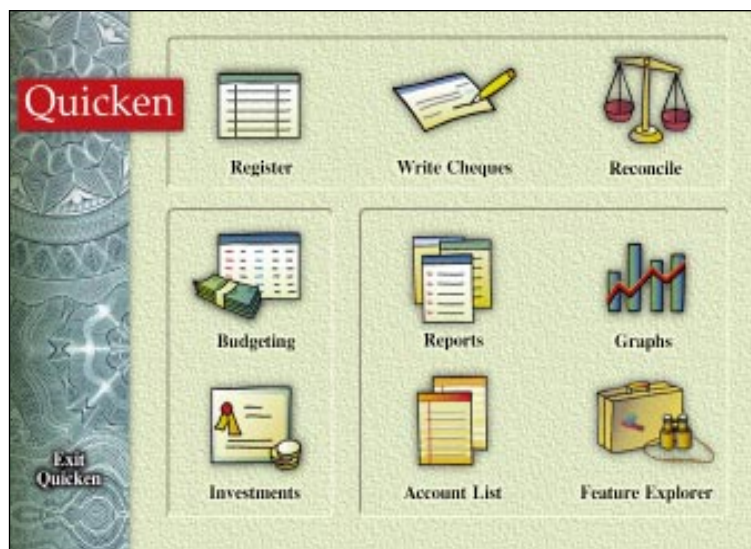


Among the new products under review are: CorelOffice (the reincarnation of the PerfectOffice software suite), two leading integrated packages, a no-film camera to take digital pictures, a major graphics pack, two Pentium PCs and a 'Pentium killer'



This latest version of an old favourite has several enhancements aimed at the novice user. For example, its new user setup procedure takes the form of a simple interview that creates your first bank account and income and expense categories. After that, the simplest way to navigate through Quicken 5's extensive features is by using the central-access window, Homebase, which has had a facelift.

A significant new feature is Quicktabs: every time you open a new window, such as an account register, report or graph, a tab is added on the left of the screen. This means you can switch between windows quickly, working with a single screen and keeping clutter to a minimum. After a while you'll probably prefer to switch off Quicktabs so you can view multiple windows simultaneously.

Quicken 5 can manage current, deposit, cash, credit, building-society, investment, asset and liability accounts – and transferring money between them is simple. Most account maintenance is done in the transaction register, where everything needed to complete an entry quickly is now conveniently positioned. Productivity aids for reducing the effort of data entry are

essentially unchanged, including memorised payees and categories.

Reports and graphs are even better in this latest version. Easy-answer provides fast responses to questions such as: 'How much did I spend on my house last year?' Enhancements to the printing and preview capabilities make it easier to edit fonts and arrange for any width of report to fit on one page.

Quicken 5 offers plenty of help to the newcomer. Quicktours are friendly, graphical tutorials covering a range of financial activities, such as 'Organising your finances'. Easy-step Guides cover basic tasks and more advanced features like tracking mortgages and investments. All the usual on-screen help is there too, such as Quicktips and hypertext-based user guides. There are also more of the 'talking tutors', now renamed Video Quicktours.

One of the two extra programs in the Deluxe version is Quickinvoice, which might appeal to small business users (for simple invoicing and receivables). The second, Home Inventory, is of interest to those in the market for home insurance. You enter each of your household items, with resale value and replacement cost, and can display the items grouped by location or category. This lets you see the types of objects in each room and their total worth.

Quicken 5 Deluxe for Windows

Terry Pinnell

FREE FACTS 121

Combines the latest version of the Quicken personal finance manager with home inventory and simple invoicing programs.

- Home Inventory for property analysis and insurance
- QuickInvoice for invoices and basic accounts receivable
- Investment portfolio tracking
- Forecasting
- Free unlimited technical support

Unless you have a real need for a home inventory or simple business invoicing, this Deluxe version is not such good value as the basic Quicken 5 for Windows, which is an excellent program.

- Quicken 5 Deluxe for Windows CD: £64.95 (incl VAT); Quicken 5 for Windows: £39.95 (incl VAT)
- Intuit: 0181 990 5500

Quicken 5 Deluxe for Windows

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ease of use | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Features | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Documentation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Value for money | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Minimum requirements: 486, 8Mb of Ram, 18Mb of hard disk space, CD-Rom drive, Windows 3.1 or Windows 95.

AST Bravo LC P/100

Dominic Bucknall

FREE FACTS 122

A mid-range Pentium PC intended mainly for corporate use, featuring a shared-memory design which reduces the component count and the overall cost.

- 100MHz Pentium processor
- 256Kb secondary asynchronous cache
- 16Mb of EDO Ram
- 1.2Gb EIDE hard disk
- SiS 6205 graphics chip with 1Mb or 2Mb of shared memory allocation
- Choice of monitors

Relatively affordable for a big-name system, and performance is largely unaffected by its memory-sharing design because of the 16Mb of standard Ram. The Bravo should be well received by larger companies buying in bulk, but domestic users might want multimedia features and are likely to get a better overall deal from a smaller supplier.

- £1,351.25 (estimated price incl VAT for system unit only); suggested monitor: ASTVision 7L: £640.38 (incl VAT)
- AST: 0181 232 5000

AST Bravo LC P/100

| Features | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Build quality | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Value for money | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |



The Bravo LC series is AST's entry-level business range.

It's aimed at what the company sees as the price-sensitive end of the business desktop market, which can include small businesses, but mainly seems to mean corporates looking to kit out entire departments with cheap networked PCs.

There are three versions available, based on 100MHz, 133MHz or 166MHz Pentium processors, fitted with a minimum 8Mb of Ram and a choice of either 635Mb or 1.2Gb hard disks. The machine we reviewed came with 16Mb of EDO Ram, 256Kb of standard asynchronous secondary cache and a 1.2Gb hard disk, but in keeping with its intended use there was no sound card or CD-Rom drive. The system is presented in a slim, fairly unassuming desktop case, just thick enough to add two extra 5.25in drives to a pair of front-opening bays.

AST supplies a Microsoft mouse, and a lightweight keyboard, which feels reasonably positive and comfortable, even if the long key travel takes a bit of getting used to. We also thought the unit's cooling fan was rather too noisy for comfort.

A monitor isn't included in the base price, and several sizes are available from AST as options. We were sent the 17in 7L model, which would add considerably to the overall cost. It's a flat-screen monitor with digital controls which produce an on-screen menu to help you select the various functions. There are plenty of these, including pin-cushion, trapezoidal and parallelogram correction, rotation and individual gun intensity adjustments as well as several preset colour temperatures to choose from. Unfortunately, the image suffered from

general moiré distortion (the interference pattern generated by a misalignment of the aperture grille with the phosphor dot pattern on the screen itself) and this degraded fine detail. Coupled with the small 15.25in image diagonal, it made the screen a little hard to read at 1,024x768 resolution.

Internally the Bravo was very tidy, even though we were sent a pre-production sample. The motherboard is manufactured by SiS and equipped with an integrated SiS 6205 graphics accelerator, which uses a portion of main memory rather than having any of its own. By default it gets 1Mb, but you can increase this to 2Mb for more colours at high resolutions by making a change in the Bios setup. This arrangement works well enough when there's 16Mb of Ram available, but having only 8Mb can slow Windows performance down.

The memory sockets are easily accessible and two of them are vacant, so further upgrades won't be a problem. Because the motherboard will support Pentium chips running at up to 200MHz, the system could be given a comprehensive upgrade in the future.

The height of the case doesn't allow a great deal of room for add-in cards, but there are two 16-bit Isa slots and one PCI (all full-length) on one side of a riser board; and one more of each type on the other side of the riser board, although both of these are half-length.

Altogether, the new Bravo LC achieves what it sets out to, which is to provide mainly corporate customers with a straightforward, well-built network workstation without any unnecessary bits and bobs tacked on to increase the price.



With this camera you can take digital pictures with the same ease as you take snapshots with an ordinary film camera. The pictures are stored in the camera's 1Mb of memory and can be downloaded into your PC using a cable that plugs into any one of your computer's serial ports.

Once the pictures are in your PC they can be edited using the software provided or any graphics program. The pictures are stored in a special, highly-compressed Kodak Digital Camera format, but can be converted to any of the common image graphics types used by Windows.

If you have a dye-sublimation printer (which is unlikely, unless you work professionally with graphics) you can produce snapshot-sized prints that will be indistinguishable from ordinary photos. A conventional inkjet printer will give acceptable results on glossy paper, but the real use for these digitised pictures is in other software on your computer.

With the boom in multimedia, many users want to use pictures in presentations, in word-processed and desktop-published documents, in databases and for posting on the Internet. The clip-art provided with many programs is fine, but with your own digital images you can really get down to some serious business. Imagine the increased usefulness of a stock or parts database in which each item is illustrated, rather than merely described.

Taking pictures is foolproof. Sliding open the lens cover turns the camera on. Point the camera at the subject, depress the button half-way and the lens focuses automatically. Depress the button fully and the picture is taken, with the flash firing automatically if light is

poor. The only other picture-taking controls are two buttons used to set the range of the 3x zoom lens.

The pictures you take are stored in the camera's internal flash Ram, so they are safe even if you remove the batteries. When you've loaded the pictures into your PC you erase the Ram and start again. This is a safe and easy way of working, but with flash Ram it's all or nothing: you cannot select which pictures to erase – you have to blank them all.

There are three qualities of picture you can take, described by Kodak as good, better and best. On the lowest setting (good) about 22 pictures will fit into memory, while the middle setting (better) takes only 11.

The highest quality (best) uses even more Ram per picture, so you can only take seven pictures in this mode unless you increase the memory by fitting a standard PCMCIA memory card.

In practice, the best setting is the middle one, which offers a good compromise between storage and picture quality. There's really not much difference between the two higher qualities but, as the two pictures of the black Mini show, there is a noticeable improvement between the lowest setting (the shot on the left) and the middle setting.

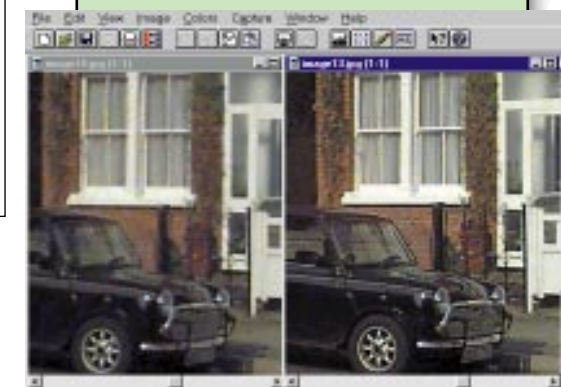
Although we are extremely impressed with how easy the DC50 is to use, and very pleased with the results, there are two drawbacks. The first is the lack of manuals: all the documentation is provided on disk and it has to be read on screen. The second problem is that there is no way of seeing how well your pictures have come out until you download them into a PC. We feel that, at this price, you should get an LCD viewer built into the camera.

Kodak DC50 Digital Camera

Paul Wardley

FREE FACTS 123

A camera with no film that can take up to 500 full-colour digital pictures on one set of batteries.



- Zoom lens (3x), built-in flash, auto-focus
- Up to 500 pictures from four AA batteries
- Memory capacity of 1Mb (stores up to 22 pictures)
- PCMCIA memory card slot for increased storage
- Pictures taken in 24-bit colour
- Resolution: 756x504 pixels
- Downloading software and cable provided
- Close-up (20in) and telephoto modes
- Self-timer

This versatile and extremely portable digital camera scores on ease of use and quality of results, but has no means of viewing pictures until you get back to base – apart from the extremely inconvenient option of taking a notebook computer with you.

- £998.75 (street price incl VAT)
- Kodak: 01442 61122

Kodak DC50 Digital Camera

| Features | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ease of use | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Value for money | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Requirements: 386 PC or better; 6Mb of Ram; Windows 3.1 or above. Software for Apple Mac also provided.

MS Works and Bookshelf 95 for Windows 95

Terry Pinnell

FREE FACTS 124

The latest version of Works has new easy-to-use features across its five integrated applications, and Bookshelf 95 complements it with seven reference sources.

- Introductory tutorial
- Single-level undo
- OLE 2.0 support
- WordArt for special text effects
- Database supports form design, sorting and filtering
- Communications module to contact online services
- Bookshelf 95 provides seven reference sources

Generously featured for such an inexpensive package, and easy to learn and use, Works should be high on your list if you're looking for an integrated package to run under Windows 95 – with Bookshelf 95 as an attractive bundled extra.

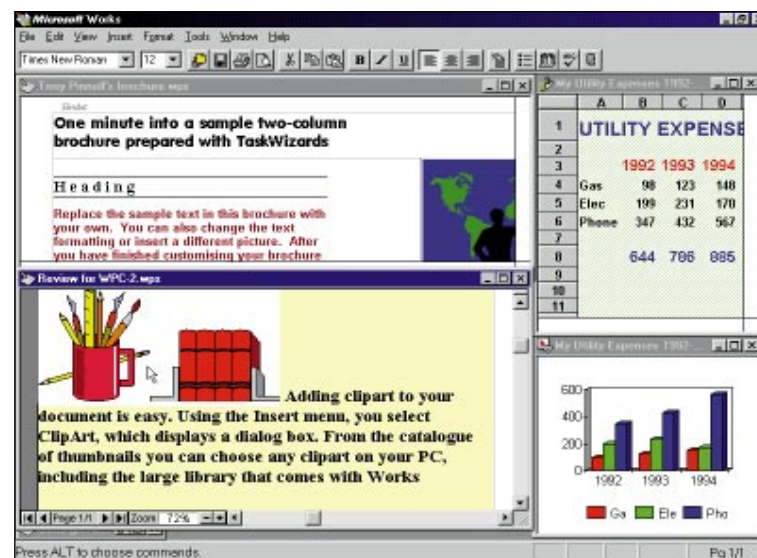
- £99: Works with Bookshelf (street price incl VAT); £79: Works without Bookshelf; £69: Bookshelf without Works.

- Microsoft: 0345 002000

MS Works for Windows 95

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Features | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ease of use | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Value for money | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Minimum requirements: 386 DX/25; 6Mb of Ram (8Mb recommended); 25Mb of hard disk space; CD-Rom and sound board; SVGA 256-colour monitor.



As part from the new features inherent in Windows 95 itself, this latest 32-bit version of Works has many improvements of its own across its five application modules: word processor, spreadsheet, database manager, drawing tools, and communications. One is evident every time you start Works or open a new file, when you get the Works Task Launcher. This lets you choose from an impressive set of nearly forty Taskwizards, putting the focus on what you're trying to create, rather than the tool used.

There's wizardry for just about any sort of document you need for home, school, club or small business. Your chosen Wizard prompts for further input, sometimes merely a few options, sometimes more extensive, but you can always cut to the end.

Despite Works' non-standard on-line help system, it's comprehensive and easy to use. Help is displayed to the right of your document, showing information relevant to the work you're currently doing. Select from a list of tasks, and you're prompted on exactly what to do. When confidence grows, or if you don't want to sacrifice document space, you can just shrink the Help window to an icon or hide it completely. It's inflexible in not letting you copy help text to the clipboard though.

Overall, the word processor is excellent – bristling with enough features to satisfy all but the most ambitious user. The familiar repertoire of facilities is available, such as spell-checker, thesaurus, borders, shading, and so on. But you also get several more powerful facilities. You can insert tables, choosing from nearly thirty predefined types, take a word count of a selected section, and use Easy Text to enter abbreviations for fast, accurate input of any information that you type frequently.

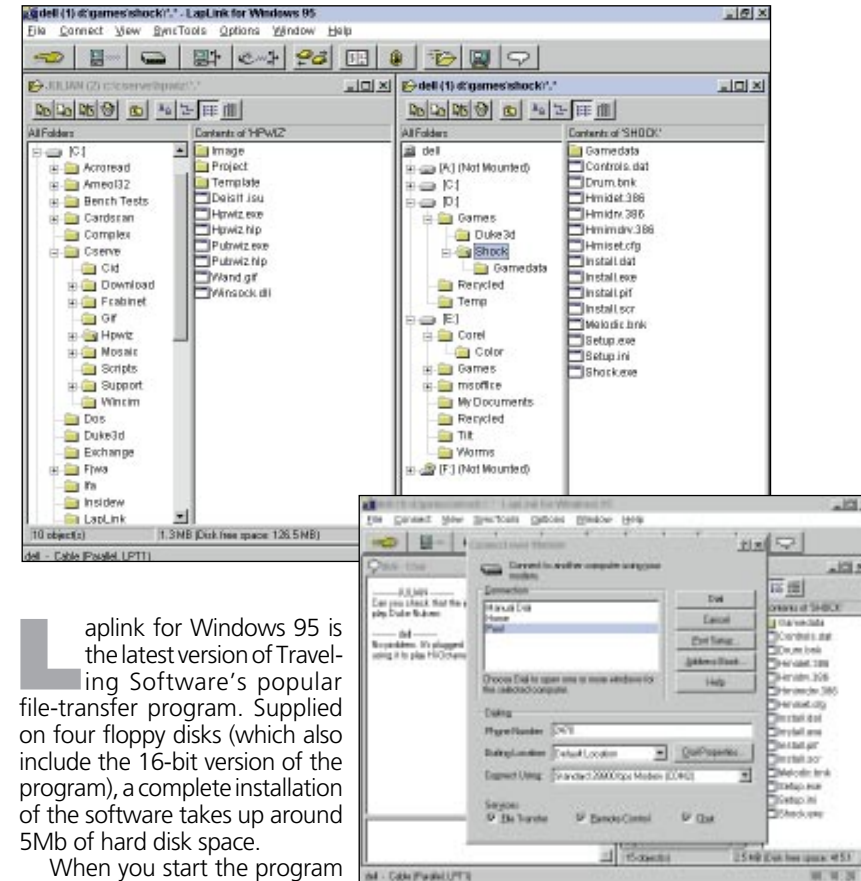
One of the most attractive of these powerful features is Easy

Format, which lets you apply a professional style to paragraphs or entire documents, and you get a thumbnail preview first. If you've laboured to format some text nicely yourself, just add this to the list for future use.

Works' simple database module lets you create, store and manage any collection of information, from CD and video lists to an accounts-receivable database for tracking who owes you money. There's also a library of clip-art, easily accessible from the Insert menu. The spreadsheet has several features inherited from Excel, such as auto-summing and cell-filling. Its range of chart types is fine for most purposes, and delightfully simple to use, but customising is limited. To transfer a chart or a spreadsheet to your word-processing document, you copy it to the clipboard using either tool button or menu, switch to the other document and paste it in place. Disappointingly, the more intuitive drag-and-drop approach isn't supported.

The Communications module is a little more complicated and rather specialised in nature. It lets you create and maintain instructions for dialling up other computers, bulletin boards and on-line services. You can also record a script – a sequence of steps used for a particular communication task. When you play it back, Works performs the same steps again, so it could help you keep phone and connection charges to a minimum.

The CD-Rom version of Works includes an attractive separate program called Bookshelf 95. This lets you access some excellent reference books, including the *American Heritage Dictionary*, *Roget's Thesaurus*, *World Almanac and Book of Facts* (1995 Edition), *Concise Columbia Encyclopaedia*, *Columbia Dictionary of Quotations*, *People's Chronology*, and the *Hammond World Atlas*.



Laplink for Windows 95 is the latest version of Traveling Software's popular file-transfer program. Supplied on four floppy disks (which also include the 16-bit version of the program), a complete installation of the software takes up around 5Mb of hard disk space.

When you start the program you are presented with an empty window with a row of buttons running across the top. It is at this point that you encounter the only real problem with Laplink – the guest computer (the one you're sitting in front of) cannot connect to a host computer (the other one) unless the host is also running Laplink.

In the past, this was easily remedied by using the remote install feature to transfer Laplink from the guest to the host. Laplink for Windows 95 cannot do this, which means all installations have to be made using the floppy disks. This isn't difficult if the other computer is across the office, but if it's across the Atlantic Ocean, you've got problems.

There are three components to Laplink – File Transfer, Remote Control and Chat. File Transfer is used to transfer files between two connected computers. Once Laplink is up and running on both machines, two Explorer-like windows appear – one for the host and one for the guest. Copying and moving files and folders is then simply a matter of dragging icons between the two windows, as you would with Explorer.

To cut down on the time taken to transfer files, Laplink uses a clever system called Speedsync. Before a file is copied, Speedsync checks to see if any of its contents are already on the PC they're being copied to. If they are, Laplink only copies the parts of the file that are different, dramatically reducing transfer time.

Remote Control allows the host computer to be controlled using

the guest system's screen, mouse and keyboard. The host computer's desktop is displayed in either a window or full-screen, and from then on you can access files and run programs as though you were using your own machine. The host computer's screen mirrors your actions, but it is possible to blank it and lock the mouse and keyboard to prevent confusion.

Chat opens a window on the host computer that can display messages typed on the guest, and vice versa. If the computers are connected via the Internet (see below) then this provides cheap person-to-person communication. If used in conjunction with Remote Control, it can be used for messages such as: 'Put the other floppy disk in now.'

Laplink can transfer files between PCs in several different ways. The simplest is to use either a parallel or serial cable. If two notebook PCs are being used, then their built-in infra-red serial ports can also be used.

If you are working from home and need to get at your office machine, Laplink can connect by modem. This also gives you the opportunity to type in your phone number and get the other machine to disconnect and call you back.

The software can also connect to another PC over the Internet. Setting this up isn't quite as straightforward as the other methods, but once done, you can access a computer on the other side of the world for the cost of a local phone call.

Laplink for Windows 95

Julian Prokaza

FREE FACTS 125

A 32-bit communications package that allows PCs to be accessed and controlled remotely, and greatly eases the process of transferring files between local PCs.

- 16 and 32-bit programs included
- Can connect by serial or parallel cable, infra-red, network, modem or Internet
- Serial cable included, parallel cable provided free on registration
- Speedsync file transfer reduces transfer times
- Password protection prevents unauthorised access
- Dial-back feature allows guest computer to be called back by the host

Although Windows 95 comes with its own remote communications features, these look rather basic when compared to those of Laplink. If you regularly need to access computers remotely, Laplink is the easiest and most effective way of doing it.

- £176.19 (RRP incl VAT)
- Traveling Software: 0800 374849

Laplink for Windows 95

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ease of use | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Features | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Value for money | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Minimum requirements: Microsoft Windows 3.1 or Windows 95; Intel or compatible 386DX/33 processor; 8Mb of Ram; 7Mb of hard disk space.

Clarisworks 4.0 for Windows 95

Terry Pinnell

FREE FACTS 126

The first Windows 95 version of Clarisworks offers some unique facilities, including versatile frames for combining several types of data in one document.



- Single-level undo
- Flexible frame capabilities
- Macros, Endnotes
- Slide show
- Templates ('stationery')
- Style sheets, with pop-up menu in text ruler
- Integrated outlining in word processing
- Multiple headers and footers
- Built-in HTML translator
- Enhanced mail merge

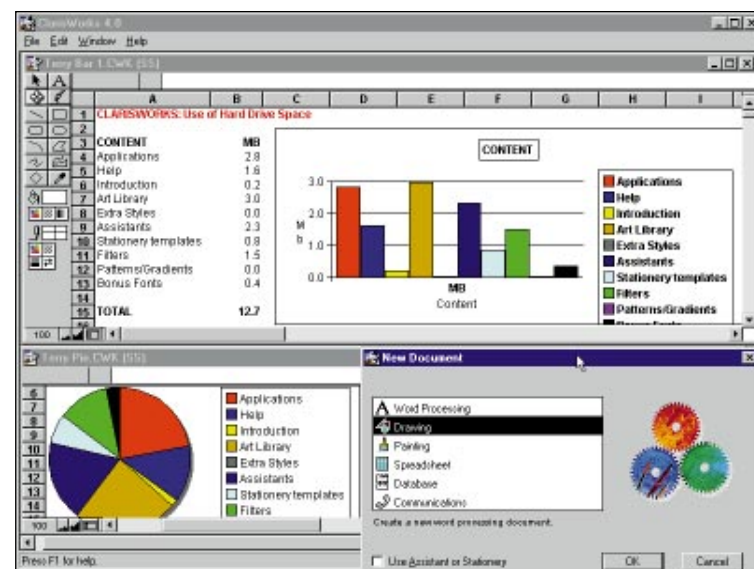
Despite its non-standard look and feel, for home or small office users who want just one program for all everyday work, this is a serious contender.

- £151.58 (suggested retail incl VAT)
- Claris: 0181 756 0101

Clarisworks 4.0 for Windows 95

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Features | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ease of use | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Value for money | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Minimum requirements: 386 PC, 8Mb of Ram, 12Mb of hard disk space, Windows 95.



Clarisworks 4.0 is available for both Macintosh computers and for Windows 95 PCs, so it's potentially very attractive for corporate and other Mac users seeking compatibility with PC users. But it also competes head-to-head with Microsoft Works 4.0 and other Windows 95 integrated packages.

You get five applications: word processor, spreadsheet and database, plus separate drawing and painting applications. Claris claims a sixth – communications – but the package simply runs whatever communications program you've specified, with a default to the Hyperterminal applet bundled with Windows 95.

Our favourite first impressions of the package stem mainly from the ease of installation, the program's compact size, and the readable 200-page user guide, complemented by comprehensive on-line help and courteous telephone support. It takes a while to get used to Clarisworks' unusual look and feel though. Menus are non-standard, with no View, Tools, or Options, and the steps to perform some common tasks aren't always intuitive. Also, all the routine operations that you'd normally get in a toolbar can be accessed via a floating shortcuts palette, but this can't be anchored in place or minimised.

Nevertheless, Clarisworks offers impressive versatility. Frames are a major strength, allowing you to combine different types of information in the one document. There are text, paint, and spreadsheet frames, each like a window to another type of document. So it's simple to add drawings, spreadsheets, tables, notes or charts to any document. When you click inside a frame, menus and shortcuts change so that you can edit it right there, without starting up the other module. It's rather like OLE 2.0, Microsoft's object linking and embedding pro-

cedure, but with less hassle and without the systems overhead. But if you really need it, OLE is there too.

Your reactions to Clarisworks will depend in part on how set in your ways you are from using other software. Happily, the longer you use it, the more you become aware of its merits. For example, the simple macro capabilities are useful, as are the ExpressStyles, which can be applied anywhere – to outlines, spreadsheet cells, and drawn shapes, as well as text and paragraphs. There's also a library of useful Readyart. Clariswork Assistants are supplied to help you design documents of various kinds, including certificates, budgets, and data files, as well as to help with specific tasks like inserting tables into an existing document.

Yet, there are some weak spots. In the word processor there's no drag-and-drop editing, single-click line highlighting or shading, and you must always work on your document in page-layout view.

The drawing program is friendly to use and puts several versatile tools at your disposal. You can create shapes with precise lines and Bezier curves using the powerful 'bezigon' tool, and flip, smooth, reshape, gradient-fill or freely rotate any drawn object. Combined with the flexible tools in the painting module, and the simplicity of wrapping text smoothly around objects, you could even use Clarisworks as a modest desktop publisher.

An interesting feature is that the latest version lets you create and read World Wide Web documents with a built-in HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) translator. The easiest way is to start with the Clarisworks HTML stationery, one of many templates included with Clarisworks 4.0. Alternatively, you can create an HTML document in a regular word-processing document, by importing the HTML style sheet.



Acer has made quite a noise about the launch of its latest home PC, with ads in the colour supplements and a general press brouhaha intended to stir up interest among aspirational computer owners with a yen for a bit of style. It's also touted as being pretty much idiot-proof, at least as far as the initial setup is concerned.

First, there's a nice, colourful sheet with plenty of pictures on it showing you exactly what plugs in where. Then, to make doubly sure, the jacks and the sockets on the back panel are colour-coded, which eliminates any element of guesswork that might remain.

Finally, when the power is turned on the system loads a reasonably friendly and comprehensible shell over the top of Windows to spare you the myriad menu options and general strangeness of Windows 95. This bears a certain similarity to Packard Bell's Navigator, in that it features a picture of a room with various objects that take you to the appropriate applications when you click on them. The bulk of it, however, is a more conventional set of tabbed screens containing button shortcuts to all the free software, grouped by type: games, multimedia and so on.

As for the design – well there's no denying that the Aspire is an eye-catching machine. The fascia and monitor bezel are made of heavily-curved bluish-green plastic, while the case and monitor cabinet are dark grey. The keyboard is also styled with overtly curved corners to match the case, and it too is green, except

for a purple clip-on handrest which is comfortable, if a bit odd-looking. Opinion will differ as to whether this is an improvement over the standard angular, oatmeal box, but for our money the Aspire did look less ill at ease in the corner of the front room than the average PC.

In keeping with the general streamlined look, the Aspire's stereo speakers are actually built in to the monitor, along with a microphone which, coupled with the modem, turns the machine into a telephone. The sound comes from a low-cost 16-bit Soundblaster clone called a Magic S23, and emerges from the speakers lacking bass and with rather too much middle for comfort. The monitor itself needs a flatter screen, although it manages a quite respectable 13.1in image from its overall 14in diagonal. The passive controls are okay as far as they go, but there is no geometry correction, which our test machine needed.

There isn't a great deal of room for expansion – no drive bays and a choice of a single PCI or 16-bit Isa card only – and the memory banks are completely filled by the standard 16Mb of Ram. Acer plans to replace the 14.4Kbps modem with an up-to-date 28.8Kbps version about the time this goes to press, but the 1Gb Maxtor hard disk is relatively slow, as is the Cirrus Logic GD5440 graphics chipset.

Down at motherboard level, old-style fast-page Ram has been used, rather than the faster EDO type; the secondary cache is asynchronous not pipeline burst; and to top it off, the system board doesn't use Intel's performance-enhancing Triton support chipset. None of this helps the Aspire whip up a storm, which is a shame because, to run the latest games and multimedia software, home PCs are likely to be asked to work harder than a typical business machine.

Acer Aspire P133

Dominic Bucknall

FREE FACTS 127

A new-look home PC with full multimedia, built-in modem and a comprehensive software bundle.



- 133MHz Pentium processor
- 256Kb asynchronous cache
- 16Mb of Ram
- 1Gb hard disk
- Quad-speed CD-Rom
- 16-bit audio
- 14.4Kbps internal data/fax/voice modem
- 14in monitor with integrated stereo speakers and microphone
- Bundled with Windows 95, MS Works, Quicken and a host of CD titles

The Aspire should give the likes of Packard Bell something to think about for a passing moment, but it suffers from the usual performance shortcomings that afflict home PCs as a result of compromises to keep the price down.

- £1,999 (incl VAT)
- Acer: 01628 533422

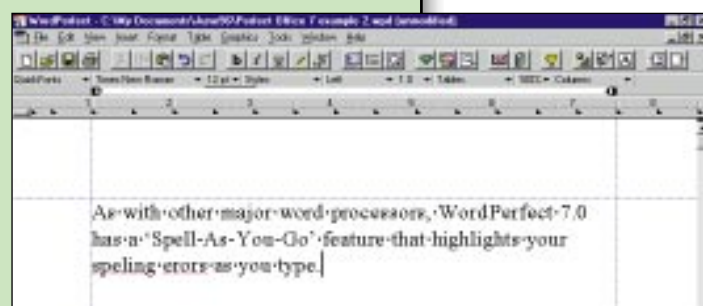
Acer Aspire P133

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Features | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Build quality | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Value for money | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

CorelOffice 7.0 for Windows 95

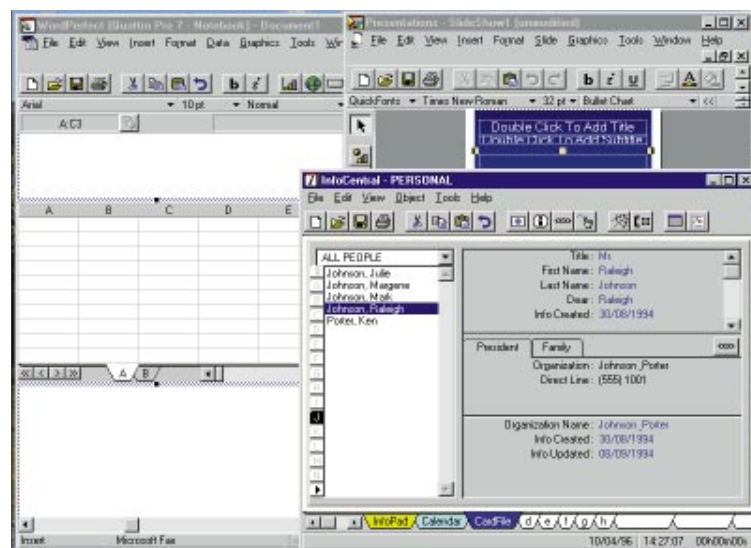
Scott Colvey
FREE FACTS 128

A 32-bit version for Windows 95 of what used to be the PerfectOffice software suite.



- Improved integration between the various software components
- Formula Composer for preparing and analysing spreadsheet formulae
- Format-As-You-Go and Spell-As-You-Go 'live' formatting and correction tools
- QuickTasks to automate the production of common document styles
- Envoy allows you to create 'portable' documents for use on PCs without Wordperfect
- Hotspots allow quick formatting of paragraphs
- Windows 95-compliant right mouse button-click menus
- Tab selections on most dialog boxes speed navigation
- PerfectFit enables documents to be fitted to a specified number of pages
- Extremely clear system for altering margins
- Common interface between all applications eases the learning curve
- Shared address book accessible by all applications
- In-place editing of objects using OLE2 (object linking and embedding)

(continued)



The future of the PerfectOffice suite has, until recently, appeared bleak, with Novell selling the title a mere 18 months after buying it from Wordperfect Corporation.

However, Corel – the new owner – has risen to the challenge and continued development of the product, resulting in CorelOffice 7.0 for Windows 95. Although the version reviewed here is a beta, many of the features are already complete and, naturally, some of these may be improved.

CorelOffice is supplied with the common office suite software elements – a word processor (Wordperfect), a spreadsheet (Quattro Pro) and a presentation tool (Presentations). Additionally, you get a personal information manager (InfoCentral) and a document packaging tool (Envoy). Each of the CorelOffice products is now suffixed with the version 7.0 tag to tie in with Microsoft's numbering of its Windows 95 products.

The highlight of the bunch is Wordperfect, which boasts many new or improved features such as Format-As-You-Go (this includes Spell-As-You-Go), hotspots and QuickTasks. Spell-As-You-Go checks the spelling of your words 'live' (that is, as you type them) and pinpoints potential errors by underlining them with an obvious red dotted line; errors can then be simply corrected by choosing a word from a list available via a right mouse button click. Format-As-You-Go is based on the same live-checking concept and automatically formats text according to a predefined set of rules (for example, if you type the ordinal number '2nd', Format-As-You-Go would

format the 'nd' part as superscript). Hotspots – small button icons – appear automatically while you're working on a document and speed up editing considerably. The cursor can be moved over any part of the paragraph and a hotspot will pop up in the margin; a single click on this leads you through all the formatting options available at that point.

Much like Microsoft's Wizards in Word, QuickTasks offer an easy way to prepare common documents such as memoranda and faxes. Once selected, a QuickTask dialog box pops up and you are required only to input information relevant to the requested task.

Quattro Pro is a comprehensive spreadsheet package with all the expected functions and features, and an excellent new tool: the Formula Composer. This offers a graphical representation of a formula as it is built. Initially, the Formula Composer appears to be little more than a gimmick; however, longer use proves its worth and makes the tasks of constructing and analysing complex formulae much easier. This is particularly useful if a formula seems to offer an incorrect result; using the Formula Composer you can trace clearly the path the formula followed to reach the erroneous figure.

In keeping with other major spreadsheet packages, Quattro Pro 7.0 has introduced the ability to represent data in the form of maps. It's a feature that looks good and is fun to experiment with, but as a tool it is unlikely to be of much use to home or small business users.

The presentation module, unimaginatively called Presentations, is easy to use and comes with some slide templates to aid presentation design. The supplied slide templates are typically garish coloured backgrounds with placeholders for text. But they are use-

ful for those needing to prepare presentations in a hurry and by customising these templates you can add a personal touch to your presentations.

Once created, each slide can be printed on a transparency for use in a traditional presentation or collated into an electronic slide show. Slide shows can be set to run and display in any imaginable combination and there are around 40 effects from which to choose when deciding upon transitions between slides. To add impact, objects and text can have animation effects applied. These effects are basic (scroll an object in from the top and make it bounce, for example) but they are eye-catching and, when coupled with sounds, can turn around an otherwise ordinary presentation.

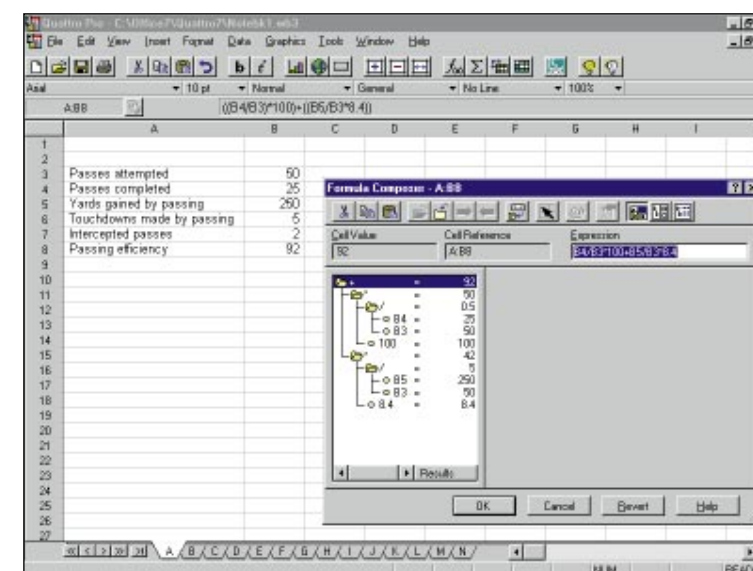
InfoCentral is a personal information manager with a scheduler and a card file database. The scheduler is reasonably well featured and easy to use. Its calendar can be viewed in either a daily, weekly, monthly or yearly format and appointments and alarms can be rescheduled simply by dragging and dropping. The card file section keeps track of contact details. Search facilities are limited but enough for their purpose and, besides, contacts can be located quickly by using an alphabetical tab selection.

InfoCentral also has an unusual notepad tool entitled InfoPad. This structures notes hierarchically and priorities can be assigned to each note (a feature you would usually expect to find only on 'to do' lists). Also, notes can be linked to one another and then cross-referenced when required. Unfortunately, InfoPad is confusing and awkward – links and priorities are not immediately obvious, and better use could have been made of colours and

numbering to improve this.

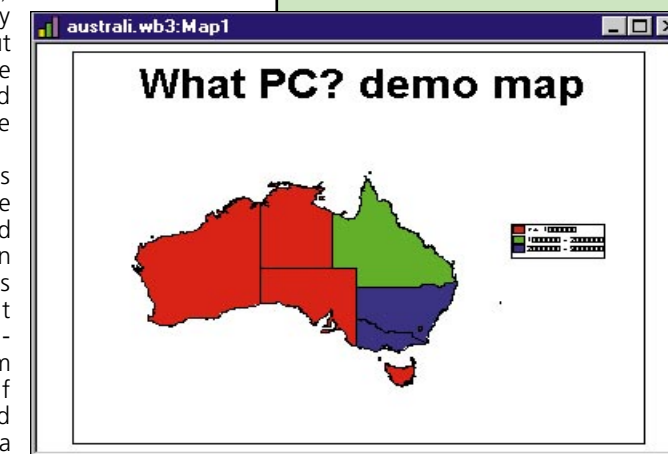
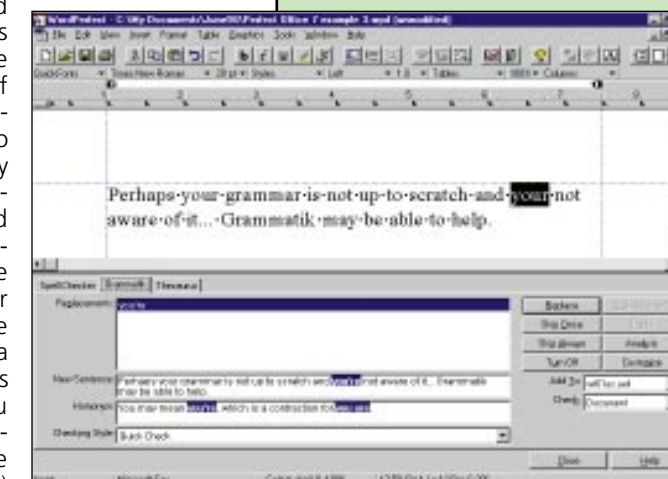
Completing the CorelOffice line-up is Envoy, billed as a 'portable document solution'. Envoy allows you to annotate documents in a variety of ways from simple highlights on a page to hypertext links to other documents. Envoy saves the whole bundle as a runtime file with an embedded Envoy viewer. This means that the intended recipient of your packaged document does not have to have, or obtain a copy of, Envoy – the document can be viewed by launching the runtime file from File Manager or Explorer under Windows. The advantages of such a runtime file is that it is truly portable. You can send the file electronically (over the Internet, for instance) without losing any formatting or without the need to check the recipient's word processor software preference.

Wordperfect was always the star of the PerfectOffice suite and it now stands out even more. However, this should not detract from the other elements that go to form CorelOffice, all of which are improved and now integrate to a higher level than ever before. Although many of the changes and additions to CorelOffice are minor, they contribute to form an office suite that now presents a worthy alternative to the other heavyweights.



CorelOffice 7.0 for Windows 95

(continued)



A well-produced package that manages to both impress and surprise. The features list is strong, the common interface makes the suite easy to use and the integration between applications is good. Corel has tried hard to address previous criticisms of PerfectOffice and appears to have succeeded. We found it particularly pleasing to see Wordperfect in such good form.

- Price yet to be announced
- Channel Market Makers: 01703 814142

CorelOffice 7.0 for Windows 95

| | |
|-----------------|-----------|
| Ease of use | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Performance | n/a |
| Features | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Value for money | n/a |

Requires: 486/25MHz PC, 8Mb of Ram, (486/66, 16Mb recommended), CD-Rom and Windows 95.

Adobe Pagemill

Paul Wardley

FREE FACTS 129

A utility for the Mac (soon to be available for the PC) that lets even novices design good-looking pages for the World Wide Web.



- No HTML coding required
- Can create objects with drag and drop or by pasting
- Direct text entry
- Integrated browser for testing
- Links created without typing
- Form creation tools
- Image manipulation tools
- Existing Web pages can be loaded (and automatically corrected, if necessary)

If you're a Mac user who wants to be 'on' the Web, this is the easiest way to get up and running, although the price is rather hefty for a single floppy disk and a slim manual. PC users will have to wait for the forthcoming Windows version.

- £99
- Adobe: 0800 232223

Adobe Pagemill

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ease of use | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Features | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Value for money | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Requirements: Apple Mac running System 7 (or later) with 3Mb of free memory and a colour display.



The World Wide Web is the part of the Internet that's easiest to get to grips with; indeed, many users think the Web is the Internet. It uses highly graphical pages filled with pictures, buttons and text: all you have to do to find your way around is to click on the pictures and buttons and see what happens.

While this simplicity is great for users, it's a headache for those who design the pages. Adobe Pagemill simplifies page design so anyone can do it without having to understand anything about Hypertext Mark-Up Language (HTML), which is the language of the Web.

HTML is little more than a text file filled with special codes that load graphics, jump to new places or display text. What Pagemill does is to let you design a page by drawing, typing, pointing and clicking at things on screen, just as you would do with a word processor or desktop publishing program. In the background, Pagemill converts the screen(s) into HTML code which is ready to put on the Web.

Although Pagemill is currently available only for Apple Macs, a PC version with similar features is due out in July. It will also include a built-in browser that shows your pages exactly as they will appear on the Web. Most other page designers rely on your computer having a browser already installed and they force you to switch between the designer and the browser to see the results of your work.

To design a page in Pagemill, you first create a blank page and then drag any pictures you need directly from the program that created them. Alternatively, if the picture is stored in a file, you can load it from disk; if it has been copied to the clipboard, you can simply paste

it in. Text can be loaded in the same way or you can simply type it directly onto the Pagemill screen.

An essential part of any Web page is its links. These are 'hot spots' on the screen that take you to another location. The location could be part of the same page, another of your pages, or any other page on the Web.

Remember that Web pages can be many screens long, so being able to jump directly to another part of the same page can save the user a great deal of scrolling up and down trying to find information.

Links are created using the same drag-and-drop techniques as text and images, so to create a link to another of your own pages you simply drag the icon for that page on to the one you are designing.

To link to another part of the same page you create an anchor by dragging the icon for the current page to any position on the same page. You can then jump directly to the anchor. Links to other pages on the Web are created by typing into the Link Location bar at the bottom of the screen the Uniform Resource Locator (URL), which is the unique name of the page.

One of the most difficult parts of page design is the creation of interactive forms. These are input boxes that users can fill in to send information to you. Pagemill provides a set of simple tools to help you create forms that look good, but it doesn't handle the input from the forms. For this, you still have to write a script to process the responses people make, and this is no simple task.



Most inkjet printers we've seen are suitable for use on a desktop. The Hewlett-Packard Copyjet M, on the other hand, is the only one we've seen that's suitable for use as a desk – it's enormous. Given that it's an inkjet printer, it also looks remarkably like a photocopier. Actually, it is a photocopier, too – a colour photocopier, to be more precise.

It may seem a little odd to combine a colour inkjet printer and colour photocopier into a single device, but there is some sense in the idea. The Copyjet M uses the same inkjet printing system to produce photocopies as normal printouts. This is somewhat different from the system used by standard colour photocopiers but it has the advantage of being significantly cheaper. HP reckons the Copyjet M can produce a full-colour page for about 15p, compared to at least three times that amount for a standard colour copier.

At these prices, the Copyjet M may well be a sensible option for those users who need to produce the occasional colour copy as well as regular colour printouts. According to HP, potential buyers are twice as interested in a combined unit as they are in a dedicated colour photocopier – no doubt for the convenience it brings. That said, although £2,000 plus may be a bargain price for an occasional colour copier, it's a lot of money for a mere colour inkjet printer.

The Copyjet M is a four-colour (cyan, magenta, yellow and black) printer and it uses a separate ink cartridge for each colour. This gives it a number of advantages over other inkjet printers. First, it can use true black on colour prints – inkjets that use only three colours have to produce it by mixing cyan, magenta and yellow, which is never com-

pletely successful. Second, individual colours can be replaced as and when they run out. Other printers require the whole colour cartridge to be replaced when this happens, which can be an expensive business if, for example, you print a lot of one colour.

As a photocopier, the Copyjet M works just like any other. Pages to be copied are placed one at a time onto a glass plate underneath the lid on top of the machine. Press the green 'Start' button and a full-page A4 colour copy emerges in about a minute and a half.

Scanning resolution is limited to 300x300dpi but this is adequate for the majority of originals, particularly photographs. The copy quality can be changed using buttons on the Copyjet's control panel and there's an LCD status display to keep you informed. The control panel has the usual selection of photocopier functions – number of copies, copy brightness, magnification and so on.

The supplied driver disks have to be installed before the Copyjet M can be used as a printer, but this done, it's plain sailing from then on. From selecting 'Print' in an application to the last page emerging takes around 80 seconds for five full pages of black text, which is fast for an inkjet printer.

Thanks to the 600x300dpi resolution, black text quality is reasonably crisp, but jagged edges evident on certain letters make it poorer than laser quality. Colour printing, on the other hand, is extremely impressive. Colours are bright and clear and the four-colour printing system means black is black rather than dark grey. No matter how closely you examine a print, there is no discernible banding and even full-page prints don't cause the page to ripple or otherwise distort.

HP Copyjet M

Julian Prokaza

FREE FACTS 130

A combined colour inkjet printer and photocopier for use with both MS-Dos and Windows applications.

- Four-colour printing, with separate cartridges for each colour
- Scanning resolution: 300dpi
- Maximum scan size: 226mm x 368mm
- Printing resolution: 600 x 300dpi (black text); 300 x 300dpi (colour)
- 7Mb of Ram, expandable to 39Mb
- Languages: HP PCL 5c, HP GL/2, Adobe Postscript Level 2
- 180-sheet feeder
- Size: 557.9mm x 460.5mm x 333.2mm
- Weight: 30kg

While it's undeniably convenient to have a colour printer and photocopier in a single device, that convenience does not come cheaply. It may be easier to use but the Copyjet M really only performs the same function as a flatbed colour scanner and high-quality colour inkjet (albeit somewhat faster).

- £2,513 (incl VAT); black cartridges: £25.26 each (incl VAT); colour cartridges: £29.38 each (incl VAT)
- Hewlett-Packard: 01344 369222

HP Copyjet M

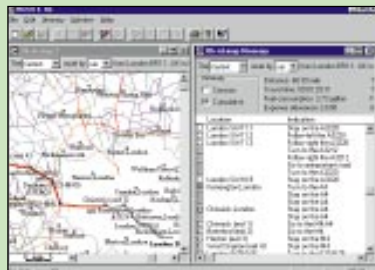
| | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ease of use | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Features | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Value for money | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Route 66 (Ultimate Traveller Version)

Paul Wardley

FREE FACTS 146

A route planner for journeys by road in Europe and North America. It can display and print maps and itineraries and calculate the cost of trips.



- Ten separate maps included (Europe and North America)
- Calculates journey expenses
- Can be customised with your own locations
- Plans routes for cars or cycles
- Speeds can be set for seven road types
- Detailed or simple route descriptions
- Calculates quickest, shortest or least expensive routes

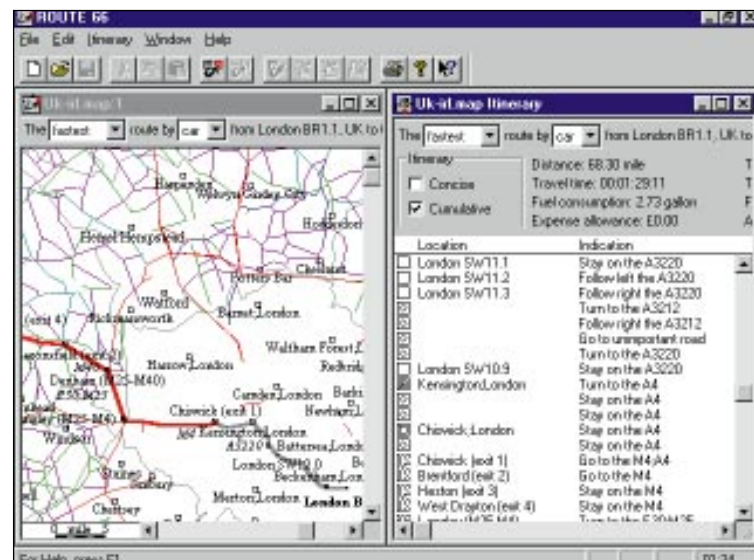
Almost a good program, but lacking in features and flexibility. It will appeal to motorists who make frequent trips to the Continent, but has little to attract those who drive predominantly in the UK.

- £116.33 (incl VAT); UK and Ireland single-map version: £45.83
- Ingram Micro: 01908 260160

Route 66

| Features | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ease of use | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Value for money | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Requirements: 386 PC or better; Windows 3.1 or above (Windows 95 recommended); 4Mb of Ram; CD-Rom drive for Ultimate Traveller version reviewed here.



Try as we might, we cannot help but compare Route 66 with Autoroute Express, a similar product from Microsoft. Both are designed to calculate road routes and then print maps and itineraries for the journey; both run under Windows; and both promise to save you time and money.

Route 66 can be bought in several versions. The one we looked at is called the Ultimate Traveller bundle. It includes ten different map sets: seven for individual European countries, one for all of Europe, one for Eastern Europe and one for all of North America.

It's a very straightforward program, which is just as well because the documentation is virtually non-existent, comprising a 20-page CD insert which manages to cover both Mac and Windows versions in eight different languages! The on-line help is little better, lacking the usual Windows search, index and find facilities.

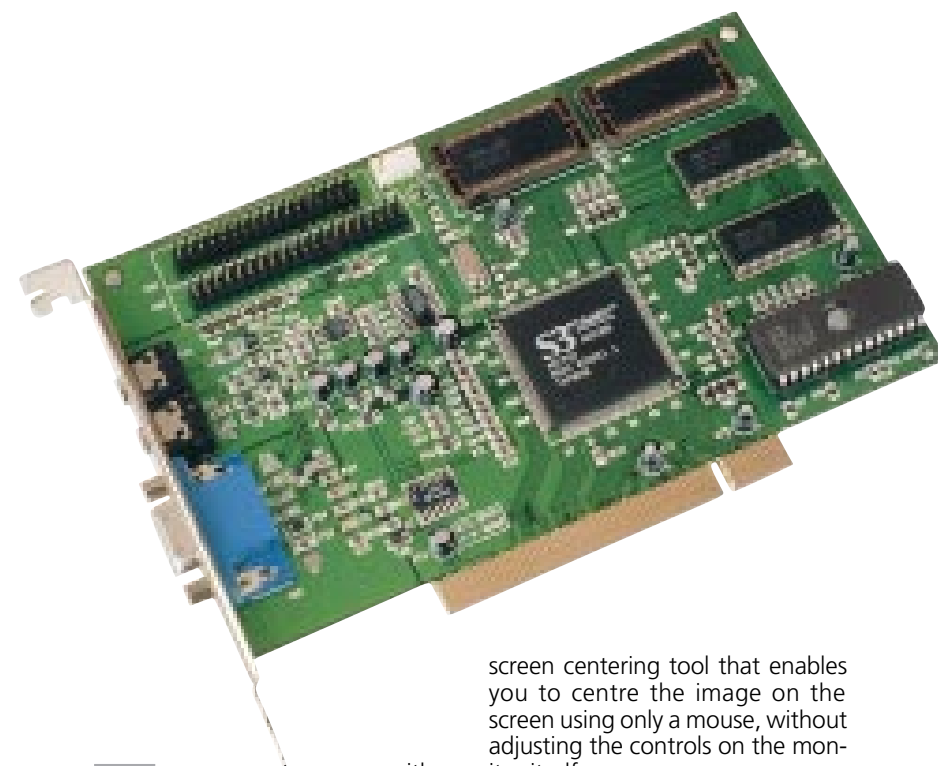
To plan a route you enter the starting and finishing points into two dialog boxes and click on the Find button. A few seconds later a map is displayed with your route highlighted. You can also choose one 'via' to be included in your route: for example, a route from Romsey to Brighton via Portsmouth. Microsoft Autoroute works in a similar way, but lets you have up to four 'vias', as well as specifying the length of stay at each stop along the way.

To see the route description, choose Itinerary from the Map menu and a detailed description of the journey will replace the map picture. These two views can be tiled horizontally or vertically. We were not happy with the directions given in the itineraries; the language used betraying the program's Dutch origins. Directions

such as 'follow right the E5,M27 SSE' and 'stay on unimportant road' do not exactly inspire confidence or reassure you that you're still on the right track. Autoroute's 'stay on the M27' and 'go onto local road' are much clearer.

Other evidence of Route 66's origins are the use for motorways of 'E' road designations, which are not often seen in this country, with our own national road names tagged on as an afterthought. Setting preferences also makes you stop and think. You can choose gallons or 'liters' (not our choice of spelling) but you have to express your car's fuel consumption in gallons or 'liters' per hundred miles, not the more usual miles per gallon. The default preferences also caught us unawares when we planned our first journey from London to Oxford and Route 66 came up with a cost of £186.66. Dashing immediately for the preference options we found Route 66 had based its costs on fuel at £1.50 per gallon (where, please?), a cost per hour of £100, an additional cost of 50p per mile and an expense allowance of 50p per mile. Setting the fuel price to £2.50 and the others to zero we achieved a more realistic £6.83 for the same trip.

The routes chosen were always appropriate, though not necessarily what experience has taught are the best. The maps are clear and the road numbers along the route are easy to read, but none of the roads adjacent to the route are numbered, so if you need to make a diversion you've had it. You can't set preferences for road type, as you can in Autoroute Express, to tell the program you don't like B roads or that you don't like switching between road types. You can, however, plot a route for a cycle ride rather than a car journey and this will avoid motorways.



Every computer comes with a graphics card inside – it's what turns the computer's efforts into something the monitor is able to display. However, not all graphics cards are created equal, and great advances in their design have been made over the last two years – despite falling prices. If your PC already has a Pentium processor and more than 8Mb of memory, a new graphics card is the next step towards improving its overall performance.

The Grafixstar 400 is supplied as standard in many new PCs, but you can also buy and fit one yourself with the aid of nothing more than a cross-point screwdriver. The manual supplied with the card tells you everything you need to know, and the whole process should take less than half an hour.

We tested a standard 1Mb version of the card, but we also asked Videologic to supply a 1Mb memory upgrade and a plug-in accessory called the Mpeg Star that enables video CD playback. Both the memory upgrade and the Mpeg Star came with their own instruction leaflets and, strangely enough, these actually agreed with the main manual. This is much rarer than you'd think.

Essential software drivers are provided for Windows 3.1 and Windows 95, but there are other software utilities too. The most significant of these is SmartTools, which provides an easy way of getting your monitor and graphics card working in harmony. SmartTools lets you choose how many colours you want to display and also lets you match the output of the graphics card to the refresh rate of the monitor; essential for getting a steady, flicker-free picture.

Another useful tool is the on-

screen centering tool that enables you to centre the image on the screen using only a mouse, without adjusting the controls on the monitor itself.

The best part of SmartTools is the Zoom feature. This is not, as you might expect, a sort of on-screen magnifier – it's a convenient way of switching between the most common resolutions, such as 640x480, 800x600 and 1,024x768, while maintaining the same desktop layout and size.

As a graphics card, even without the Mpeg add-on, the Grafixstar 400 is an excellent performer for general-purpose computing and for displaying Windows' own AVI video clips. To play AVI clips on a standard PC you don't need any extra hardware, but the quality is very poor compared to broadcast TV signals or VCR recordings. Most people choose to run AVI video in a small window (possibly using only a quarter of the screen) to bump up the quality. The Grafixstar 400 includes built-in video acceleration. This improves the quality of Windows AVI video so that you can run it in full-screen mode, without dropping frames or losing sound quality – though the process of interpolation does make the clips look more 'blocky'.

With the Mpeg add-on board you can play commercially-available feature films from video-CD, or games with Mpeg sequences within them, and these will display in a quality approaching that of a so-so video recording. Mpeg playback cards costing £300 or more can do little better, so for £88 the Mpeg option is well worth taking. The simple 1Mb Grafixstar by itself is as good as anything else at the price, and comes with an excellent set of software tools; but if you're in the market both for Mpeg and a new graphics card, you won't find better value than the Grafixstar 400.

Videologic Grafixstar 400 with Mpeg Star

Paul Wardley

FREE FACTS 147

An accelerated graphics card with a plug-in upgrade board providing playback of video-CD movies and Mpeg files.

- Available in 1Mb (upgradable) or 2Mb versions
- Uses S3Trio64V chipset
- 64-bit graphics, PCI interface
- Built-in Windows video (AVI) acceleration
- Plug-in daughterboard adds Mpeg-1 capability
- Xing Mpeg playback software
- SmartTools utilities
- MPC 3-compatible
- 5-year warranty

The Grafixstar 400 is a solid performer as a display adaptor, especially when upgraded to 2Mb of memory, but the real attraction is the very cheap Mpeg add-on card. The complete ensemble costs no more than many standalone Mpeg players, but with the Grafixstar you get a high-quality graphics card thrown in.

- Grafixstar 400: £94; Mpeg add-on: £88; 1Mb upgrade: £44 (all street prices including VAT)
- Videologic: 01923 260511

Grafixstar 400 with Mpeg Star

| Features | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ease of use | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Value for money | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

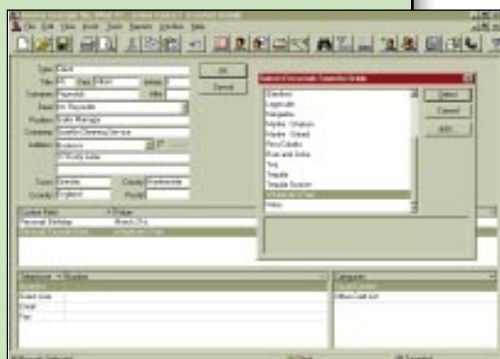
Minimum requirements: computer with PCI bus and any version of Windows (a Pentium with Windows 95 recommended).

Janna Contact 95 for Windows 95

Scott Colvey

FREE FACTS 131

Electronic personal organiser software with document management features.



- Drag-and-drop appointment scheduling
- Advanced document management
- Quick pick lists of common values
- Unlimited custom fields per contact
- 'In place' document editing
- Interactive tutorial

Small quibbles aside, Janna Contact 95 is a competent personal information management system and is worth both the financial and personal time investments.

- £117.44 (incl VAT)
- Janna Systems UK: 01628 789878

janna Contact 95 for Windows 95

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Features | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ease of use | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Value for money | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |



The release of Janna Systems' Contact 95 adds yet another to the long list of software titles gathered loosely under the banner of 'personal information managers' (Pims). Pims claim to make light work of your organisational nightmares by co-ordinating your time and keeping track of business and personal contacts. Unfortunately, the effort required to operate a Pim will often find you reaching for your trusty leather-bound organiser.

Contact 95 shares features common to most Pims: diary, appointment scheduler, contact address book and task lists; but there's also a powerful document management system and contact information log.

The scheduler is easy to use and at its simplest requires you only to point at a date on a calendar, select a time and type in an appointment description. Advanced editing allows you to set up recurring appointments, add alarms (which could even take the form of video clips) and attach objects relevant to the appointment (such as a spreadsheet of your finances in readiness for a meeting with the bank manager).

Adding contact details is simple and aided greatly by 'quick pick' lists. Quick pick lists are available via a right mouse button click and allow you to select previously used values for a detail field (such as 'Mr' for the contact's title) – this saves time and ensures consistency. You select a 'type' for the contact ('client', for example) and this dictates the fields that are available for data entry. Additionally, each contact can have an unlimited number of custom fields held with their details. Custom fields are exactly that; you could store details of a contact's golf handicap or favourite tippie.

Each contact is assigned an information log, which can be thought of as a folder into which you can place any file relevant to a contact. The

information log also groups together all appointments scheduled with a contact which allows an 'at a glance' view of past or future meetings with the contact.

Once created, a list of contacts and their information logs can be displayed in a window alongside the scheduler. It is at this point that Contact 95's real strength – the ability to drag and drop all manner of objects – becomes apparent. A file can be dragged into a contact's information log; the contact can be dragged from the contact list and dropped into an appointment slot in the scheduler; appointments can be rescheduled by dragging them to a new date/time – and so on. This system is intuitive and makes Contact 95 a joy to use.

The drag-and-drop facilities are complemented by a document management system, negotiated in the familiar Windows Explorer vein. The system also enables 'in place' editing of documents using OLE features.

Contact 95 does have problems. The first is the screen clutter; although all windows and panels can be resized, at times there can be just too much information on the screen. In fairness, Janna has attempted to combat this by allowing some windowed information to be displayed in a tab selection form (as opposed to slider bars), but this doesn't help much. We found the search and selection facilities awkward – too many of the main search criteria insist on exact pattern matches.

System performance is also an issue. Janna recommends a minimum of a Pentium with 16Mb of Ram. However, even with this configuration, disk activity is considerable and there are some annoying time lags between mouse clicks and results. Overall, Contact 95 stands out amongst the many other Pims available. It is supplied with a clear, illustrated manual and a useful interactive tutorial to speed learning.

Turbocad 2D/3D for Windows 95

Colin J O'Keefe

FREE FACTS 132

Low-cost computer-aided-design software collection includes Turbocad version 3.0 for Windows 3.1 and Windows 95, a standalone 3D modeller and 10,000 drag-and-drop symbols.

- Autocad-compatible (reads and writes .DWG and .DXF formats)
- Styles can be created and named
- Drag-and-drop editing
- User-selectable scaling/drawing sizes
- Multi-line text handling
- Unlimited undo and redo facilities
- Floating dockable toolbars
- On-line tutorial and help facility

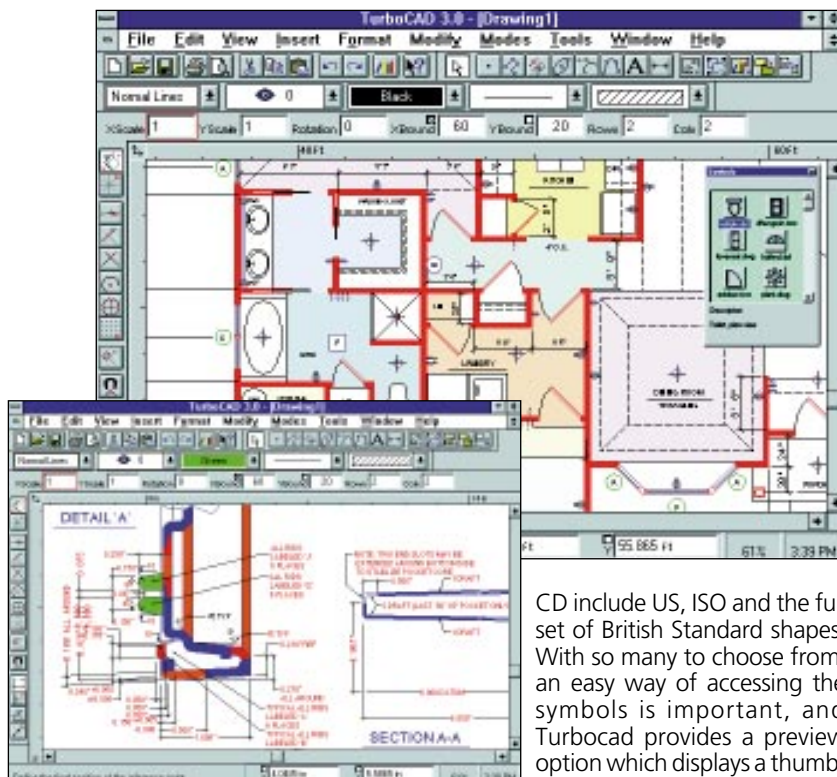
Once the abundant tools and shapes are mastered, Turbocad can satisfy all but the most demanding Cad user. The slightly dense documentation is compensated for by the on-line help and tutorial.

- £385 (incl VAT – estimated street price); £399.95 (ex VAT – recommended retail price)
- IMSI: 0181 581 2000

Turbocad 3.0 for Windows 95

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ease of use | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Features | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Value for money | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Requirements: 386 or higher processor; 8Mb of Ram recommended; Windows 3.1 or Windows 95; 11Mb of hard disk space.



Computer-aided-design (Cad) software has traditionally been so expensive that cheaper products have been regarded with suspicion. Turbocad 3.0 – the Cad element of a package called Turbocad 2D/3D – is intended to be not a stripped-down, low-feature version of a real Cad program, but serious competition for the market-leading Autocad LT.

In the box are two completely different versions of Turbocad 3.0; one is fully Windows 95-compliant and the other is a 16-bit program suitable for older versions of Windows. We tested the 32-bit Windows 95 version of the software which makes full use of the features of the operating system, offering a context-sensitive right-hand mouse button, object linking and embedding, and Microsoft Office compatibility.

Turbocad 3.0 seems to surround you with tools. In addition to the standard toolbar along the top of the screen, there are two more down both the left and the right-hand sides. A total of 18 toolbars can be active at the same time and, in true Windows 95 fashion, they can be docked anywhere on the screen, dragged into convenient positions or customised to suit your own way of working. Pop-up dialog boxes provide an easy route into some of the more advanced features, and tabs within the dialog boxes make it easy to select features for customisation or to set program options.

Much Cad work is dependent on symbol libraries. There's no point in re-inventing shapes and symbols in common usage, and the 10,000 examples supplied on the Turbocad

CD include US, ISO and the full set of British Standard shapes. With so many to choose from, an easy way of accessing the symbols is important, and Turbocad provides a preview option which displays a thumbnail image of shapes or drawings being imported. Blocks and symbols can be imported from other sources, such as Autocad, and saving and filing your own shapes is a simple point-and-click operation.

Drawing in Turbocad is done in two ways: either traditionally, using parameters to define and describe shapes, or by using screen-based casual drawing. You can mix the two techniques by starting to draw interactively and then locking in lengths and angles for subsequent use.

Text handling is particularly good and is a complete revamp of the approach used in Turbocad 2.0. Text can be imported in .RTF format, which can be produced by any decent Windows word processor, and placed in a multi-line box within Turbocad. It remains completely editable with the built-in text editor that pops up when you click on the text. A powerful alignment feature lets you powerfully align objects in a variety of ways and should appeal as much to the graphic designer who needs to incorporate Cad as to the engineer interested in design.

Despite the 2D/3D tag on the packaging, Turbocad 3.0 is a two-dimensional product. The three-dimensional aspect of the software is supplied by a separate product called 3D Modeller, which uses a system of prompts to guide users through the process of creating complex designs. Features include ray-tracing, quick rendering and key-frame animation. Once created, these files can be imported into Turbocad itself. In fact, Turbocad can also import standard Windows metafile and bitmap files, making it a versatile all-rounder for many design purposes.

Red Box Winstation CP166+

Dominic Bucknall

○ **FREE FACTS 133**

A multimedia tower system based on the new Cyrix Cx166+ processor, which is being promoted as a Pentium killer.

- 133MHz Cyrix Cx166+ processor
- 512Kb pipeline burst cache
- 16Mb of EDO Ram
- 1.2Gb Quantum Fireball EIDE hard disk
- Six-speed Teac CD-Rom
- Three-piece Altec active speaker set
- Creative Labs AWE32 Value sound card
- Matrox Millenium 2Mb WRam PCI graphics adaptor
- Idek Iiyama 17in monitor
- Windows 95
- Works 95 version 4.0
- Encarta 96 CD

Considering what you get, this is a competitively-priced machine that really delivers on the performance front thanks to its impressively fast Cyrix processor and generally top-flight specifications. Well worth a look.

- £2,532 (incl VAT)
- Red Box: 01480 405541

Red Box Winstation CP166+

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Features | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Build quality | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Value for money | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |



Until now, Cyrix has been an Intel chaser rather than an Intel basher, with relatively inexpensive processors like the 5x86 aimed at the low end of the market as an alternative to Intel 486s. This has changed with the introduction of the 6x86, which actually outperforms Pentiums with equivalent clock speeds. For this reason, the 133MHz version is billed as the 166+ because Cyrix claims it can outrun a Pentium 166. These claims appear to be true – the Cx166+ really is a fast processor.

The Winstation comes in a suitably imposing tower case a little over 18in high. There are no irritating clock-speed indicators or turbo buttons, but you do get a reset button, which can come in handy.

The machine comes with a good Microsoft mouse and a Windows 95 keyboard that calls up the Start menu and simulates a right-hand mouse button click. The action has a somewhat nondescript feel to it – too mushy to be positive, but still with a sort of pop as the keys trigger.

You can use a variety of monitors with the Winstation, but we were sent an Idek Iiyama Visionmaster with a 17in screen and digital controls. This is a good-quality display with a relatively flat screen capable of a 15.75in image diagonal. It supports super-stable vertical refresh rates of up to 107Hz at 1,024x768.

The controls are comprehensive, with pincushion, trapezoidal and parallelogram geometry adjustments and customisable colour balance. They are also fairly easy to use, thanks to an on-screen setup menu. All this wouldn't add up to much without a good picture, but the Visionmaster produced a nice,

sharp image that remained focused out into the corners and was entirely readable in 1,024x768 mode.

The Winstation's multimedia output is enhanced by a set of externally-powered Altec Lansing ACS31X speakers. These consist of a stereo pair of mid/tweeter units and a third bass woofer. They are capable of excellent sound quality – between these and the AWE32, most gamers should be more than happy with the audio output.

The inside of the system box is neat and tidy, with clear access to the memory banks (four slots were free for extra memory), the expansion slots and the processor socket. The system comes with its full complement of 512Kb of fast pipeline burst secondary cache, but this is mounted on a module, so if a chip should fail, replacing it would be relatively simple. There are four 16-bit Isa and three PCI slots free, as well as room for two additional internal 3.5in hard disks and three 5.25in devices.

Red Box has selected good-quality components to get the best out of the Cyrix processor, which explains why this is such a fast machine. The 512Kb of synchronous cache is a help, as is the use of EDO Ram, and the machine's Quantum Fireball 1.2Gb hard disk is a popular choice because of its recognised performance advantage.

To top things off, there's a Matrox Millenium PCI graphics card with a Texas Instruments AVI scaler/interpolator/speedup chip for faster full-screen AVI playback. There's also a software Mpeg player and the card comes with 2Mb of W-Ram so you can run at up to 65,536 colours at 1,024x768 resolution.

Corel Graphics Pack

Paul Wardley

FREE FACTS 134

A mammoth application of five major graphics programs and five related utilities from Corel, all of which can be started from a common control centre.



- Applications: Print House, CorelFlow 3, PhotoPaint 6, CorelPresents, and Corel Motion 3D
- Utilities: Corel Multimedia Manager, Corel Depth, Corel Capture, Internet goodies, Photo CD Browser
- 25,000 clip-art images and symbols
- 1,000 photographs
- 1,000 samples
- 500 TrueType and Type 1 fonts

Either a bold attempt by Corel to provide an easier way of using a broad set of graphics programs, or a cynical attempt to cash in by bundling disparate elements of its other products. Either way, it's terrific value.

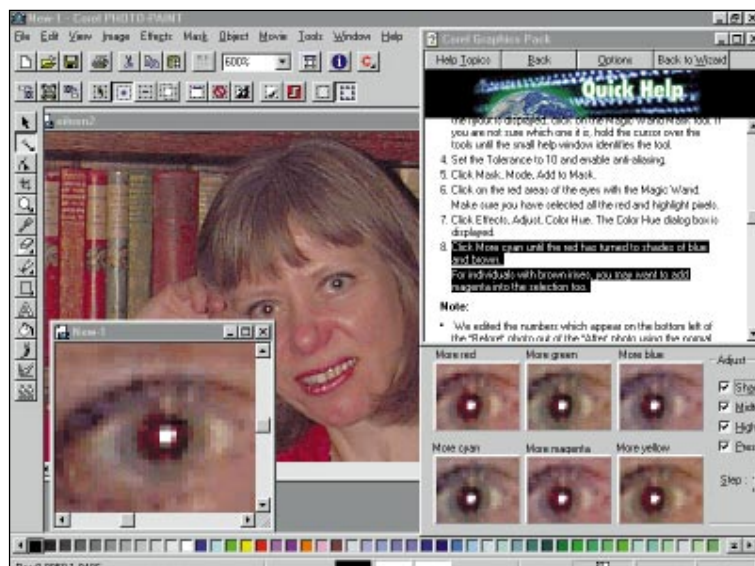
○ £99 (excl VAT – introductory price)

○ Corel: 0800 581028

Corel Graphics Pack

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Features | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ease of use | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Value for money | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Requirements: 486 DX2/66 or better, 8Mb of Ram (16Mb recommended), Windows 95, 256-colour SVGA graphics, double-speed CD-Rom drive, minimum 100Mb of disk space.



Corel has bundled many of the extras supplied with its best-selling Draw program in this mixed bag of graphics software. On top of these, there's CorelFlow, Corel Print House, and an extensive collection of fonts, pictures, clip-art and photographs.

All are bound together by something called the Corel Graphics Pack Wizard, the only new element in the box. It's an ingenious way of letting Corel decide which of the programs in the pack you should be using for a particular job. Take, for example, the problem of removing red-eye from flash photographs: just choose Photographs/Touch up/Remove Red-eye by clicking on options in the Wizard. The most suitable program (Corel PhotoPaint) will then be started with a pop-up help screen that stays on top of the program and gives step-by-step instructions on the task in hand.

PhotoPaint is probably the best program in the set: it's a painting program which is equally adept at image editing and creating free-hand pictures from scratch. The list-price of this program alone is more than the cost of the complete Graphics Pack. Another valuable component is Print House, a recent addition to the Corel stable, which we reviewed in April's Up Fronts. It uses a question-and-answer technique to help you design stationery, such as brochures, banners, cards, forms, labels and signs.

CorelPresents is a program on the lines of Powerpoint or Freehand, that enables you to combine text, pictures, sounds and animations to make business presentations. The animations for a presentation can be bought commercially or created with one of the other programs in the pack, called Motion 3D. This is fairly easy to use (for an animator) but is best suited to designing flying logos and the

like, rather than a sequel to Toy Story. Last of the major programs is CorelFlow 3 which, as its name suggests, is mainly for flow charts, but can also be used for technical diagrams and business graphics.

Everything else in the pack is designed to be used in support of other programs: there's a media manager to help you keep track of all your clip-art, a browser for Photo CD images, a screen-capture program for grabbing graphics from other software and a simple utility to apply 3D effects to 2D text and graphics. Sticking out like a sore thumb is a group of Internet programs, culled from Corel's Internet Mania CD, and with very little in common with the rest of the Graphics Pack.

There are two obvious criticisms of this comprehensive set of programs. The first is that there is very little integration between the individual components, which must be why it's called 'Pack' instead of 'Suite'. Most of the programs were acquired by Corel from other companies, which means that, apart from the disciplined menu structure applied by Windows 95, they have very little in common and the commands for each one have to be learnt separately.

The second objection is probably related to the first: installing even the minimum set of programs took up 100Mb of hard disk space on our test machine and a full installation would be well over 300Mb. This is probably due to each program doing everything from scratch, instead of being able to draw on a common set of resources, which would be the case if they had been designed by the same hands.

On the plus side, there's a thick colour-printed guide detailing all the clip-art and making it clear which of the five CD-Roms you can find it on.