

News



The **Primax Superswitch** is a parallel port adaptor that can be manually switched between up to four parallel devices. The

Superswitch costs £29.99 without cables.

Primax: 01235 546020

Steljes' Smart Board is a touch-sensitive presentation screen that can display information from a PC or Mac. Prices from £1,439.38. Steljes: 0181 213 2130



Hewlett-Packard has joined the ranks of virtual pet shop proprietors this month with its MOPY Fish. MOPY Fish swims in its own aquarium and interacts with its 'owner'. Keep your fish alive and you are rewarded with points, which can be used to buy fishy accessories. Download from: www.hp.com/go/fish

Iomega has improved its Zip drive. The ZipPlus is faster (28 times as fast as a floppy) but uses standard 100Mb Zip disks. It has a new software bundle, allowing it to be used for presentations and music-making, and should be available at the end of October for around £180. The Zip drive is still available for around £140.

Also from Iomega is a 10-pack of coloured disks, at £149.99, suitable for Zip and ZipPlus drives. Iomega: 0800 413 0999 www.iomega.com

300MHz Pentium IIs break speed barrier

Dell, Gateway and Carrera are shipping their fastest PCs yet with the new Intel 300MHz Pentium II processor. In addition, all three vendors are combining this latest CPU with Intel's new LX PCI chipset.

The LX is superior to the old FX chipset and boosts Pentium II performance by supporting the processor's more advanced features and enabling the use of the latest high-speed Ultra ATA hard disks and AGP (Advanced Graphics Port) display adaptors.

Dell's XPS D300 has 64Mb of RAM, an 8Mb Matrox AGP graphics card, a staggering 8.4Gb Ultra ATA hard disk and 17in monitor, and comes at a cost of £2,496.

Gateway's G6-300XL is more expensive at £2,584 and might seem poorer value with its 6.4Gb hard disk and 4Mb AGP graphics card, but it comes with a 19in monitor.



Carrera's Power Pro II-300 has 64Mb of RAM and comes with Windows NT 4.0. It costs £2,579 and has a 4Mb AGP graphics card, 6.4Gb hard disk and 17in iiyama monitor.

Carrera: 0171 830 0486

Dell: 0870 1524625

Gateway 2000: 0800 552000

Sell-off grants AOL a share of CompuServe

On-line giant CompuServe (owned by H&R Block Inc) has been sold to WorldCom, one of America's biggest Internet Service Providers, in return for \$1.2 billion worth of WorldCom shares.

WorldCom is hanging onto CompuServe's corporate Internet access business but has sold the content and personal account side to America Online. In exchange for this and a further \$175 million, AOL handed over its corporate accounts.



AOL intends to keep run the business as a separate division. The deal consolidates AOL's position as the world's biggest on-line service, well ahead of the Microsoft Network. Defending MSN's decision not to bid for CompuServe, Laura Jennings, MSN vice-president, said it had taken a strategic decision to hang onto its resources and invest them internally.

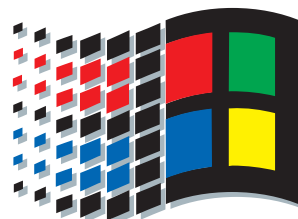
www.wcom.com

CompuServe: 0800 289378 (www.compuserve.com)

AOL: 0800 2791234 (www.aol.co.uk)

Upgrade pressure forces Win 98 delay

Microsoft has delayed the release of Windows 98, a move that caused the company's share price to drop sharply.



The follow-up to the Windows 95 operating system was originally set to ship in the first quarter of 1998 but it will not now appear before the second quarter.

Phil Holden, Microsoft's Windows group product manager, attributed the delay to the need to supply upgrades for Windows 95 and 3.1 in the same box. Though Microsoft was content to supply upgrades separately, pressure from distribution partners and large business users forced it to alter its plans.

The situation has faint echoes of the Windows 95 fiasco, when that product's release date slipped several times. It was eventually launched in the third quarter of 1995.

www.microsoft.com



The CreditCard Ethernet 10/100+Modem 56 is **Xircom's** latest combined modem and network adaptor PC Card. The card offers a 56Kbits/s modem and costs £311.38.
Xircom: 01256 332552
● www.xircom.com



Psion PDAs (personal digital assistants) are delicate little things and the Palm-Tec case is designed to protect against hard knocks. Available for both Series 3 and 5 models, the clamshell cases are made from sturdy ABS plastic and have a padded internal lining. The cases cost £24.95 (inc delivery) for both sizes.
Palm-Tec: 01342 317416

The **Hewlett-Packard** OfficeJet 590 is a combined printer, fax machine and photocopier that costs £399. The OfficeJet 590 incorporates a colour inkjet printer and black and white scanner.
Hewlett-Packard: 0990 474747
● www.hp.co.uk



PC flying fans will be impressed by **Saitek's** X36 control stick. Styled by the Seymour Powell design company, whose credentials include the Intercity train and MZ Scorpion motorbike, the X36 is intended for flight simulations. An X36 control stick costs £69.99 and a stick and throttle combination is priced at £99.99.
Saitek: 01454 855050
● www.saitek.com

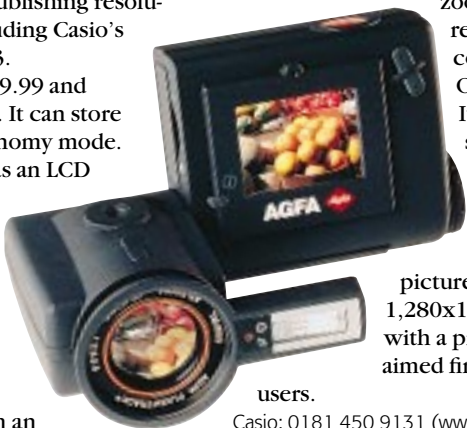
Camera options grow

Six new digital cameras from the leading manufacturers are set to hit the streets. Four of them use the ideal Web publishing resolution of 640x480 pixels, including Casio's QV-200 and the Ricoh RDC-3.

Casio's offering costs £399.99 and features a panoramic setting. It can store 64 fine images or 192 in economy mode. The Ricoh costs £399 and has an LCD screen for previewing pictures.

Panasonic's not-so-catchily-named NVDC1000B is scarcely bigger than a credit card and weighs a paltry 158g without batteries. It's the world's smallest camera with an LCD screen, can store up to 94 economy pictures and costs £449.95.

Most expensive at this resolution is the Minolta Dim   V, weighing in at £600 but it does have a detachable zoom lens.



For £649 you can buy the Agfa ePhoto 1280, with a 1,280x960 resolution and 3x zoom lens. The highest resolution though, comes from the Olympus C-1400L. It's a digital SLR, sharing its styling with the company's all-in-one 35mm models. It can store pictures at up to 1,280x1,024 resolution but, with a price of £1,299, it's aimed firmly at professional users.

Casio: 0181 450 9131 (www.casio.co.uk); **Ricoh:** 01782 717100 (www.ricoh.com); **Panasonic:** 0500 404041 (www.panasonic.co.uk); **Minolta:** 01908 200400 (www.minolta.co.uk); **Agfa:** 0181 231 4906 (www.agfa.co.uk); **Olympus:** 0171 253 2772 (www.olympus.com)

New Presario users get home delivery

Compaq's new £1,056 Presario 2212 is priced to include delivery and installation by authorised installers. The service is just one part of a package designed to introduce new users in the SOHO (Small Office/Home Office) market to the benefits of PC ownership without any of the attendant worries.

The specification of the Presario 2212 is rather basic, comprising a 180MHz processor, 16Mb of RAM, a 1.6Mb hard disk, 33.6Kbits/s modem and 14in monitor, but it should be capable of running the pre-installed software satisfactorily.

An installer will deliver, unpack and test the Presario PC within three days of an order being placed. An on-site warranty is included and buyers also receive a year's free telephone support for the computer and its pre-installed software.

Microsoft Office 97 Small Business Edition is supplied, together with the easier-to-use Microsoft Works as well as a selection of other Microsoft software titles covering personal finance, reference and entertainment.
Compaq order line: 0800 611722



Monitor makers follow 19in route

ADI and Maxdata have launched 19in monitors, hot on the heels of the Hitachi CM751 model reviewed last month.

The 19in monitors bridge the price and performance gap between 17in and 21in models and use the same FST technology as 17in monitors, making them less likely to distort objects in the corners. The new monitors are smaller, lighter and cheaper than their 20in and 21in rivals, yet still work comfortably with resolutions up to 1,280x1,024.

The Belinea 106090 from Maxdata has an anticipated street price of £668, while ADI's Microscan 6P is expected to sell at £704. The pricier ADI model gives a wider range of refresh rates and the option to buy clip-on multimedia speakers for £16.

ADI: 0181 236 0801
Maxdata: 0118 936 2900



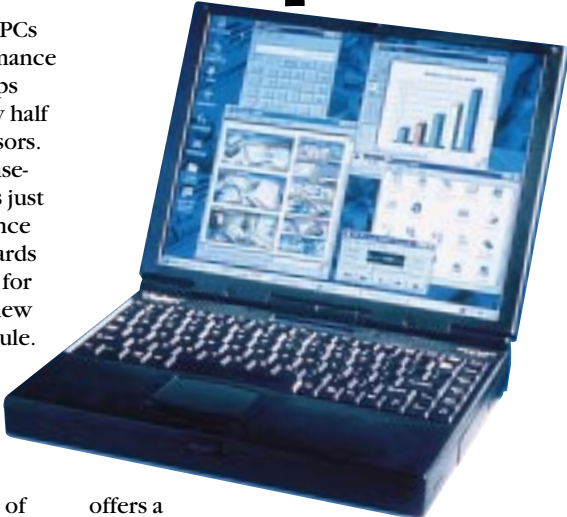
Portable Pentiums shift balance of power

Faster Pentium processors for notebook PCs have arrived, bringing speed and performance benefits. Intel's new MMX notebook chips run at 200MHz and 233MHz, yet use only half as much power as older 166MHz processors.

Low power consumption and the consequent increase in notebook battery life is just one advantage of the new processors. Since they are packaged on Mobile Module boards with essential supporting chips, it's easy for manufacturers to upgrade models with new processors by swapping the Mobile Module.

Both Gateway 2000 and Viglen have been quick to adopt the new technology and are ready to deliver 200MHz and 233MHz notebooks. Viglen offers the cheapest entry point at £2,730 for a 200MHz Dossier M notebook with 16Mb of RAM, a 1Gb hard disk and a 12.1in TFT screen. There's a wide range of other configurations, with the top of the Dossier line comprising a 233MHz processor, a 3Gb hard disk and 13.3in TFT screen for £3,710.

Gateway's 200MHz Solo 9100 S5-200LS



offers a 4Gb hard disk, 32Mb of RAM and a 13.3in TFT screen for £3,759, and the 233MHz version at £4,346 has 48Mb of RAM, a 5Gb hard disk and a modem.
Gateway 2000: 0800 55 2000
Viglen: 0181 758 7000

Speech recognition comes naturally



Continuous speech recognition that is usable and affordable has arrived for the PC, courtesy of Dragon Systems. NaturallySpeaking costs £270 and needs a PC with at least a Pentium 133 processor and 32Mb of RAM.

Rather than speak in staccato bursts, NaturallySpeaking allows you to talk to your PC in a natural, fluid manner with normal intonation. The software only supports dictation, not full PC control, and spoken words appear in a dictation window, where they can be copied and pasted into another application.

Incredibly, NaturallySpeaking works extremely well with just half an hour's training (involving reading chapters from Arthur C Clarke's *3001: The Final Odyssey*), though it does benefit from further vocal tuition. You can also feed it a selection of your own documents, from which it will learn your writing style and vocabulary.

The software is supplied on CD and comes with a headset microphone.
Endeavour Technologies: 01932 827324

UK leads world in computer literacy poll

If you want proof of Disraeli's adage about lies, damned lies and statistics, consider the *1997 European Computer Literacy Report* commissioned by Olivetti.

The report puts Britain ahead of the world in terms of computer use and says primary and secondary school children have greater access to IT than those in other European countries, the US, Canada or Japan. One in three British households with children has a home computer and headmasters estimate that 94 percent of school pupils get hands-on computer experience.

Without wishing to disparage Olivetti's findings, we wonder how many of the home computers are capable of running current software and how much of the hands-on experience is in isolated sessions at obsolete computers, while decent PCs are reserved for examination classes.

Those of a nationalistic persuasion can take heart from the report's findings that the computer to pupil ratio in Britain is 1:18, while in Germany it is 1:500.



Quality printing is even more affordable with new printers from **Lexmark** and **Kyocera**. The Lexmark 1000 Color Jetprinter is a 600dpi colour inkjet for £129, while the Porsche-designed FS-600 – £350 from Kyocera – also offers 600dpi printing at 6ppm. Like all Kyocera laser printers, the drum is rated for the life of the printer while low toner costs promise class-leading economy.
Lexmark: 01628 481500
Kyocera: 0118 931 1500



Canon has added a digital camcorder to its range of existing still models. The DM-MV1 is based on the MiniDV format and has an IEEE 1394 (Firewire) interface. It costs £1,700.
Canon: 0500 246246
● www.canon.co.uk

Game.com is a new combined PDA/portable gaming device from **Tiger Electronics**. The 8-bit unit has a touch-sensitive monochrome screen and uses cartridge-based games, a range of which are already available from £19.99. The £79.99 Game.com can optionally link to the Internet for e-mail and Web browsing.
Tiger Electronics: 01789 299942

Logitech has launched three new mice, all compatible with Microsoft's IntelliMouse. The MouseMan, MouseMan+ and Pilot Mouse+ have three or more buttons and prices start from £29.99.
Logitech: 01306 734300
● www.logitech.com





Symantec has released the latest version of its PC-to-PC communication software, pcAnywhere 32. Version 8 supports voice and data switching on a single call, even with non-SVD modems, and security during remote communications has also been beefed up. pcAnywhere 32 is available now and costs £163.33. Symantec: 0171 616 5600
 ● www.symantec.com

Available now from **Panasonic** is one of the first notebooks to be fitted with a DVD-ROM drive.

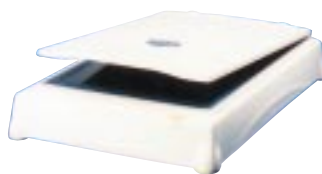


Coupled with a P166MMX processor, 32Mb of RAM and a 13.3in colour TFT screen, the CF-63 allows you to access up to 17Gb of data from a single disc. Such power, though, costs £4,699.

Panasonic, 0500 404041
 ● www.panasonic.co.uk

Software Warehouse is selling software over the Internet. From 3 November, customers can download complete programs from www.downloadshop.co.uk via secure credit card transactions.

Software Warehouse:
 01675 466467



Plustek's OpticPro 4830P is a colour flatbed scanner, costing £175.08. It has an optical resolution of 300x600dpi, scans in 30-bit colour and connects via the parallel port (there's also a pass-through connector for a printer). It comes with Micrografx Photo-Magic and is Twain-compliant.

Plustek: 0171 831 3139
 ● www.plustek.com

Latest scanners make design breakthrough

A horde of new scanners offering numerous technological and design improvements have been announced.

The Visioneer Strobe, costing £234, is a compact parallel port colour document scanner that uses an array of CCDs instead of a fluorescent tube, a technique said to improve both focus and image quality.

Another parallel port scanner is the Phodox UltraScan 300 from Primax. This £240 flatbed unit incorporates an LCD control panel that enables you to scan and copy without having to directly invoke

software on the host PC. Images are automatically located, straightened and corrected for colour weaknesses.



Two interesting new scanners from Logitech are the £189 PageScan USB, which picks up power and transfers data via the host PC's USB port, and the £199 FreeScan for parallel ports. The FreeScan has a 25-sheet automatic paper feeder and a

detachable scanning head for use on books and bound documents.

Principal Distribution (Visioneer): 01756 704000

Primax: 01235 546020

Logitech: 01306 734300

Graphics card market accelerates

The quest for superior graphics continues apace with the launch of several graphics accelerator cards.

The VideoLogic Apocalypse 5D is finally on sale and accelerates both 2D and 3D graphics. Based around the PowerVR chip, it's available in both 6Mb and 8Mb versions, for £159 and £199 respectively. The older Apocalypse 3D now costs just £49.

The Hercules Thriller 3D uses the new Rendition V2200 chipset and comes in either 4Mb (\$179) or 8Mb (\$249), PCI or AGP versions, allowing fast gaming and video output, and MPEG decoding.

Meanwhile, Number Nine is shipping an AGP version of the Revolution 3D, built around its own Ticket To Ride graphics chip. Available in 4Mb (£233) and 8Mb (£304) models, it can be expanded to 16Mb of RAM.

Aimed at business users, the Datapath TWINfinity has two S3 accelerator chips and allows a PC to run two monitors simultaneously. Two cards can also be combined to allow use of four monitors.

VideoLogic: 01923 260511 (www.videologic.co.uk)

Imago Micro (Hercules distributor): 01635 294300 (www.hercules.com)

Mentor Computer Systems (Number Nine distributor): 01582 483381 (www.nine.com)

Datapath: 01332 294441 (www.datapath.co.uk)

Creative Labs seeks video success

Having virtually cornered the market in sound cards, Creative Labs is now expanding its horizons with forays into video conferencing, DVD and graphics.

The Eclipse 3D graphics card is designed to complement Creative's AWE64 Value sound card to provide flexible general-purpose multimedia facilities. The more advanced 4Mb Exxtreme 3D graphics card (£129) is aimed at serious gamers and graphics enthusiasts. Based on 3DLabs' Permedia 2 graphics processor, this can be upgraded to 8Mb.

Movie buffs might be tempted by the DVD Encore Dxr2 kit at £259. This bundles a DVD drive with an MPEG2 decoder for playing DVD movies, while budding directors can



make their own videos with the Video Blaster WebCam at £149. This digital colour camera is supplied with software to capture and edit video sequences and can also be used with an ordinary 28.8Kbits/s modem for video conferencing and video telephony over the Internet. Creative Labs: 01245 265265