



well as more pronounced grain; acceptable, but only for personal use. This A4 copy took a ponderous two minutes, 54 seconds but speeds were more reasonable for text-only documents: normal mode hit 3ppm and draft mode 14ppm.

So despite the HP's excellent printing ability, enthusiasts should consider a dedicated printer and scanner combination. More general users should consider the Canon MP780, which costs £70 less.

DAVE STEVENSON

PC PRO RATINGS

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

SPECIFICATIONS 1,200 x 1,200dpi six-colour A4 inkjet; 48-bit-colour flatbed scanner; 4,800 x 1,200ppi resolution; 305 x 222 maximum document size; 33.6K fax; 100-sheet input tray; USB 2 interface; 10/100 Ethernet and 802.11b/g networking; CompactFlash, Microdrive, SD, xD and Memory Stick card reader; PictBridge and USB flash drive-compatible USB port; 3.6in LCD screen; drivers for Windows 98 onwards. Dimensions: 464 x 395 x 220mm (WDH). Weight: 11.9kg. Part code: Q5863B#ABU.

RUNNING COSTS High-capacity mono cartridge (800 pages), £15; cyan and magenta cartridges (350 6 x 4in prints), £5; light magenta and light cyan cartridges (240 pages), £5; yellow cartridge (170 pages), £5. Overall cost per A4 page: mono, 1.8p; colour, 15.7p; overall cost per 6 x 4in photo, 11.2p.

beauty pageants, but in use it isn't obtrusively loud, and doesn't produce a noticeable amount of ozone, making it a good choice for desktop use. The toner and image drum are in the same unit, making replacing the two most-frequently changed consumables straightforward. A 21,000-page toner costs a hefty £206, but works out at just 0.98p per page (a smaller, 6,000-page toner costs £82, and works out at 1.37p per page).

The T640n is a good printer at a good price, and we're happy to recommend it for small and medium-sized workgroups. However, larger groups should be looking at the likes of the HP 4350dtn, which is much faster and delivers significantly better paper handling.

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PC PRO RATINGS

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

SPECIFICATIONS 1,200 x 1,200dpi A4 mono laser; 35ppm quoted print speed; 400MHz processor; 64MB RAM (maximum 576MB); USB, parallel and 10/100 Ethernet ports; 250-sheet input tray; 100-sheet multipurpose tray; drivers for Windows 98 onwards. Dimensions: 421 x 498 x 345mm (WDH). Weight: 17kg. Part code: 0020G0157.

RUNNING COSTS High-capacity mono cartridge (120,000 pages), £206. Cost per A4 page: 0.98p.

COLOUR FLATBED SCANNER

Epson Perfection 3490 Photo

PRICE £57 (£67 inc VAT)

DELIVERY £6 (£7 inc VAT)

SUPPLIER www.savastore.com (code: 10283136)

INTERNET www.epson.co.uk

VERDICT What more could you want? Superb image quality, amazing speed and a low price mean the 3490 beats all-comers.

The Epson Perfection 2580 ruled the A-List scanner category for four months before being discontinued. We liked its automatic 35mm film feeder, its excellent software package, and above all, its superb image quality.

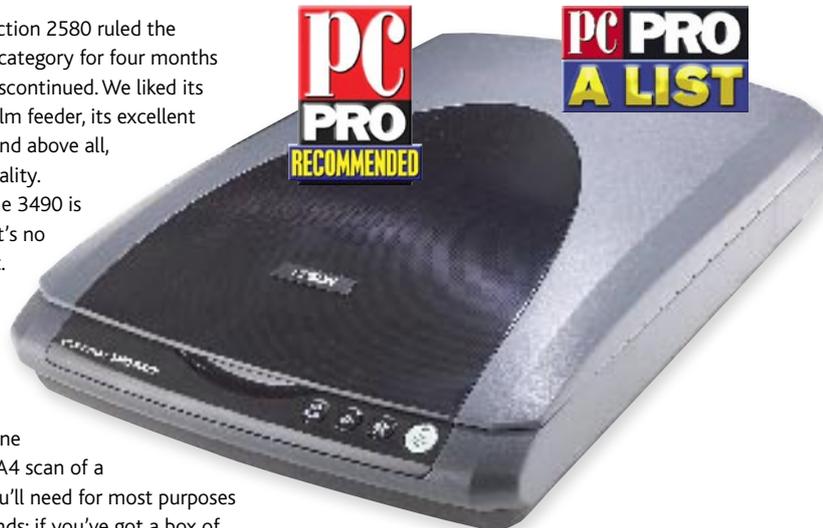
The speed of the 3490 is unchanged, but that's no cause for complaint. At 150ppi, a 6 x 4in print scanned in a stunning six seconds, which is actually faster than taking a preview (nine seconds). A 300ppi A4 scan of a photograph – all you'll need for most purposes – took just 21 seconds: if you've got a box of photos to digitise, the 3490 is for you.

There's no automatic film feeder, but if you'll be scanning plenty of negatives, then the extra £19 for the next model up, the otherwise identical 3590, is well worth it. This will halve the time it takes to scan a strip of four negatives.

Quality is paramount, and the Epson produced some exceptional results. It beats the Canon LiDE 500f (see issue 131, p124), which costs £50 more. There was a pleasing lack of colour casts too, although our one criticism would be that the default mode leaves images over-saturated, so colours look more vivid than they should.

Luckily, Epson supplies some heavy-duty image-correction software to help everyone from total beginners to serious enthusiasts get the best from the 3490's excellent hardware. There's a beginners mode, which is too simple to be of much use, a reasonably powerful home mode, and a professional mode which, while not quite as powerful as the moniker suggests, is the one that offers the most features. The key inclusion is adjustable saturation, which is a straightforward way of dealing with the 3490's only real quality failing. You can also adjust the tone curve and histogram, while colour balance is another useful tool that allows you to generally get your scans right without needing any third-party image software.

The bundled OCR software has been upgraded from ABBYY FineReader 5 to version 6, but it's still the Sprint version, which falls some way short of other OCR packages in terms of features, if not raw accuracy. If all you ever need to scan are straightforward text and image boxes you'll have no cause for



The 3490 will scan photos, documents and even negatives via its built-in transparency adaptor.

complaint, but you'll be frustrated if you're dealing with complex documents that need manual zoning.

On the plus side, FineReader is quick: it took just 16 seconds to scan and recognise a greyscale A4 document at 300dpi, and it recognised a simple graph, table and all the text flawlessly. Scans of monochrome text were excellent, although we noticed some very slightly soft edges, but nothing that would make us hesitate to use the 3490 as a low-volume archive scanner.

But the lacklustre OCR software really is the only major downside to this superb scanner. It's exceptionally fast and, with the most minute of adjustments, offers image quality that will do justice to any photo you scan. The best-in-show TWAIN software and low price mean the 3490 is our pick of the sub-£100 scanners.

DAVE STEVENSON

PC PRO RATINGS

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

SPECIFICATIONS 48-bit colour CCD flatbed scanner; 16-bit greyscale scanning; 3,200 x 6,400ppi optical resolution; 12,800ppi interpolated resolution; USB 2 interface; 224 x 305mm scan area; transparency scanner for 35mm and slides; drivers for Windows 98 onwards. Dimensions: 275 x 419 x 86mm (WDH). Weight: 3.2kg. Part code: B11B177042.