Acronis True Image 9
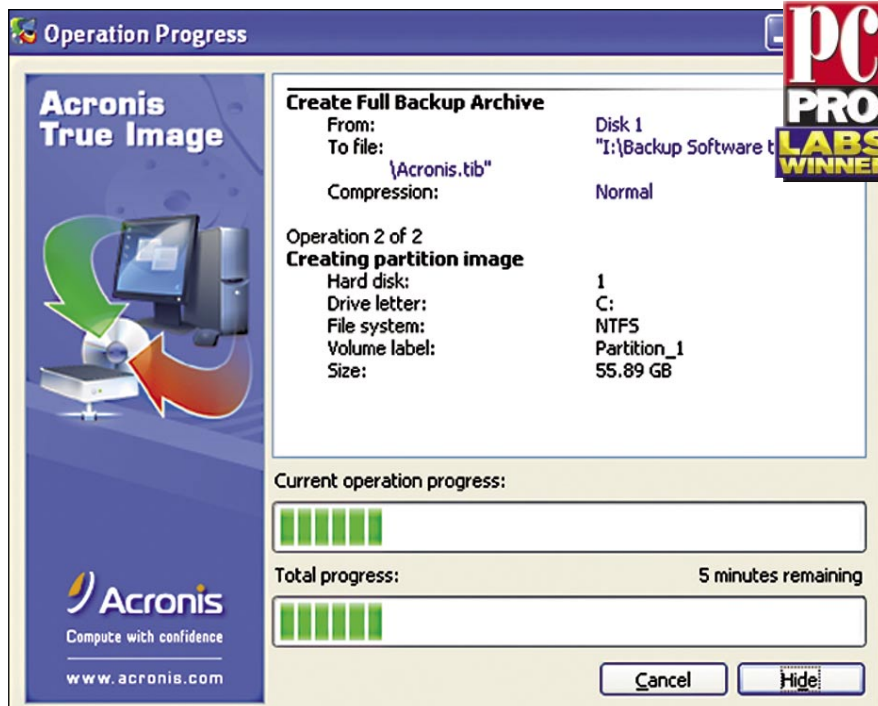
PRICE £30 (£35 inc VAT) **SUPPLIER** www.acronis.com

VERDICT Offering file backup, system restore and some unique features like the Secure Zone, there's no better-value package for backing up a single PC.

True Image offers both incremental and differential backups for maximum flexibility.

The unique Secure Zone will protect your data if you don't have external storage options.

The name 'True Image' is a tad misleading. This software is far more than a disk-imaging product, as it showed when we pitched it head-on against Norton Ghost (*see issue 136, p78*) last month. That showing was enough to win Acronis a Recommended award, but this month it goes still further by defeating specialist backup software in our group test.

The latest version on review here has already shown Norton Ghost how the job should be done and here it fully justifies the Labs Winner accolade as a file backup tool as well.

The interface bears more than a passing resemblance to the Windows XP Control Panel, which, with the help of the numerous wizards, makes it easier to get to grips with what can be complex procedures for creating backups.
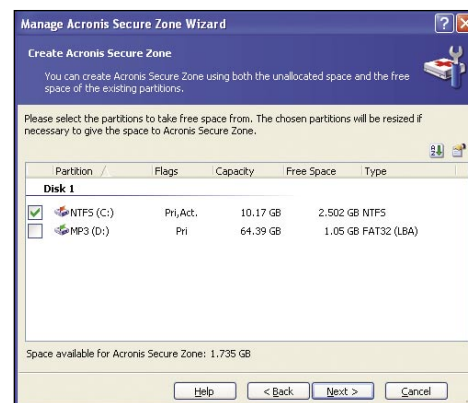
The Backup Wizard offers both incremental and differential options. The standard tweaks are all present: you can apply basic password protection to your backup, for example, and there are three levels of compression to choose from. Less common this month is the option to adjust the backup task's thread priority to prevent it from hogging system resources, as well as support for pre- and post-backup commands to run maintenance tasks.

Our test backup averaged 948MB/min, which puts it among the fastest this month.

Like EMC Dantz Retrospect 7, it can back up open files for minimum disruption of your day. The Backup Task Scheduler worked flawlessly even when we weren't logged in; you can enter the admin account's username and password and run the software as a background service. This is vital in a multi-user environment, as the administrator doesn't have to be logged on to Windows for the scheduled backups to run.

In fact, our only gripe is that True Image is one of just two packages on test (the other being Centered System's Second Copy) to require third-party packet-writing software in order to back up to CD or DVD. Since this software is provided as standard with most PCs, it's a minor issue. As you'd expect, you can back up to local and network hard disks, FireWire and USB devices, magneto-optical, Iomega Zip and Jaz drives without any extra software.

Uniquely this month, True Image also offers another backup location: the Acronis Secure Zone. This is a hidden partition on your hard disk, which stores the backup out of reach of viruses and other malicious software. It guarantees your data will be restorable should your critical operating system files become corrupted, although it obviously won't withstand mechanical disk failure. It's a useful and reliable option for those without

access to external storage, although be warned the software can fully manipulate the size of partitions on your disk.

Activating the Startup Recovery Manager allows you to boot directly into a full Linux-based version of the software by pressing F11, so no recovery disks are needed. The utility will then attempt to restore the system from any local or network image. You can then make use of the Snap Restore feature, which allows you to begin using your system in seconds while the image is still being restored. If you attempt to use an application that hasn't fully restored, it will make that restoration a priority, which means your system can be surprisingly functional in a very short time.

Back in Windows, the Restore Wizard takes you effortlessly through the process of restoring files using a standard folder tree. Full drive images can also be 'plugged' (assigned a temporary drive letter), allowing the contents to be accessed like a normal, albeit read-only, disk.

The wizard approach extends to even the smaller tasks, such as checking an archive for errors. Control over Windows System Restore is integrated into the software. Therefore, you can have full protection with file and folder backup, System Restore on all drives, recovery discs and the startup recovery manager, all through one interface: it's hard to see how backing up your system could be made much simpler.

Once you understand what each menu option is for, Acronis True Image 9 is an easy piece of software to use, and offers power and reliability, which are vital in a backup utility. It has its weaknesses, particularly the lack of any advanced encryption for your archives, but no package this month is perfect. It's competitively priced and, although not the best choice for those with multiple PCs to back up, its comprehensive capabilities make it our pick for individual users.

PCPRO RATINGS

EASE OF USE	★★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★☆
OVERALL	★★★★★☆