

Barbie, tell me something new

Sure, Barbie talks, and perhaps will make your kids happy too. But is it what your kids really need?



Once upon a time, Barbie dolls were silent. Now it is Barbie's turn to talk, and "play like never before". Mattel Media's *Talk with me! Barbie* CD-ROM comes with a Barbie doll, her little chair and 'workstation', a User Guide and a 9-pin plug that has to be connected to the serial port in your PC.

You do not need the manual to tell you that installing Barbie would require "the help of an adult". But what the manual should mention and does not, is that you might have to navigate through the CD-ROM yourself to program Barbie to talk for your kid.

Though the installation forces you into a 256-colour mode, the interface is

refreshingly child-friendly, with huge flowers, butterflies and fonts to match the likes of fairy tale books. Perhaps the only noteworthy feature of this CD.

When you 'help' your kid fill in details like name, date of birth, number of brothers and sisters, colour of eyes and hair etc, in the 'Talk about Me' section, you are not likely to find an Indian name among the hundreds listed. So, unless your daughter is named Cereza, Jenny, or Zephyr, brace yourself to handle her tantrum. Or log on to the Mattel Media site, from where you can get a custom name posted to you.

In the 'What would you like to talk about today?' menu, you can custom-design Barbie's party dress, choose her friends (or date), decorate her playhouse, or even be part of a fire-rescue team. Surely, our kids deserve something more intelligent.

Barbie is a great doll, as long as she does not open her mouth. Save your money for a short vacation with your family instead.

System requirements

Windows (95/3.1), Multimedia PC 486/66 MHz or higher; 2x CD-ROM drive

RADHIKA NAIR

Rating: **HHH**

Price: Rs 3,425
Developers: Mattel Media
Distributor: Microware Computer Services
Phone: 022-8727446 Fax: 022-8727446

Darn! rather than wOw!

WOW claims to be a power guide to effective communication and comprises a multimedia reference library of eight "most useful and interesting" books. The Demo includes an encouraging voice-over, and the TBW (Towards Better Writing) module attempts to guide you through the various stages of preparing an article. The suggestions are not always ideal—for the simple and effective "I am happy", wOw suggests the ludicrous "I am

feeling swell". The search function is good, but consistency and accuracy will not wOw you. Though good in concept, the CD is unfortunately a careless compilation of unchecked (and often obsolete) facts.

HARIKRISHNAN MENON

Rating: **HH**

Price: Rs 1,290
Developer: Koncept Software Consultants
Phone: 020-486187

Digital Street Atlas of Bangalore, Price: Rs 2,500

Bangalore's maze of streets and alleys need



not fox you any longer. This multimedia title from Street Atlas Company helps you pinpoint streets, locations and important buildings. The interface is easy to use, but panning and zooming through the six levels of magnification is a little slow. The 'path' enables you to measure distances between places, and the distance is updated as you progress. The Atlas can also read and display readings from Global Positioning System devices.

Phone: 080-2285995 Fax: 080-5514018

Rating: **HHH**

Computer Tutor—Word,

Price: Rs 749

Pentafour's Computer Based Tutorial



(CBT) on Microsoft Office includes seven modules in four CDs. The Word CBT walks the novice through an easy, interactive set of demos and explanations, from the basics of word-processing to working with templates and creating macros. You can even bookmark or save your progress. As a bonus, MS Binder, MS Outlook and MS PhotoEditor are also covered as a bonus.

Phone: 022-6414725-28 Fax: 022-6433887

Rating: **HHH**

Computer Tutor—PowerPoint, Price Rs 749



Another one from Pentafour, this PowerPoint CBT is very intuitive, and teaches how to create professional-looking presentations in a gradual, interactive way. All the relevant topics are covered, right from the basics to templates to creating multimedia effects and the Web. You can save your progress and carry on from where you left off.

Phone: 040-3322947 Fax: 040-3316223