

● PHOTO INKJET PRINTER

HP Photosmart 8250

PRICE £128 (£150 inc VAT)

DELIVERY Free

SUPPLIER www.pcworld.co.uk (code: 750694)

INTERNET www.hp.co.uk

VERDICT Packed with features, the 8250 boasts first-class output at a pocket-friendly price and with a little encouragement can achieve impressive speeds.

HP is making bold claims about the speed of this chunky silver printer, with its US website going as far as blazoning a 'world's fastest' badge across the specs. However, leaving the settings at auto, our standard A4 photo took a fairly pedestrian two minutes, 27 seconds to complete. Nevertheless, switching the driver from auto to 'fast normal' we were able to shave a full minute-and-a-half off the print time. What's more, our judging panel was unable to readily distinguish between the two sets of results.

Job times for 6 x 4in prints ranged from one minute, 42 seconds to one minute, 51 seconds for two- and eight-megapixel pictures respectively. That doesn't sound too bad until you realise 24 prints will still take 45 minutes. Cutting the quality to the bone, 'fast draft' threw out our postcard-sized photos at a rate of one every 11 to 13 seconds, which beats even HP's claim. Results did take a slight hit; they weren't quite as crisp and showed some grain, but we could only say that for sure with the help of a magnifying glass – friends and clients won't send back your snaps in disgust.

Text performance was less impressive, but only by dint of being average. At auto, pages arrived at just over 4ppm with everything set to auto. The results were good, with hard edges and an ink density to rival laser output. It accelerated to 7.5ppm when set to draft,



The Photosmart 8250 can produce a 6 x 4in photo in just 11 seconds.

but the quality took a serious hit, with broken alignment and muddy grey characters that we'd never use for out-of-house letter writing.

But the crucial question for most is photo quality. And in particular, how does the 8250 compare to the Epson R800 (see *A List*, p46)? At first glance, the 8250 has the edge: its colours are warmer, skin tones are realistic and detail capture appears excellent. Closer examination reveals the R800 to still be superior, however. In particular, you can see the grain in the 8250's photos if you start looking for them. We also noticed that reds, which could appear a little orange on the 8250, were purer on the R800.

To 99 per cent of the population, though,

the 8250's results will look fantastic. And it holds other advantages over the R800 too. The 2.5in built-in screen allows you to browse, edit and print photos straight from a media card, with support for CompactFlash, SD, Memory Stick and xD. There's also a nifty hidden photo paper feeder, moved in and out of position whenever the need arises, even if the main tray is full of plain A4.

HP has also changed its printing system. Instead of a colour and photo colour cartridge, complete with their own print heads, the 8250 uses six colour inks, each in a separate well. This means you can replace each of them, and the separate black ink, as they run out; just note that the print head isn't replaced each time you change the ink, so quality will very slowly reduce over time.

Ink costs are reasonable, at 3.3p or 2.5p per page of text (depending on whether you opt for the standard or high-yield black cartridge) and about 16p for each 6 x 4in photo. Add in features such as the extra paper tray, and the Photosmart is even more attractive. If you don't need the absolute quality of the A-Listed Epson R800, the 8250 is a tremendous choice.

NIK RAWLINSON

PC PRO RATINGS

PERFORMANCE	★★★★★
FEATURES & DESIGN	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★

SPECIFICATIONS 4,800 x 1,200dpi six-colour A4 inkjet; 32ppm quoted print speed; USB 2 interface; 100-sheet input tray; drivers for Windows 98 SE onwards. Dimensions: 447 x 385 x 160mm (WDH). Weight: 8.5kg. Part code: Q3470A.

RUNNING COSTS Standard-yield mono ink cartridge (300 pages), £10; cost per page, 3.3p. High-yield mono ink cartridge (800 pages), £20; cost per page, 2.5p. Each colour cartridge (396 pages), £7; cost per A4 page, 5.3p.