Copying our 3GB DVD took 34 minutes 38 seconds, and our consumer DVD player had no problems reading the disc. CD-R burning took three minutes 58 seconds, while CD-RW took four minutes 45 seconds. One thing we did find was the HP was a little fussy about the media it wrote to – failing once on both DVD+RW and CD-RW where other drives had no problems with the discs.



5 Sony DRU110A

In fifth place is the Sony DRU110A DVD+RW drive, which also boasts CD writing facilities. Although adequately functional, the writing software seemed a little clunky compared to more well-known authoring packages. Copying the 3GB DVD took 34 minutes 27 seconds, and the resulting disc played in our consumer DVD player. The DRU110A is a competent drive and delivered reasonable performance, but ultimately it is let down by its software bundle.

