



Featured this month: a digital camera, 5X DVD drive and SB Live! Value soundcard

AGFA ePhoto 1280 Say Cheese...



The feature-rich Agfa ePhoto 1280 is a digital camera that will definitely click with home users and amateurs, who are looking for a camera that can also provide semi-professional digital photography.

The ergonomically-built ePhoto houses an integrated flash, a 1.2-million pixel CCD, and features intelligence control. The lens system is integrated into a swivel barrel, the other end of which is attached to a sharp 2-inch TFT LCD screen. This lens mechanism can rotate up to 280 degrees, enabling you to capture pictures at the most difficult and challenging angles.

The focal length of the 3x zoom lens ranges from 38 to 114 mm, which makes it ideal for close-up shots and telephoto photography as well. To ensure that you do not fumble for the menu options in the middle of your photo-shoot, the shutter release, zoom and the easy-to-use thumbwheel-based menu buttons are located near the LCD screen. The thumbwheel menu also allows access to the many features—aperture control, manual focussing, self timer, flash and lighting modes, and image resolutions.

There are two basic modes of operation—recording and playback of images—which are controlled by a rotary switch. However, this switch obstructs the grip of

the camera and is prone to being accidentally switched to the 'off' position. In the playback mode, all images can be viewed on the LCD screen either individually or as a thumbnails (where nine photos are displayed simultaneously).

The images are stored in the universal JPEG format on a 4 MB (upgradable to 8 MB) flash RAM card. The number of pictures you can store in the camera varies upon the resolution you choose. For example, at the maximum resolution of 1280 x 960 and 24-bit

colour, the card can hold six pictures but at a resolution of 640 x 480 and at a similar colour depth, up to 60 photos can be captured.

The bundled software (AGFA Photo-Wise, Live Picture Photo Vista and Live Picture LivePix SE) provides an interface to view and download images from the camera through the supplied serial port adapter. Also provided are four AA-sized NiMH rechargeable batteries and a battery charger.

The Agfa ePhoto requires a minimum configuration of a 486 running Windows 95/NT with 16 MB of RAM and a serial port, or a Macintosh running system 7.0 or higher. Rich features, sharp images, extreme simplicity of use and powerful bundled software make the ePhoto picture perfect.

VERDICT **A+**

- Excellent picture quality, software
- Prone to accidental switching of f

CCD	1.2 million pixels
Battery	AA x 2 NiMH
Zoom	3x
Price:	Rs 43,000
Contact:	Manoj Trading
Phone:	022-2083541
Fax:	022-2064458

GenX 500

Ergonomic design, a contoured grip and four configurable buttons give this joystick a very futuristic look. The joystick also features a point-of-view 'hat' for use in flight simulations. Installation is simple, and the firm and responsive feel makes the joystick convenient during extended use.

A slider at the base of the joystick can be configured as a throttle control in racing and aircraft simulations. The driver is included on the accompanying 1.44-MB disk and the configuration is affected through the joystick configuration in the Control Panel.

Verdict: A
Contact: J S Equipment
Price: Rs 2,200
Phone: 022-4940685
Fax: 022-4940685

POP Presentation Remote Control

This remote control for presentations is a powerful substitute for your pointing device. Consisting of an infrared remote control unit and sensor that connects to a standard serial port, the Control has 35 buttons to launch applications, or use special effects and presentation aids such as highlights, spotlights, zoom, laser beam, lens, light bar, circle and rectangle. All these effects are created with the help of the presenter Configuration software. The manual is very comprehensive and provides detailed explanations of all the features. However, it is very highly priced.

Verdict: B+
Price: Rs 9,950
Contact: VGA Systems
Phone: 022-6464236
Fax: 022-6053336

Creative Encore 5X DVDs

A winner, once again



With its next generation DVD-ROM drive, Creative has managed to repeat its outstanding performance by producing a successor to the Creative Encore 2X.

The packaging and the software bundled with Encore 5X are no different from those bundled with the previous version. The Dxr2 card that is supplied with the kit facilitates 'resolution quadrupling'—a process that enhances video quality of the DVD signal and also features scaling and filtering technology to provide an exceptionally clean picture.

The cables include those for CD audio, dual connector audio cable, VGA

loopback cable for connecting the display card to the Dxr2 card, TV-out and IDE data cable. The manual elaborates step-by-step instructions for installing the drive as well as interfacing it with other components such as multiple speaker systems and the soundcard. The drive was automatically detected upon startup and gave no problem in loading the appropriate drivers.

Among the many features incorporated into this drive are support for 17 GB DVD disks, 5x DVD data transfer speeds (6,760 KBps), 32x CD-ROM data transfer, composite and S-Video outputs for display on to television. Dolby Digital AC-3 output and compatibility with the CD-R, CD-RW, DVD-R, Photo CD and Video CD formats make this drive a good buy.

The data transfer rate and access time of the drive was measured along with the drive's performance in error correction. The test system consisted of a PII 350 with a 440BX mainboard and 128 MB of 100 MHz SDRAM. The drive performed well in the speed test, managing an average

data transfer rate of 1659.7 KBps and an access time of 103.9 ms. For the error correction test, a standard test CD with abrasions on the read surface was used. Here, the drive showed acceptable error correction with six read errors during the entire test. The data transfer rate prior to the errors was recorded at 1673.4 KBps while it slowed down to 300.3 KBps after encountering the errors.

The bundled software configures the system for DVD playback and allows the user to navigate through a DVD. The playback on this drive is extremely sharp and when used in conjunction with a soundcard like the SB Live!, the effect is very impressive.

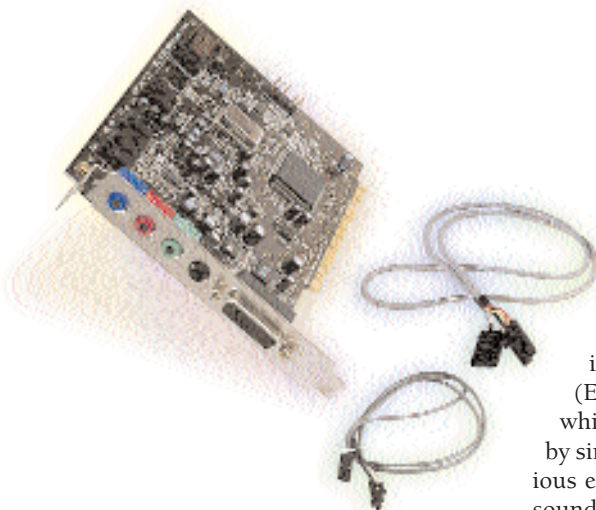
VERDICT **A+**

- ◆ Unparalleled video playback, Dolby support
- ◆ Unreliable error correction

Price: Rs 13,000
 Transfer rate [DVD]: 6760 KBps
 Compatibility: CD-R, CD-RW, VCD
 Contact: Urja Communications
 Phone: 022-2048179
 Fax: 022-2826390

Creative SB Live! Value

A sound bargain



Like its more expensive counterpart (SB Live!), the SB Live! Value offers outstanding performance in audio playback and processing power, though some of the more exotic features are absent. The most conspicuous is the absence of the SPDIF card.

The primary component on this card is the EMU10K1 processor, which carries out the intensive real-time audio processing and boasts of a processing power equivalent to that of a Pentium 133. With this kind of power at its disposal, effects like chorus, flanging and reverb can be applied in real time to any audio data.

Another important technology incorporated in this card is EAX (Environmental Audio Extensions) which creates a truly 'live' experience by simulating the acoustic effects of various environments when applied to any sound. With EAX you can, for example, hear your favourite CD in pre-stored environments like an auditorium, a church or even a sewer pipe!

Add two more speakers and this card can implement true four-point surround sound that can be truly enjoyed while playing games (like *Unreal*) that support

EAX. MIDI playback is enhanced due to the availability of wavetable samples ranging from 2 MB to 8 MB and with support for 256-voice simultaneous playback. All sounds are processed at 32 bits and at a sampling rate of 48 KHz. This even surpasses CD quality and approaches that of studio quality sound.

The card features numerous audio input connectors, through which devices like a DVD-ROM drive, CD audio, MIDI and a telephone answering machine can be connected. Unparalleled audio playback and a host of features make this card ideal for the audiophile.

VERDICT **A**

- ◆ Very high quality audio playback, reasonably priced
- ◆ Lacks a connector for DVD

Sampling rate: 48 KHz
 Digital Voice: 256 voice (Polyphony)
 Sound Processor: EMU10K1
 Price: Rs 7,000
 Contact: Urja Communications
 Phone: 022-2048179
 Fax: 022-2826390

Daredevil Racing Kit

Licence to fun



Racing is your passion, and the keyboard and mouse do not provide the excitement you crave. Try the Daredevil Racing Kit, which consists of a steering wheel and foot pedals. Windows drivers are included on the accompanying floppy.

The steering wheel is connected to the foot pedal unit, which in turn is connect-

ed to the game port of your computer. A switch identifies the gaming system as a racing or a flight simulator controller. Configuring and calibrating the device is effortless. We used the *Hardcore 4x4* game to test the system. Initially, the control was a little too sensitive, but after calibrating and adjusting the response of the steering wheel and pedals, the control was realistic and comfortable.

Ten buttons, all of which can be configured, are located on the steering device. The steering wheel is analogous to a joystick and controls the left-right (X-axis) motion, while the foot pedals control the accelerate-decelerate (Y-axis) functions.

The steering wheel has a very firm feel and the accelerate/decelerate functions can also be configured using the buttons on the steering wheel.

The foot pedals are quite responsive. The manufacturers have included a gearshift device next to the steering wheel. Clamps have been provided to anchor the steering wheel to a tabletop or any flat surface.

VERDICT **A**

- Good control, easy setup
- Expensive

Price: Rs 6,500
Contact: J S Equipment
Phone: 022-494 0685
Fax: 022-4940685

ACER AcerView 54e

Average performance, average price



This 15-inch monitor from Acer features most of the common screen control features like pincushioning, vertical and horizontal sizing and raster displacement and trapezoidal correction. However, a

built-in degauss feature is absent.

There was no troubleshooting section in the manual, but features, specifications and modes of operation were clearly listed. The AcerView supports a maximum horizontal frequency of 54 KHz and a maximum vertical refresh rate of 120 Hz. The video bandwidth supported is 65 MHz.

In the convergence test, the monitor displayed good characteristics with no distortion. However, in the signal on/off switching test, the raster showed very heavy pumping and an unusual black band was noticed moving upwards during the test. The appearance of the display

in standard operation was acceptable at the operating resolution of 1024 x 768 and 60 Hz.

For applications like spreadsheets and word processing, this monitor is an acceptable choice but it loses out to others in its range that offer a better level of performance and features.

VERDICT **B**

- Easy screen control
- No built-in degaussing

Price: Rs 9,500
Contact: Roop Electronics
Phone: 022-3887536
Fax: 022-3856772

AGFA DuoScan T1200

A keen eye for detail



This A4 scanner targeted at professionals, uses AGFA's Twin Plate technology and features support for A4 reflective media, as well as transparencies. The maximum scanning resolution for colour

and greyscale images is 2400dpi and for line art, it is 3600dpi. It uses single-pass technology and the scanning unit consists of 5000 scanning elements. Also Supplied are 35 mm, 6 cm x 6 cm and 4- x 6-inch transparency adapters.

Windows 95 detected the scanner upon startup and the drivers were loaded very easily from the accompanying CD-ROM. The IT8 card was used to measure the differences recognised by the scanner in scanning specific regions of the card like the dark upper left region and the white region in the central area of the

card. The dark region showed a standard deviation of 4.6 while the white region did not respond very accurately, showing a standard deviation of 1.37.

This scanner is an excellent choice for quality conscious pre-press professionals.

VERDICT **A+**

- Professional quality, good bundled software
- Expensive

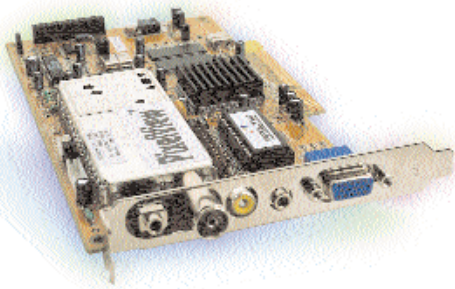
Price: Rs 76,000
Contact: Manoj Traders
Phone: 022-2083541

hardware

Test

PixelView 3D AGP Combo TV

Good for TV, bad for 3D...



Want to watch your favourite television programs on your computer? Grab the 3D AGP Combo TV. With this card, PixelView, the manufacturers of TV tuner cards, have gone a step further. The card is based upon the Cirrus Logic CL-5465A+ graphics chip that provides basic 3D acceleration with support for features like texture mapping, bilinear filtering, Z-buffering, Alpha blending, fog and transparency. The 4 MB on-board RDRAM supports resolutions of up to 1280 x 1024 at 24-bit colour. However, PixelView is a

slow 3D accelerator. Though it correctly reproduces all 3D functions, the frame rates are very low. In the gaming test, with all the functions enabled, the card logged only 8 fps at 800 x 600 in *Turok*. Drivers for Windows 3.x, Windows 9x and Windows NT are provided. The graphics systems supported include MS Direct3D, DirectDraw and AutoCAD. The manufacturers could have considered including OpenGL drivers as most present day 3D games use this standard.

The card was detected on startup and the drivers loaded without any problems. The accompanying manual details the procedures for configuring and setting all features. The TVTap software is small but powerful and allows you to adjust TV playback settings like brightness, contrast, video source, frame capturing and channel previewing.

Navigation through this software is facilitated by an intuitive remote control interface enabling you to flip between channels and access features like window size and menu control with the click of a button.

The Remote Master software controls the operation of the supplied remote control. This controller is interfaced through a sensor connected to a standard serial port. Setup for the remote controller is simple and all features of the TVTap software can be accessed through it.

Another interesting feature is the FM tuner—you can listen to both mono and stereo FM transmission using a special software that can change up to 12 FM stations and has features like search, fine-tuning, volume and audio control.

This excellent TV tuner decoder is simple to install and has good features. Sadly, it does not do well as a 3D accelerator.

VERDICT **A**

- ♦ Feature rich, easy to set up
- Poor 3D performance

Graphics processor: CL-5465A+
Interface: AGP
Onboard RAM: 4 MB RAM
Price: Rs 4,950
Contact: Rashi Peripherals
Phone: 022-8235360
Fax: 022-8326637

ACi Kudos

Kudos to the Kudos



With features that surpass an average desktop computer, this PII 266-based notebook carries 64 MB of SDRAM, a 4 GB IDE HDD and an ATi Rage Pro Lite 2X AGP graphics card with 4 MB of graphics RAM.

The 12.1-inch active matrix TFT display is sharp and displays fast-moving images without any blurring. This notebook features a 440BX motherboard that

integrates an ESS Maestro sound system, while the speakers provide average sound.

Numerous external ports—USB, parallel, serial and PS/2—are available for interfacing devices. Specially impressive are the S-Video and composite video outputs for displaying the signal on television or for recording on an external VCR. There is also a 120-pin connector that is used on a port replicator.

IrDA compliance is provided by the integrated infrared port that supports a maximum data transfer rate of 115.2 Kbps. The built-in 56K modem is optional. Two Type II slots or one Type III PCMCIA slot can take compliant devices like LAN cards and modems. Kudos has both a 1.44 MB floppy drive and a 24X TEAC CD-ROM drive. A responsive two-button touchpad facilitates smooth control of the pointer and the full-sized keyboard facilitates easy typing.

For the test, we used the Ziff-Davis Business WinBench suite that measures

the performance of the system in word processing, spreadsheets and database applications. In the Disk WinMark, it achieved a data transfer rate of 1.41 MBps. In the Business Graphics WinMark and CPUMark32, it scored an index of 96.4 and 681, respectively.

The only noticeable negative aspect was the CD-ROM drive, which exhibited an excessive vibration. This, however, did not affect the performance of the drive.

Soon a PII 300 processor will be standard, at the same price.

VERDICT **A+**

- ♦ Very fast, feature packed
- CD-ROM drive vibrates when accessed

Processor: PII 266
RAM: 64 MB SDRAM
Hard Disk: 4 GB IDE
Screen: 12.1-inch TFT
Price: Rs 109,990
Contact: ACi-India
Phone: 022-2821502
Fax: 022-2814360