

Among the new products reviewed this month are: a Toshiba notebook with Pentium MMX technology, an all-in-one graphics application, an Hitachi DVD-ROM drive, a PC-based video editing system, and a compact multimedia Pentium PC



Toshiba's Tecra 740CDT ushers in two new developments to the notebook market – a Pentium MMX (multimedia extensions) processor and the biggest active-matrix screen yet seen on a portable PC. Together with its 16Mb of EDO RAM and a huge 2.1Gb removable hard disk, this adds up to an impressive challenge to the typical desktop PC.

This model has the Tecra trademark light grey finish and slightly rounded contours and it's pretty robust. It's also heavy, weighing 4kg with its CD-ROM drive fitted.

Other Tecra staples are present, including Zoomed Video and 32-bit CardBus support for both the Type II PC Card slots and a fast 4Mbps/s infra-red serial port, plus the docking station connector at the back. This machine comes with a 28.8Kbps/s modem, which can handle faxing and voice calls in conjunction with the built-in speakers and microphone.

A bay in the front of the case can accept either the floppy drive module or a 10-speed CD-ROM drive and you can connect the floppy drive up externally via an adaptor, which is included as standard.

Sound is handled by a 16-bit Crystal Audio chipset and fed out

to a pair of speakers set into the case just above the keyboard. These are clear and produce a slightly better bass response than the typical notebook offering.

For some time now Toshiba machines have been fitted with a lightweight keyboard. Unfortunately, this translates into a rather insubstantial keypad, wobbly keys and an over-thin baseplate.

Its screens, however, have gone from strength to strength, culminating in the lid-filling 13.3in panel on the Tecra. This is as big as a screen can get without increasing the size of an A4-format notebook PC and it makes the best job yet of displaying an easily readable 1,024x768 resolution. In fact, we'll stick our necks out and say that eventually this size/resolution combination will become the standard for all conventionally designed notebooks.

As we reviewed a pre-production model, it was impossible to make definitive pronouncements about either performance or charge life from the Lithium Ion battery. However, the Tecra is fast by notebook standards and gets a boost from the larger on-chip cache fitted to its MMX processor, with further improvements expected when running MMX-enhanced applications.

Dominic Bucknall

Toshiba Tecra 740CDT

This notebook combines MMX power with a groundbreaking high-resolution screen and full multimedia capabilities

- Intel Pentium MMX 166MHz processor
- 256Kb pipeline burst cache
- 16Mb of EDO RAM
- 2.1Gb removable hard disk
- 10-speed removable CD-ROM
- Internal/external floppy drive module
- Integrated 16-bit audio, microphone and stereo speakers
- 13.3in TFT screen
- 2Mb Chips & Technologies 65554 graphics
- Integrated 28.8Kbps/s modem with voice and fax
- 4Mbps/s (IrDA 1.1) infra-red port
- Lithium ion battery
- Windows 95, comms and system utilities
- Weight: 4kg inc CD-ROM drive
- Dimensions (wxdxh): 304x239x61mm

The Tecra has moved the notebook market on, bringing together the performance advantages of MMX and the visual impact of its new-generation screen in an impressively capable package.

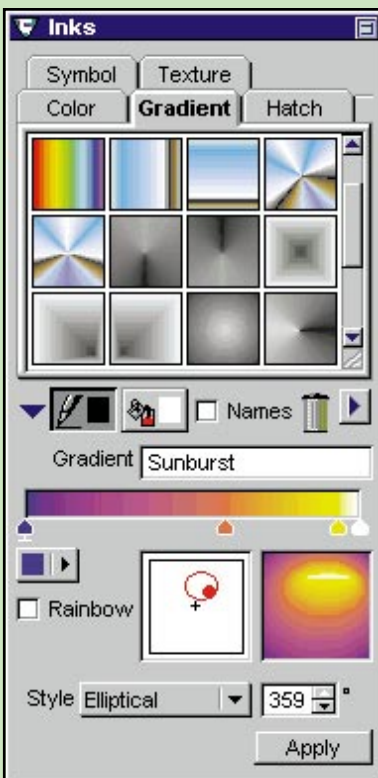
- £5,869 (inc VAT)
- Toshiba: 01932 828828

Toshiba Tecra 740CDT

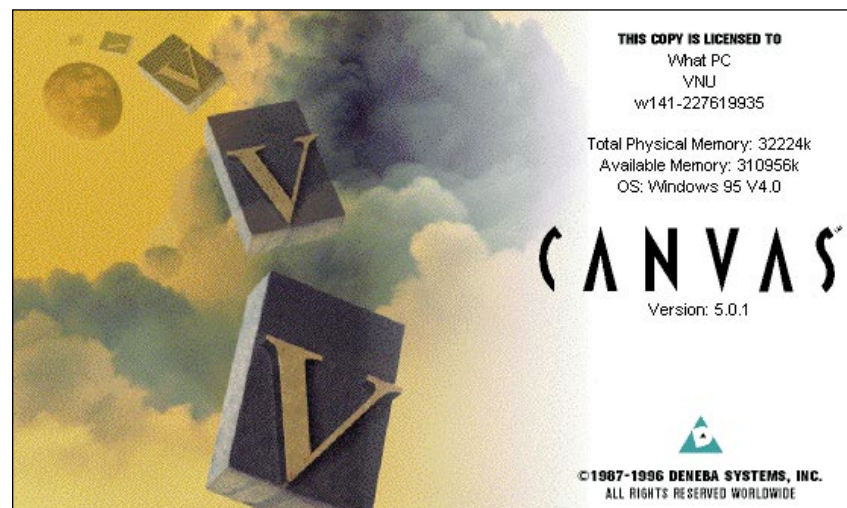
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Canvas 5

An all-in-one graphics application for Windows 95, incorporating image processing, painting, vector drawing and page layout.



- Drawing, painting and page layout without switching programs
- Unlimited undo
- 2,000 fonts, 20,000 clip-art pictures
- Precise typographic control
- Left/right master pages
- Colour separations and trapping
- Smart lines, multiple lines, neon lines and dimension lines
- Supports Adobe-standard plug-ins
- Creates slide shows with QuickTime movies



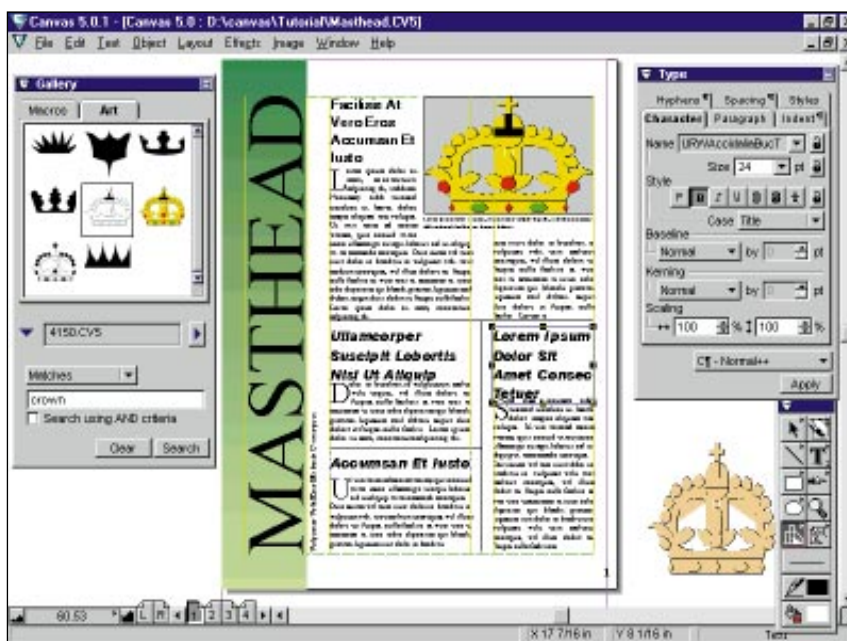
The idea of a one-stop graphics suite isn't new – for some years Corel and Micrografx have offered drawing, image editing, fonts and clip-art all in the same box, and more recently Macromedia joined the fray. Canvas, however, goes a stage further, by placing bitmap editing, vector graphics, page layout and slide-show tools not just in the same box, but in the same application. The program comes on floppies or CD-ROM and will take up around 26Mb of hard disk space – modest in comparison to the competition – plus nearly 2,000 fonts in TrueType and Adobe Type 1 format.

The interface, at first glance, is deceptively simple, with one small toolbox providing access to everything. Click on the 'Paint Tools' button, for example, and a sub-box of 19 more buttons flies out. You can drag any sub-box away from the main set to keep it on screen. Some tools have further options – double-click on the text button and a tabbed palette of type and formatting options opens. These, together

with things such as the colour and line palettes can be kept permanently open on screen, or collapsed into their own title bars.

On the DTP side, there is excellent typographic control, with kerning (adjusting the space between selected letters), outline and shadow effects, styles, dropped capitals (large letters starting a paragraph) and text wrap around graphics. There's also tight control over hyphenation, which is essential for getting an even density of text in narrow columns. You can flow text between columns and pages but this is surprisingly difficult, especially if you are importing the text from a file. You can't place the text directly into existing columns – you have to put it in a temporary container and copy it from there. The problem is exacerbated by the only import format being RTF (Rich Text Format). Though most word processors can produce this, it seems extraordinary that you cannot import plain text files – you have to cut and paste from Notepad or another editor.

Canvas 5 can set up 'Master'



pages, which contain items that will be used on many pages, but unlike high-end DTP applications such as PageMaker or Ventura, you can only have one left-and-right pair. There's little in the way of long document management – no indexing or contents facilities, for instance – as the emphasis is very much on page design. Colour support is excellent though, with Pantone, Toyo and Trumatch libraries and colour separation facilities, including trapping and dot-gain compensation, for professional printing.

The vector drawing facilities comprise the usual line, rectangle, ellipse and Bézier tools, but there are some special shapes, too, such as concentric circles, spirals and the multigon tool, which can produce pointed or rounded stars and polygons. The fill palette offers a preset range of patterned, textured and graduated effects to which you can add and save for reuse. The lines palette has the usual options for arrowheads, dashed lines and calligraphic effects but also has other tricks lurking in its tabs. You can create equidistant multiple lines in various colours and widths, and 'Neon' lines which have a shaded effect, exactly like a neon sign. This is especially effective when applied to text and, again, you can create and save your own neon effects.

For accurate drawing, the 'Smart Mouse' feature constrains the placement of objects so you can connect lines precisely to another object or force them to exact angles. You can add automatic dimension lines to drawings for technical illustration and 'Smart' lines, which link objects and stretch to stay connected when the objects are moved. Layers are another important feature which allows you to group text and graphics anywhere on the page

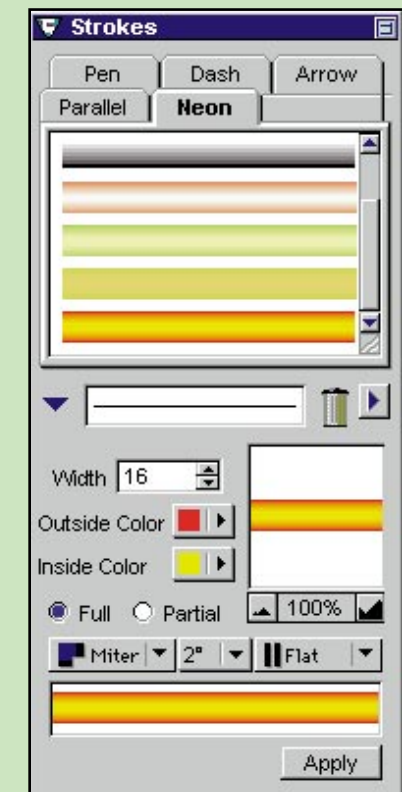
and make them invisible or lock them against change. It's useful, say, if you want to hide the pictures for faster response when you're editing text, or add objects to a complex drawing without the risk of accidentally changing previous work.

The 'Gallery' provides access to the clip-art library, which is spread over two more CD-ROMs. There's a clever 'search by keyword' feature, but, unfortunately, no printed catalogue. The Gallery also sports a 'Macro' feature, which is a means to store objects (or groups of objects) you've created for reuse later.

Canvas is well equipped with bitmap-editing features. You get image-enhancing filters, such as sharpening, softening, brightness and contrast, as well as more esoteric effects such as solarising or embossing. Adobe-standard plug-ins are supported so you can add third-party effects. Then there's a full range of painting and retouching brushes in the toolbox, but there are a few discrepancies. Using the Clone tool to 'paint' over an image with another section of the same image is utterly frustrating until you realise that you have to set the source of the clone with the Alt key, not the Control key as the manual and Help state. As well as paper-based documents, you can create slide shows for presentations. These can contain QuickTime movies but, unlike bespoke presentation software, there are no charting facilities.

Fast it isn't, taking nearly a minute to load (twice as long as Corel Draw 7) and display update can be glacial, especially at high magnification. It also betrays its Macintosh origins by having no function for the right mouse button, which is unforgivable for a Windows 95 application.

Tim Nott



Canvas 5 is a brilliant idea that unfortunately falls down on its implementation. It's slow, quirky and has shortcomings when it comes to text-handling.

- £468.82 (inc VAT)
- POW Distribution: 01202 716726

Canvas 5

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★

486DX or higher, Windows 95 or NT, 8Mb of RAM for Windows 95 (16Mb recommended), 16Mb of RAM for Windows NT (24Mb recommended), 35Mb of free hard disk space, 8-bit VGA display, CD-Rom drive.

Hitachi GD-1000 DVD-ROM

The first drive to be launched in this country supporting the new high-capacity DVD-ROM data storage standard.

- Dual-focus laser (supports dual-layer DVD media)
- Can read both CD-ROM and DVD-ROM media
- Up to 17Gb storage
- Average access time: 190ms
- DVD data transfer rate: 1.38Mb/s (Mbytes per second)
- CD-ROM data transfer rate: 1.2Mb/s (eight-speed)
- Enhanced IDE interface
- 256Kb data buffer
- Dimensions (hxxwxd): 41.3x146x190mm
- Weight: 0.9Kg

If you want to be an early adopter and get a DVD-ROM drive into your PC, then the Hitachi GD-1000 is the only way to do it at the moment. It's expensive but you can take some comfort in its ability to play CD-ROMs as well.

- GD-1000: £400 (expected street price at launch)
- CineMaster card: £TBA
- Hitachi: 0181 8492000

Hitachi GD-1000 DVD-ROM

Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Many people claim that it stands for Digital Versatile Disc while others say it's definitely Digital Video Disc, but the official view of the consortium behind DVD is that stands for nothing. What is certain though, is that DVD is the next big thing in the world of multimedia and information storage. It's all but certain to replace the standard CD-ROM drive in PCs over the next couple of years and is likely to pose a serious threat to home video recorders and Laser-disc players by the turn of the century. It's early days yet but DVD-ROM drives are available for PCs and the first to hit the UK market is the GD-1000 from Hitachi.

Physically, the GD-1000 looks just like any internal CD-ROM drive. It's designed to fit into a standard 5.25in drive bay and once fitted, if it were not for the DVD-ROM logo, you'd be hard pressed to recognise the GD-1000 as a piece of state-of-the-art technology. The drive has all the usual CD-ROM driver features – a slide-out tray for discs, 3.5mm headphone socket, volume control and a couple of LED activity indicators.

Although the GD-1000 looks like a normal CD-ROM drive and indeed, can read normal CD-ROMs, it uses very different technology. To the naked eye, a standard DVD disc is indistinguishable from a CD-ROM but they offer a drastically increased capacity – up to 4.7Gb (gigabytes). This is around seven times more than a CD-ROM and is possible because of the surface structure of a DVD disc. Simply put, the pits that represent the data are smaller and closer together than those on a CD-ROM, which means there can be more of them. Furthermore, DVD discs can be double-sided and each

side can have two layers. In theory at least, this means that DVD discs can store up to 17Gb of data (which is why feature films stored on DVD discs will soon be a reality).

As long as you're not afraid to poke around inside your PC, installing the GD-1000 is straightforward. Just like a CD-ROM drive, it connects to the secondary IDE interface using a ribbon cable and, once the drivers are loaded, the drive appears with its own drive letter. The GD-1000 is then used in the usual way. Discs placed in the drive do, however, take longer to initialise than with a CD-ROM drive. This is because the drive takes a while to recognise the type of disc inserted – CD-ROM or DVD. The GD-1000 performs like an eight-speed CD-ROM drive with CD-ROMs, with a transfer rate of around 1.2Mb a second. DVD-ROMs can be read a little quicker, at around 1.38Mb a second.

For discs containing data, that's all there is to it. One major use of DVD's huge storage capacity, however, is for storing high-quality video. We looked at a disc containing high-quality MPEG-2 video, which offers better quality than the more common MPEG-1 system. Unfortunately, although MPEG-1 discs can be played using software, even the latest Pentium 200MMX PCs cannot play MPEG-2 effectively. To play such discs, a PC needs extra hardware assistance. We used a decoder card from CineMaster that fits into a PCI slot. Although the sample videos were a little cheesy, the quality was absolutely astonishing and of by far the best quality ever to be seen on a PC. The images are crisp with vivid colours and are far superior to VHS video.

Scott Colvey ►

Video Director Studio 200

PC-based video editing system incorporating PC-controlled vision mixer with varied scene transitions, PC control of VCR/camcorder and final video sequence with titling and still frame grabs.



- Source deck (camcorder) and record deck (VCR) control
- Storyboard editing of tapes
- Automatic video scene detection
- PC-controlled vision mixer for titles overlay and video fades and wipes
- Titles editor
- Frame grabs of up to 1,500x1,125 resolution
- Soundtrack effects

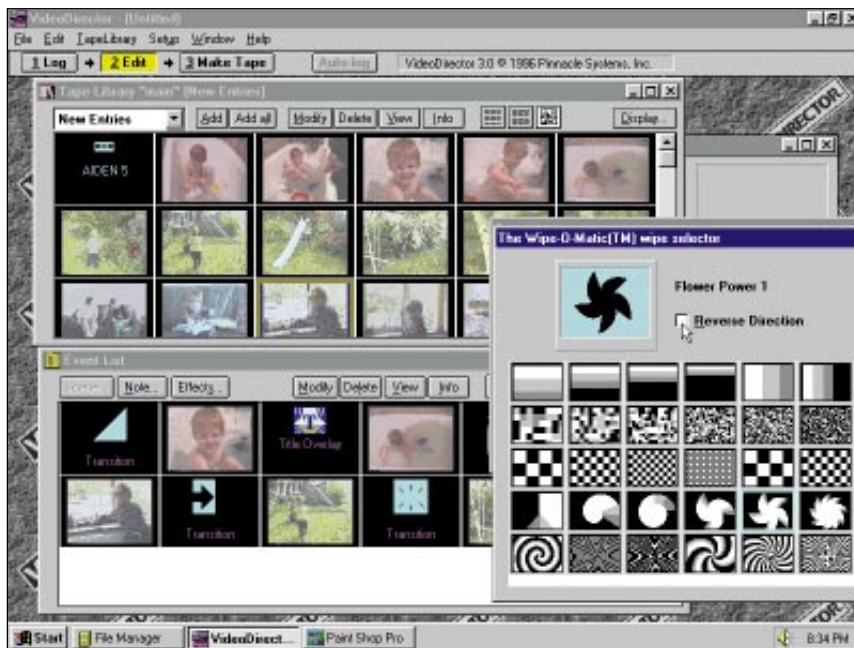
A most powerful combination of excellent software and ingenious hardware for a bargain price. Studio 200 genuinely turns editing video tapes from a chore to a pleasure and opens the door to creativity you would never bother with otherwise.

- £290 (inc VAT)
- Pinnacle Systems: 0118 9814230

Video Director Studio 200

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: 386 or later, 8Mb of RAM, serial port, Windows 3.x or Windows 95.



Modern camcorders make shooting video easy but getting every shot in the right order and of the right length is next to impossible. The real skill of video making, therefore, is in the editing but systems to do this on a PC are usually expensive and by no means simple to use. Video Director Studio 200, on the other hand, gives anyone equipped with a PC, camcorder and VCR everything they need to create a near-professional computer-controlled editing suite, all for under £300.

Video Director Studio 200 is a development of Pinnacle's previous packages, Video Director Home and Video Director Suite, and uses a special cable to put the camcorder and VCR under the control of the PC. Studio 200 adds a PC-driven vision mixer and digitiser to the mix.

The control cable connects to a serial port and gives the PC control over such things as play, record, rewind, fast forward and pause, on both the camcorder (which plays the raw video) and the VCR (which records edited highlights). The VCR is controlled by an infra-red transmitter and the camcorder either by infra-red or a LANC socket.

Editing a tape is a matter of deciding which bits to keep and which to discard. With Studio 200, you play a tape and press one button when a scene starts and another when it finishes. With the scenes marked, their sequence then must be defined. Clicking 'Make tape' finds each scene according to the sequence and plays it on the camcorder while recording on the VCR.

A LANC-compatible camcorder (preferably with timecode) is essential for accuracy of playback. The infra-red control of the VCR is inevitably a little variable but Studio 200 can calibrate itself for the

VCR's delayed response to infra-red commands.

So far, Studio 200 makes editing tapes much more straightforward than usual but the vision mixer and digitiser mean it can do much more. These are contained in a unit the size of a VHS video which connects to the PC's printer port (it also has a printer-through connection), the camcorder's output and VCR's input (both composite and S-video connections are provided).

Using the digitiser, Studio 200 will scan the raw tape, detecting scene changes and automatically logging them, ready for selection and rearrangement. It captures a 'picon' of the first frame of each clip and defining the scene order is then just a matter of dragging and dropping the picons into position on a 'storyboard'. The software also gives control over the soundtrack, automatically calling up audio effects from a CD or a Wave file to overlay on the final tape when needed.

The vision mixer will overlay titles and captions from the titles editor, and produce professional 'transitions' (fades, wipes and slides from one scene to another) even though there is just one video source. Over 100 different styles of transitions are available.

The digitiser can be used for grabbing (producing images of up to a staggering 1,500x1,125 resolution) and it supports the Twain interface so you can grab directly into many compatible applications.

This really is an impressive system. The automatic scene logging is almost miraculous and is effective on the vast majority of scene changes. Editing a sequence is easy and control over sound effects, titles and transitions unequalled by anything in this price range.

Geoff Bains ►

Citizen Printiva 1700

A four-colour dry ink printer with metallic colour options and built-in colour scanner.



- Four-colour printing with cyan, magenta, silver and gold metallic colour options
- Print method: Citizen's Micro Dry (dry ink) process
- Resolution: 1,200x600dpi mono; 600x600dpi colour
- 100-sheet paper tray
- Prints on T-shirt transfer medium as well as transparencies and glossy paper
- Produces waterproof prints.
- Built-in Twain-compatible scanner with scanner resolution of 600dpi
- Drivers for Windows 3.1 and Windows 95
- Dimensions (mm): 447x272x189 (dxwxh)
- Weight: 6.4kg

The Printiva 1700 produces vibrant colour prints on a number of mediums and has average scanning capabilities, but it comes up a bit short on basic text printing.

- £703.83 (inc VAT)
- Citizen: 01753 584111

Citizen Printiva 1700

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★

At first glance, the Citizen Printiva 1700 looks like an ordinary ink jet printer. With its curved, semi-circular styling and rear-mounted paper feed tray you'd be hard pressed to think otherwise. But scratch a little deeper and instead you'll find a unique dry ink printer with a full-blown colour scanner built in too.

The Printiva 1700 is the successor to the popular Citizen Printiva 600C. The 1700 is very similar to its predecessor in that it's a four-colour printer that makes use of Citizen's dry ink technology, Micro Dry.

Unlike standard four-colour ink jet printers that use two cartridges (one containing black ink and the other containing cyan, magenta, and yellow), the 1700 makes use of four separate typewriter-like ribbon cartridges. So if you deplete one colour you don't have to replace a whole all-in-one cartridge that still has leftover ink from the other two colours. Instead, you just replace the depleted cartridge, reducing waste and expense.

Physically, the Printiva 1700 isn't the sleekest printer on the market and you'll need a good chunk of desk to accommodate it. The sheet feeder at the rear holds up to 100 sheets of plain paper, 30 transparencies or 30 postcards. Printed pages emerge from the front and drop straight onto the desk. For manual paper feed, the tray folds down into a horizontal position, which also gives a flat paper path. The ink cartridges are held inside the front lid in a horizontal row and installing one is as easy as putting a cassette into a tape recorder.

The print quality was a bit hit and miss, especially for black text output on plain paper. Printing at 300x300dpi (dots per inch) gave no

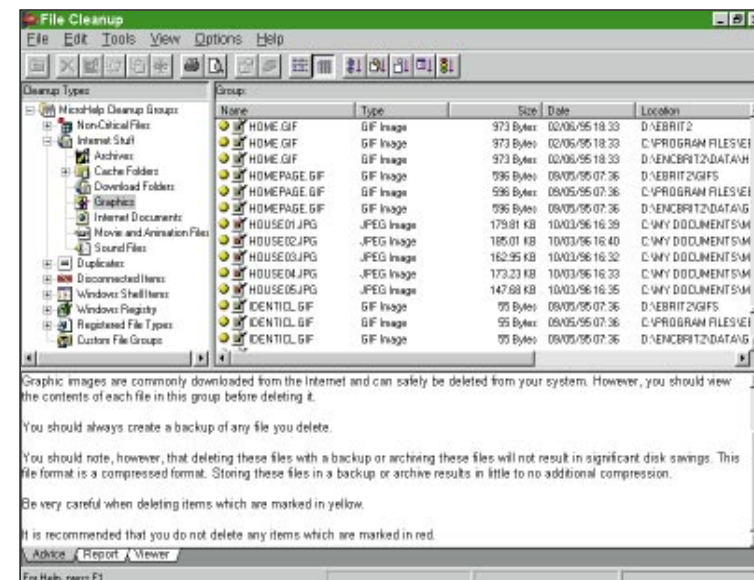
cause for concern but at 600x600dpi, text had a peculiarly speckled appearance, apparently caused by the ink not completely transferring to the paper. Output on high quality, high resolution paper fared much better but it is also much more expensive to use. The highest option, 1,200x600dpi, did, however, produce impressive results.

On the colour side, the Printiva 1700 fared much better. Its output on high resolution glossy paper was incredibly pure and vibrant, especially the reds, greens and blues. It also handled precise print jobs, such as a fine line of white through solid black, brilliantly. Colour prints aren't that quick though, with a full page at 600dpi taking around seven minutes to appear.

The Printiva 1700 falls down in one area. In every colour print job, there is a banding, caused (unavoidably) by the nature of the cartridges. The driver software is fairly standard and allows you to rely on automatic settings or you can adjust them.

The scanner side of the Printiva 1700 is functional but don't expect anything high-end. It is controlled by Citizen's 'Copy Studio' scanning software which allows a number of options. You select the type of image you want to scan (colour photo to black and white) and what resolution, ranging from 75 to 600dpi. Documents to be scanned must first be inserted into a supplied transparent sleeve before being fed into the printer via the rear paper tray. Scans are made in almost the same way as a print, with the scanning element passing across the page a line at a time. The scanning quality on the whole is acceptable for home use, but this is by no means a professional scanner.

Dylan Armbrust



Given that properly-written Windows 95 programs come with their own uninstallation routines, Uninstaller 4 has to offer more than the simple removal of unwanted programs from your hard disk. The most significant extra feature is that when you remove a program using Uninstaller 4, it makes a backup copy of it so that if you change your mind you can reinstate it.

To delete a program you select it from a list of applications on the desktop or in the Windows 95 Start menu. You can also browse the hard disk to find the program. Files marked for removal are colour-coded as green, yellow or red, indicating whether they are safe, potentially safe or dangerous to remove, and you can check these manually before confirming deletion.

Uninstaller is pretty good at working out which files belong to which program and not deleting shared files by mistake, but it's only 100 percent foolproof when used on programs that were installed using Uninstaller's monitor. This keeps a record of changes made to your system during a program's installation and then every time you start Uninstaller, it rescans the hard disk for changes and updates its records. This can be tedious on a slow computer with a big hard disk.

Uninstaller can also save disk space by archiving programs you don't use very often, by compressing a program into a single file and then removing all traces of the original. An icon to start the program still appears on the desktop or in the Start menu and, when you click on it, the program is extracted from its archive file for use. There is a significant delay while this takes place.

Another way of reclaiming disk

space is to run Uninstaller's 'File Cleanup' option. This examines your computer and seeks out files you may no longer need, such as temporary files, Internet cache files, or duplicates. Quick Cleanup offers a similar service, but also lets you specify how much disk space you want to reclaim.

You need to exercise caution before accepting Uninstaller's choices. These are colour-coded in the same manner as when removing an entire application and a viewer is built into Uninstaller so you can see the contents of graphics and document files before confirming deletion. If you don't do a manual check you could remove graphics files that a program needs for its menus – or even your own data. One gripe about File Cleanup is that files are grouped according to type and you can't select multiple files in several groups – you have to wait while the database is refreshed after deleting within each group.

An extremely useful facility is Uninstaller's 'Transport' option. This is a way of copying a program from one computer to another. The legality of this depends on the exact terms of the software's licence and Uninstaller's manual stresses that the feature is meant to allow legitimate users to copy programs from their desktop to a second computer while retaining their customised settings and options. When a program is transported, the original remains on the host computer and a single executable file is created for copying to the second computer. Run this file on the second computer and the transported program and all its support files are extracted into exactly the same folders as on the original machine.

Paul Wardley

MicroHelp Uninstaller 4

The first version of Uninstaller to be designed exclusively for Windows 95 is now Internet-aware, easier to use and equipped with help wizards.



- Removes entire applications
- Frees disk space by removing unnecessary files
- Displays graphical and text-based reports of all removal operations
- Moves programs from one computer to another
- Wizards step you through essential procedures
- On-screen advice explains Uninstaller's recommendations

The best version of Microhelp's uninstallation utility yet. Despite the speed improvements and extra features the price has gone down and the program is more 'intelligent' than ever. However, there's still time for considerable thumb twiddling during many operations.

- £39.99 (inc VAT)
- Roderick Manhattan Group: 0181 875 4444

Uninstaller 4

Features	★ ★ ★ ★
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: 486 or higher PC, 8Mb of RAM, Windows 95, 8Mb of free hard disk space.

CTX Maxiputer 540C

*A compact all-in-one
multimedia Pentium
PC aimed at the
home market.*

- Intel Pentium 133MHz processor
- 16Mb of EDO RAM
- 256Kb of asynchronous secondary cache
- 1.6Gb Fujitsu hard disk
- Eight-speed Mitsumi CD-ROM
- 16-bit Creative Labs Vibra 16 audio
- 2Mb ATI Mach 64 graphics
- Integrated 3W per channel stereo speakers
- 15in FST screen
- Windows 95

The Maxiputer is fairly typical of its type, with the benefits of easy set-up and a small footprint offset by a lack of expansion potential and unimpressive performance, but it is cheaper than some of its competitors.

- £1,526.33 (inc VAT)
- CTX: 01923 810800

CIX Maxiputer 540C

Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Apple has been making one-piece personal computers since the early days of the Mac and still uses this design today. The enduring popularity of this approach, which has also been used by the likes of Compaq, Packard Bell, and in this case CTX, lies in its neatness and practicality.

Setting up a typical multimedia PC involves connecting the monitor and speakers to the system unit and making sure that everything is hooked up to the mains, which usually results in a snake's nest of cabling and a crowded desktop. By contrast, to set up the all-in-one Maxiputer you just plug in the mouse, keyboard and mains lead and turn the machine on.

Once a normal PC is wired up, it is difficult to move, which can be a problem in the home especially if the machine is being shared by the family in rotation. The Maxiputer, on the other hand, can be picked up and carried from room to room easily by an adult and be back up and running in a minute or so.

Despite its compact footprint the Maxiputer offers full multimedia features in the form of an eight-speed CD-ROM drive, integrated Creative Labs Vibra 16 audio and built-in speakers on either side of the screen. The speakers weren't especially impressive in terms of sound quality, having rather braying tone without much bass. Still, we were pleased to see a Creative Labs sound chip, as this tends to negate the compatibility problems sometimes experienced by gamers with other brands of sound chip.

The 15in screen is a reasonable compromise between size and bulk. You can run Windows at the now more or less standard 800x600 (SVGA) resolution quite

comfortably but the machine as a whole remains just about light enough for most people to move without help. The screen surface and hence the image, is relatively flat; focus is sharp from the centre to the corners and the picture doesn't flicker thanks to support for a 75Hz vertical refresh rate.

Resolution, colour depth and refresh rates are set via Windows 95's Display Properties dialog box but there's a second Windows utility for adjusting the picture geometry and colour balance. This has plenty of functionality including comprehensive geometry set-up and individual sliders for adjusting the image's red, blue and green components and, as is generally the case, on-screen controls are easier to use and understand than lots of little buttons under the monitor.

The inside of the Maxiputer slides out of the back on a tray and can be removed from the casing. There's no room for more drives, but you can add up to three expansion cards. There are four slots in all – two PCI and two ISA – but a shared backplate cut-out limits you to a maximum of two of one type and one of the other. All the slots are two-thirds-length except the lowest ISA slot which is shortened to half-length by the processor heatsink.

The machine is fitted with old-style asynchronous cache rather than the newer pipeline burst type and neither the ATI Mach 64 graphics nor the Fujitsu hard disk are especially fast. As a result, overall performance is down at the lower end of the spectrum for a Pentium 133-class system but CTX is talking about a faster Pentium MMX version, which might bring the speed up to a more acceptable level.

Dominic Bucknall ►

Eudora Pro 3.0 for Windows 95

The latest professional version of this long established e-mail program has many new features, including multiple account capabilities and more powerful filtering.

- Multiple e-mail accounts
- Powerful filters for incoming and outgoing mail
- Multiple format attachments (graphics, sound, video, spreadsheets, etc)
- Stylised text for formatting messages
- Stationery templates for outgoing mail
- Free technical support for 90 days

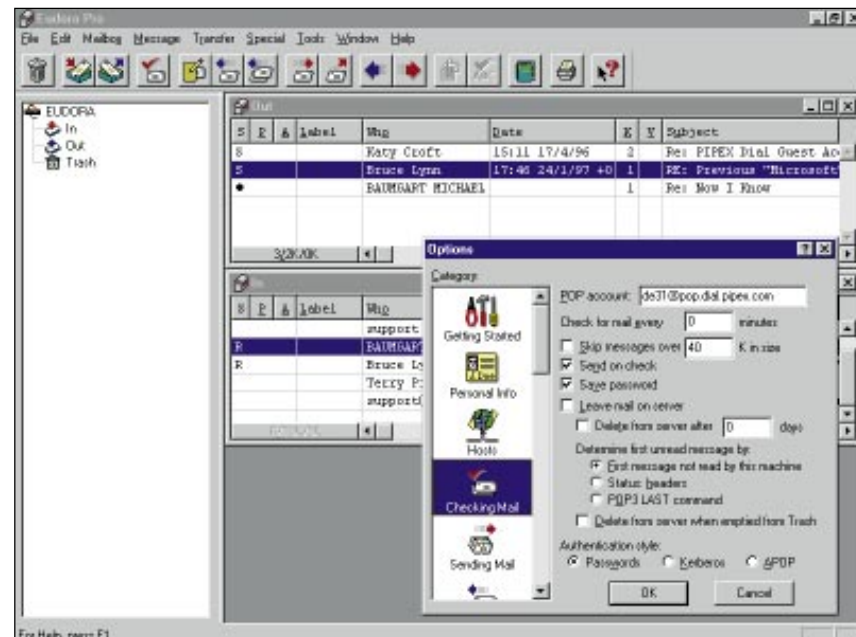
The business user with high mail volumes won't find a more richly featured e-mail program. But for the home or professional user with lower volumes, a simpler package with better set-up help might be a better choice.

- £74.91 (inc VAT and postage)
- ElectricMail: 01223 501333
- Download trial from: www.elmail.co.uk

Eudora Pro 3.0 for Win 95

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: 486; 4Mb of RAM, 5Mb of hard disk space, Windows 95 (or NT 3.5), mail account with an Internet Service Provider or an Internet-style network, modem.



Eudora Pro sets out to be the 'number one' in e-mail packages and, judged solely on the basis of its feature set and versatility, it's hard to deny it that accolade. But it's not up there at the top in terms of ease of set-up, unless you're a corporate user supported by a system administrator. However, you'll have a head start if you're one of the millions who have already used its slimmer stable-mate, Eudora Light. The latest professional version, Eudora Pro 3.0, offers many more powerful features but it's harder to configure and learn.

Installing from the four floppy disks is simply a matter of following instructions but it's the subsequent set-up that might present a challenge to less experienced users. This is largely due to the sheer richness of the features. For example, one of the major new capabilities, and a major plus for Eudora Pro over most of its rivals, is that you can use it to send and receive e-mail from more than one e-mail account. Suppose for instance that you have accounts with two Internet Service Providers (ISPs). Assigned e-mail addresses by both of them, you may have used both on occasions as your return address. Eudora Pro 3.0 lets you check both accounts for incoming mail, using what it rather oddly calls multiple 'personalities'. If you're uncomfortable with terms such as POP and SMTP servers, TCP/IP, SLIP or PPP though, you'll probably need a little input from the respective ISPs before you'll be confident setting this feature up. A set-up wizard or a few examples would have made all the difference for a novice user.

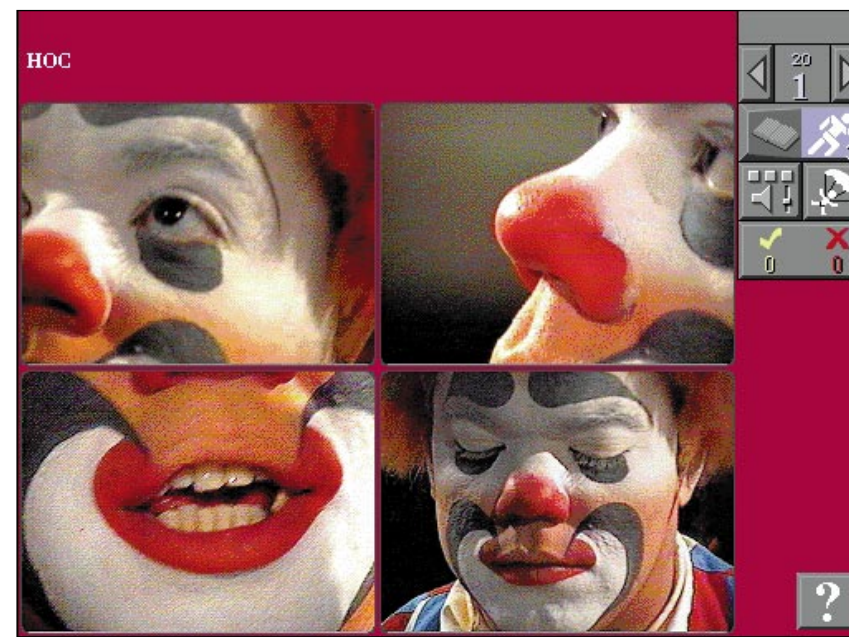
Another great strength of Eudora Pro 3.0 is its filtering capability. If your volume of mail is high, then applying filters can substan-

tially reduce the work involved in managing it. You can automatically reply to routine requests, transfer all messages from say your family into a special mailbox, label all the messages from your customers as urgent, or even sound an alert when certain messages arrive. Given the beneficial applications, it's a shame – and again a characteristic of the documentation – that Eudora Pro's user manual and on-line help fails to give even a single example of an actual filter.

As another illustration, one option is 'Unload Winsock DLL after closing socket'. The context help on this says 'If this is checked, the Winsock DLL is unloaded after the socket is closed. This is useful if you don't want Eudora to keep your Winsock DLL open continuously.' Hardly enlightening.

Yet, although some of the filters might be harder to find and configure than they should be, Eudora Pro 3.0 has just about every bell and whistle of the e-mail variety that anyone could ever need. Apart from the two stars of the Eudora show – filters and multiple accounts – among the other facilities you get with Eudora Pro that aren't in Eudora Light are a built-in spell checker, a dockable mailbox window for easy access, customisable toolbars and a more flexible address book. At a more advanced level, Eudora Pro 3.0 also offers Extended Messaging Services – special add-ons that can be installed for extra facilities. For example, you could use a language conversion add-on to translate a message to another language, a security add-on to automatically secure a message or a compression add-on to compress a message and its attachments.

Terry Pinnell



Europress's Language Labs courses are taught entirely in the target language and the drawback with this becomes evident as soon as you start the first lesson. Presenting a screen that is blank save for some obscure buttons along the bottom doesn't really make clear what is on offer and where to start. Unfortunately, this is as much a problem of poor design as of language restrictions.

It transpires that the Language Labs have 12 'run modes', in which material is presented in a number of ways, for instance spoken and written, just spoken, or a variety of other combinations. Start on the first mode and you are presented with a screen of four pictures. A word is spoken and the corresponding text displayed at the top of the screen. Your job is to click on the matching picture. If you are correct, you are rewarded with a tuneful noise and a tick. If you're wrong, you get a cross and a discordant note. You score points for each correct answer and it becomes quite addictive trying for a perfect score in as fast a time as possible. With 12 run modes for each of 20 lessons, there is plenty of material to tackle.

This is a language learning method that works and is most noticeably successful when you try a language completely new to you. After an hour or so with the Russian course, you will find yourself with a vocabulary of perhaps 10 to 20 words. New words are introduced gradually so that you are not demoralised by too much material at once.

Despite all the good points though, there are plenty of problems with these courses. The vocabulary is not wide enough to begin to equip anyone going on holiday or on business – no mention of

hotels, tickets, money, directions or shops, for instance. The most glaring omissions, though, are 'I' and 'we' – everything is based around the third person: 'the girl is jumping' or 'he is swimming'.

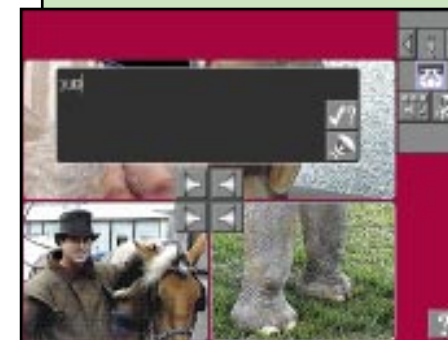
Aside from the run modes, there are sections in the program for tests, browsing and dictation. The tests are simply taken from the various run modes – you can opt to be tested via speech or text, or by the 'surprise' section where anything can be thrown at you. The tests are useful for the variety – you can't be sure what will come next – but they are dull and relentless, as you simply keep going until you can't take any more. The dictation feature sounds useful in theory, but in practise it does not have a lot to offer. Typing is not easy when accented characters or the Cyrillic alphabet are involved, as you need to refer to a character key list. The browsing feature is more useful, allowing you to see and hear the text for each lesson. If you have a microphone, you can also record yourself speaking and play it back for comparison.

All the CD-ROMs in the series use identical material and this in itself raises doubts about the validity of the courses. At the very least, there is no use of each country's culture to support the language taught and this is a lost opportunity. Moreover, while a set of vocabulary in one language is distinct and easy to learn, the same set in another can sound similar and is therefore harder to acquire. For instance, 'man' and 'car' in English and French are entirely distinct, while in Russian they sound painfully similar. Were each course individually designed, it seems likely their content would be more carefully introduced.

Sheila Hill

Europress Language Labs: French, German, Spanish and Russian

A set of language learning programs conducted entirely in the target language, aimed at beginners and those wishing to brush up their skills for holidays and business.



- Learning in the target language
- Over 800 words and phrases to learn
- Choose your learning style from 12 different modes
- Record your voice to check your pronunciation
- Practise writing with a dictation feature

Once you have struggled through the appalling interface, these titles are quite fun and effective to use – but they don't take you very far.

- £19.99 (inc VAT) each title
- Europress: 01625 859333

Europress Language Labs

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: 486DX or above, 4Mb of free hard disk space, 4Mb of RAM, SVGA monitor and video card, Sound Blaster-compatible sound card, Windows 95/3.1.

Toshiba TF601

A laser-based multifunction device that can scan documents, send and receive faxes, perform photocopies and act as a printer for a PC.



If you're looking to automate your office administration tasks, you might be considering investing in office equipment such as a fax machine and photocopier. But that's not all – if you've got a PC, you'll probably want to get hold of a printer as well, and how about a scanner so you can transfer documents and images to your computer? There is, thankfully, a simpler option – buy an all-in-one 'multifunction' device to carry out all the tasks usually performed by separate machines. The TF601 is Toshiba's latest multifunction device and is based around a 300dpi (dots per inch) laser printer.

At first glance, the TF601 looks just like a typical fax machine. There's a paper entry slot on the top, bordered by a pair of moveable guides and in front of this is a sloped control panel sporting an array of control buttons. Just below this is a paper exit slot, and underneath is a pull-out paper tray capable of holding up to 160 sheets of A4 paper. At the machine's rear are two PC connecting ports: one parallel, for using the TF601 as a printer; and one serial, so you can use your PC for sending faxes electronically. Unusually and admirably, Toshiba has seen fit to include both the required cables in the box.

Once you've made the necessary connections to your PC, all that's left to do is plumb the TF601 into your existing telephone socket (using the supplied splitter and cable) and flick the power switch. Being a laser-based device the TF601 doesn't exactly burst into life but you are kept informed of its current status via a one-line LCD panel. Directly below this panel are the three main control buttons, for starting and stopping faxes, and initiating copy operations.

Regardless of whether the

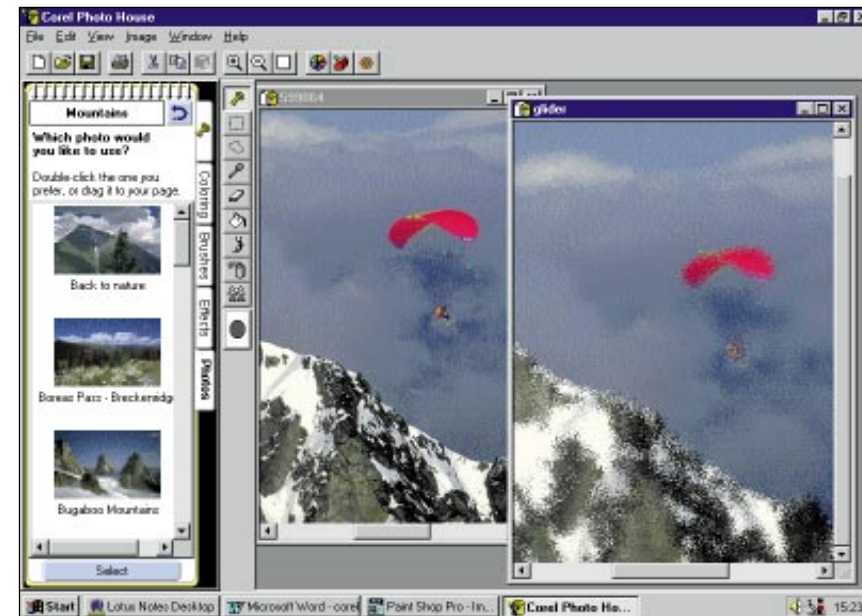
TF601 is printing PC documents, receiving faxes or making copies, the paper exits from the front of the machine. Unfortunately, there isn't a catch tray so exiting documents are left to float onto the desk. However, the exit point is sufficiently high that you can use normal filing tray to catch its output.

Surprisingly for a 300dpi laser device, print quality is not great. On faxes and copies (generally comparatively low quality anyway) it's not too noticeable, but PC-printed documents are not as good as those from dedicated 300dpi laser printers. Having said that, the TF601 is better than most inkjet printers and considerably faster too – during tests it sustained a print speed fractionally under that of the quoted four pages per minute.

Sending and receiving faxes is simple enough and involves little more than inserting a document and dialling the destination fax number. If you wish you can set up to 16 telephone numbers as 'speed dials', so you can dial a fax number by pressing a one-touch dial button on the control panel. Making copies is similarly simple, the only difference being that the 'Copy' button needs to be pressed instead.

Scanning documents into your PC is a slightly more long winded procedure, but not particularly taxing. Toshiba hasn't supplied any dedicated software, relying instead on the 'Receive' feature of Symantec's (previously Delrina's) Winfax Lite which is bundled in the box. To scan, you insert a document into the feeder, select the TF601 scan option, which then sends it to your PC as a 'fax' and *voila*, the scanned image appears on-screen. However, as the scan resolution is limited to just 200dpi the image quality is far from impressive.

Scott Colvey



There are many 'draw & photo' packages on the market that offer much the same things – smarten up photos, create wacky montages and produce cards, certificates and stationery. When you see the Corel name behind one, though, you can reasonably expect to find a weightier package than most. Corel's Print & Photo House is a very much beefed up version of the original Print House and has lots of new features.

Once installed and running, a welcoming message appears with a choice of things to do, making first steps in the Print House very easy. For the simplest start, you can opt to 'Use the Quick Way', which walks you through each stage of a project, leaving you only to add small personalised touches. You can have more control by starting with a sample or from scratch when you are completely confident. The kinds of project on offer are fairly standard, such as banners, certificates, recipe cards, business forms and greetings cards. There's an enormous supply of basic samples, especially greeting cards, and you can personalise them to your liking.

The notebook on the left side of the desktop provides access to resources, tools and help. You can add things to the basic samples, for instance text, photos or clip-art. It's easy to move objects around and add your own drawings using the simple tools provided. You can also mould text with the new shapes provided, but this can be quite tricky to get just right.

When you call up the Photo House, you can open a photo from Corel's huge library, or one of your own photos. You are then offered the available actions and guided through your task. You can improve the image quality – all the tools you would expect to find are there,

including facilities to sharpen a picture, remove dust and scratches and adjust the brightness and contrast. You can also replace or reduce colours and remove red eyes. Most of these features are simple to use, you just need to click on the option you want and Photo House prepares the adjustment for you. If you're not happy with the proposed change, you can fine-tune the settings with a slider bar, and preview the result before you commit yourself.

When you've finished with the TouchUp section, you can move onto 'Cool & Fun', where there are 14 effects to choose from. In common with most packages of this sort, there are options to add page curl, texture, motion blur or a light source. Other features turn a photo into a sketch or an impressionist painting, or swirl or ripple the picture. Again, it's very easy to choose the effect you want and sometimes possible to fine-tune the results. Some features are more successful than others and frequently the success depends on the original photo. Turning a photograph of a landscape into a sketch was an unmitigated disaster (not enough clearly defined edges to work on), while adding motion blur to a seagull's wings just made the picture look out of focus. Other effects were more spectacular, for instance, 'cloning' a cat so that two identical moggies appeared in the same photo.

As far as features are concerned, Print House is fairly run-of-the-mill – it would be easy to find another half a dozen or so packages offering much the same facilities. Where it does stand out, is in the realms of the libraries provided. Corel includes over 7,000 clip-art images, 1,000 photos, 150 TrueType fonts and even 1,000 phrases to use in greeting cards.

Sheila Hill

Corel Print & Photo House for Windows 95

A low-cost set of drawing and photo-editing tools, together with libraries of clip-art, photos, phrases and fonts.

- Create cards, stationery, calendars etc
- Use wizards or work alone
- Photo-editing tools for painting, cloning, page curl and fun effects
- Drawing tools to flip, rotate, scale, and change colours
- Add shape styles to reshape text and photos
- Libraries of photos, graphics and phrases

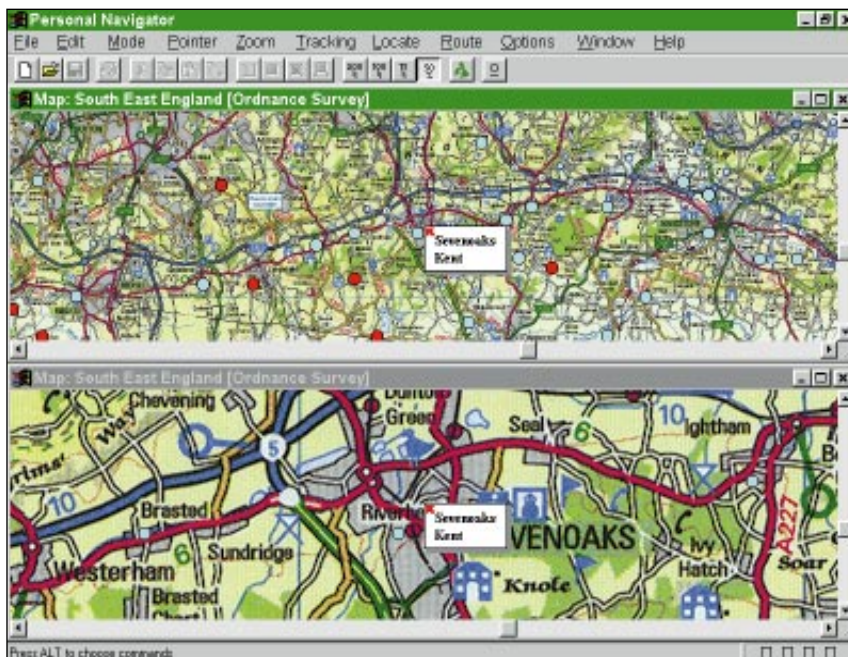
The package itself is nothing exceptional, but the huge wealth of clip-art, photos, fonts and phrases makes the Print & Photo House a gem to add to your collection.

- £45.83 (inc VAT)
- Corel: 0800 581028

Corel Print & Photo House

Ease of use	★★★★☆
Performance	★★★★☆
Features	★★★★☆
Value for money	★★★★☆
Overall	★★★★☆

Minimum requirements: 486DX or above, 8Mb of RAM, CD-ROM drive, mouse, Windows 3.1 or Windows 95.



Personal Navigator Professional plots routes for journeys made in Great Britain (but not Ireland) and displays them on-screen using superbly detailed 1:250,000 Ordnance Survey (OS) maps. It also works out an itinerary with road numbers, directions and distances.

The itinerary isn't as helpful as it could be. You're told when to turn and which road to turn onto, but you're not given any information about landmarks. Neither are you told which town to head for; you get compass directions instead.

The maps look great and the package highlights the chosen route in any colour you like. At the highest magnification and a screen resolution of 800x600, you can view an area of the map about 10 miles wide and six miles from north to south. There are three other zoom options, the lowest of which displays four times as much of the map but place names are practically unreadable. You can't zoom out to view the starting point and destination of a long journey simultaneously so an overview map (from Bartholomew) can be called up. An effective solution, but not very convenient.

The OS maps show not only roads and topographical information but also coloured dots marking the locations of selected pubs, hotels, petrol stations and tourist spots. Click on a dot and an information window pops up describing the attraction. A Professional version of the program includes data from three Egon Ronay guides offering more comprehensive information about feeding and watering holes.

Personal Navigator incorporates full postcode information for every address in the country, allowing you to set points on your journey by typing in either the postcode

or the street name. It's good being able to plot a route between two streets in different towns, instead of simply between the towns.

The package is somewhat idiosyncratic so the best place to start is with the short tutorial in the manual. To plot a route you begin by loading the map that contains the starting point for your journey (nine maps cover the whole of Britain), and then you create an empty itinerary file to store the route. Next, you locate what are called waypoints that define the start, end and intermediate points of your journey and add them to the itinerary. Finally, you tell the program to calculate the shortest, quickest or cheapest route.

The program can calculate only one route at a time so you can't switch between them at will. Calculation times are also rather slow if you set driving preferences that are widely different from the defaults. In this case it can take several minutes to calculate long routes, instead of a few seconds.

Speed preferences can be set for motorways and different types of A and B road but Personal Navigator doesn't recognise ordinary urban or slow urban roads. This means the time it takes to make journeys involving cross-city routes is grossly underestimated. For example, it thinks a 15 mile cross-London trip from north to south can be made in 18 minutes – which is at least an hour out.

If you have a GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) receiver and a notebook computer you can not only plan a route but also see exactly where you are during the journey. Softwair, the distributor of Personal Navigator, offers the Garmin GPS30PC receiver for £234 inc VAT.

Paul Wardley

Personal Navigator

A route-finding program that can also be used with satellite navigation systems to provide live updates of your position on the road.

- Displays colour Ordnance Survey maps
- Calculates journey costs and times
- Finds shortest, cheapest or quickest routes
- Links to GPS receivers to show your current location
- Full Royal Mail postcode database
- Displays most petrol stations, some pubs and a few budget hotels
- Good Weekend Guide points out interesting tourist locations
- Professional version includes Egon Ronay guides to hotels, restaurants, pubs, bars and cafes
- Routes and maps can be printed
- Driving preferences can be set

If you've got a powerful notebook computer and a satellite receiver in your car, Personal Navigator is worth considering because of its postcode database; but for use in the home or office on a desktop computer there are several better and cheaper options.

- £116.33 (£175.08 for Professional version)
- Softwair: 07000 784 662

Personal Navigator

Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ☆
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ☆
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ☆
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ☆
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ☆

Minimum requirements: 486 or better PC, Windows 95 or NT, 8Mb of RAM, CD-ROM drive, minimum 256 colour graphics adaptor, 80Mb of hard disk space (compact installation).

Kyocera Ecosys FS-1700

An environmentally friendly office laser printer, with a fast throughput and low running costs.

- 600x600dpi resolution, with image enhancement to 1,200x1,200dpi
- HP LaserJet 4 Plus compatible, upgradable to PostScript
- 2Mb of RAM as standard, expandable to 66Mb
- Running costs lower than 0.5p per page
- Printer drum self-cleaning and guaranteed to 300,000 pages, toner cartridge replaceable separately
- Parallel, serial and PC Card interfaces standard, AppleTalk and network optional
- Optional duplex module and bulk paper tray

The FS-1700 is more expensive than many of its rivals. However, its low running costs, high speed and flexibility make it ideal for use in offices where a lot of paper is generated.

- £1,433.50 (inc VAT)
- Kyocera: 01734 311500

Kyocera Ecosys FS-1700

Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Almost all manufacturers are striving for greater environmental friendliness and Kyocera has been switched on for longer than most. To that end, its latest laser printer, the FS-1700, comes packed in cardboard without a squeak of polystyrene in sight.

Fortunately, this isn't the end of the FS-1700's green awareness. On many laser printers the toner is integrated into the developer drum and when one needs replacing, the other also has to be discarded. With the FS-1700, the toner cartridge is replaceable separately and as it's a plastic box, this is a lot cheaper than throwing away the whole drum assembly each time. This can bring the cost of consumables down to less than 0.5p per page.

The developer drum is guaranteed to last for 300,000 pages, which is the rated life of the printer. It achieves this extended lifespan in two ways. First, it's self-cleaning, as long as you use Kyocera's special microfine toner. Second, the roller is wear-resistant, allowing you to use rougher recycled paper.

All this would be worthless, though, if the FS-1700 didn't produce fast, good quality prints. It prints at 600x600dpi (dots per inch) and the Kyocera Image Refinement (KIR) is claimed to increase this to 1,200x1,200dpi – nearly as high as a commercial imagesetter. Even though we couldn't see any difference with KIR on or off, printouts were legible down to a minuscule font size of two points.

Text printing is very fast. A 50-page Word 97 document printed at 12.5ppm (pages per minute), easily matching Kyocera's claim of 12ppm. Graphics prints were slower, though still of excellent quality. There was some banding, especially with graduated greys, but this was only visible from close up.

All the results were achieved using Kyocera's HP LaserJet 4 Plus emulation and the default Windows driver. This seemed reliable but when we tried to use Kyocera's FS-1700-specific driver, we had problems. A Word file printed perfectly one minute and generated garbage the next, while some graphics files wouldn't print at all. Kyocera was unable to provide an explanation at the time of writing.

Although it stands tall, the FS-1700 is compact enough to fit on a large desk, with a footprint a little squarer than a sheet of A3 paper. It's reassuringly well built too, with only a slightly flimsy manual paper feed spoiling the feeling of solidity. The FS-1700 doesn't come with a network connection as standard but this can easily be added, as can a LocalTalk interface for use with Apple Macs. There's also a PostScript option, allowing you to produce proof copies exactly as they would be printed professionally.

As befits its price and potential purchasers, the FS-1700 is expandable in almost every sense. It comes with 2Mb of memory as standard, expandable to a massive 66Mb using industry-standard SIMMs. There's a bulk paper feeder for long, unattended print runs and a duplex module for double-sided printing. All of these would add considerably to the basic cost of the FS-1700 but it is flexible enough to grow with your needs.

In fact the only real quibble we had with the FS-1700 concerned the manual. It's excellent but unfortunately supplied on a (admittedly eco-friendly) CD-ROM in Adobe Acrobat format. You'll need to print off a copy of the relevant page if your printer isn't next to your computer but if you're having problems setting up the printer...

John Sabine ►

Toplevel OfficeForms

A design system for paper or electronic forms, with links to existing e-mail and database programs to make collating completed forms easier.

- Versions for Windows 3.1 and 95
- Paper forms can be previewed, faxed or printed
- Separate programs for form designing and form filling
- Templates and styles for consistent designs
- 1,000 clip-art images and 100 TrueType fonts
- 200 customisable forms
- Forms can be embedded in other documents using OLE 2
- Electronic forms can be saved as mini programs and distributed on disk or by e-mail
- Entries in electronic forms can be checked and validated
- Automatic creation of Access data tables to hold responses to forms
- Forms can also be saved into existing databases through ODBC
- Design tools include check boxes, list boxes, spreadsheets, buttons and bar codes

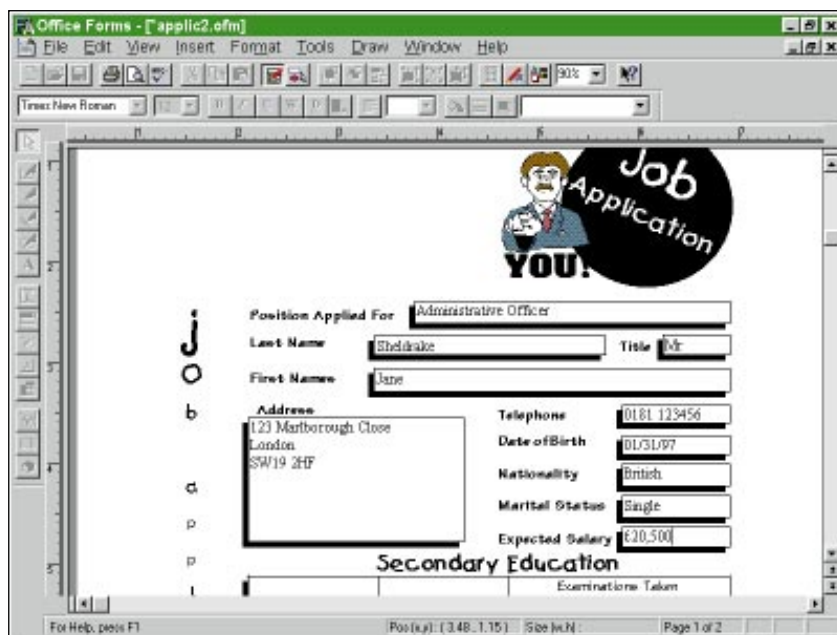
OfficeForms offers a quick and easy way of designing printed forms but it's better with electronic ones and really comes into its own when used with e-mail. It's a snip for serious data collectors but casual form designers would get better value out of a DTP program.

- £116.33 (inc VAT)
- Toplevel: 01453 753955

Toplevel OfficeForms

Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Minimum requirements: 486 or better PC, Windows 3.1, 95 or NT, CD-ROM drive, 8Mb of RAM, 42Mb of disk space.



If you want to design snazzy looking forms and churn them out on a laser printer or photocopier, you can probably do it with your existing word processor. If you're really clever, you could even get by with a decent spreadsheet program.

What Toplevel is offering in its OfficeForms package is much more than a way of creating paper forms on a computer screen; it's a way of building data collection systems. For example, your job is to collect and check overtime claims at work. If everybody has access to a PC you can use electronic instead of paper forms and the information entered can be validated as they type, the totals and payments worked out automatically and the results stored in a database for further manipulation. Employees without the use of a computer could fill in exactly the same form on paper and their responses could be entered manually into the same database.

The design tools within OfficeForms let you create the usual boxes, lines, shapes and text and you can import your own graphics or choose from 1,000 supplied with the program. Forms can be up to 22.5in square, which means they can carry about the same amount of information as six sheets of A4 paper, but there's no tiling feature to print these out so you're limited to whatever is the largest size of paper your printer can handle.

No such restrictions apply to electronic forms, these are filled in using a PC and as you complete one section, the cursor automatically skips to the next entry box, even if the complete form is too big to fit on a single screen.

Electronic forms don't have to be filled in on the computer that has OfficeForms installed. They can be saved as complete programs,

small enough to fit on a floppy disk, and posted or sent electronically to the recipients. Completed forms can be returned via e-mail, fax or as printed copy. The advantage of e-mail is that no retyping is involved and OfficeForms can import forms sent by e-mail and transfer the results to its database. Faxed and printed replies have to be retyped.

The easiest way to store responses is in an Access database, which OfficeForms creates for you, based on the design of your form. If you want to use an existing database, you can do this too, using the Open Database Connect (ODBC) system built into Windows itself. Drivers are provided for Access, Paradox, dBase and SQL.

Electronic forms can contain special elements to make form-filling easier: list boxes, check boxes and tables, the last of which are really self-calculating miniature spreadsheets. It's also possible to add buttons and assign actions to them to automate common tasks, such as printing and validating.

Around 50 pre-designed forms are supplied but as each is available in four styles (classic, jazzy, professional and stark), you effectively have 200 to choose from and a nifty customisation utility automatically adds your own or your company's details to each one. Unfortunately, the forms are not illustrated in the manual and there's no preview facility to see what they look like without loading them one by one.

OfficeForms is not difficult to get to grips with but to grasp all its ins and outs, you need to become conversant with the printed manual, the built-in help files and a screen-based tips system. None of these three by itself contains everything you need to know.

Paul Wardley