Welcome
to *What PC?*

This month there have been a few changes to *What PC?*, designed to make the magazine even better value. Along with a brighter, easier-to-use design we've updated our regular features and introduced a horde of useful new sections.

First, our new Watchdog column will be reporting on important issues that affect you as a consumer. This is joined by Price Watch, keeping you up to date on trends and pricing on the latest PCs, and a look at the Small Office Home Office (SoHo) market in Serious Business. For the creative there's a whole series of projects for you to tackle in How to, and in Testdrive we help you test and try the latest products before you buy.

Getting started
In this section we tell you the basics of how PCs work and what to look for before buying any of them or their associated peripherals.

Buyer's tables
Our comprehensive tables at the back of the magazine list all the major items of hardware and software, together with details of features, prices and suppliers: all in a readily accessible format so you can easily find what you need.

Our scoring system explained				
Build quality	★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆	Poor	★ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆	
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆	Below average	★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆	
Performance	★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆	Average	★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆	
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆	Good	★ ★ ★ ★ ☆	
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ☆	Excellent	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	

Group tests and reviews
In between the News towards the front and the tables at the back are our tests and reviews. You'll find independent tests of new and interesting items (see the Close-up section) as well as comparative tests of similar products. Our verdict at the end of each product review includes a quick-reference panel (see above) showing you how we rated the product's performance, features, value for money and so on. *What PC?* uses the industry-standard star ratings. We include an Overall score so that you can tell how good something is at a glance.

PC Doctor
Questions about your PC, or the software you use with it, can be answered on our PC Doctor pages. We welcome all contributions to PC Doctor, whether from absolute beginners or seasoned computer users.

You, the reader, are very important to us and we want to know what you like or dislike about *What PC?*. If you have any comments or suggestions, please address them to the editor. We read every letter sent to us and, even if we can't respond to them all on our Letters page, we listen very carefully to what our readers have to say about the service we provide.

Mick Andon, Group Editor

Lab testing

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GETTING STARTED

What is a PC?

A PC (personal computer) is just what it sounds like – a computer designed for personal use and able to carry out a whole range of tasks – rather than one designed for a specific purpose and housed in a big room tended by highly skilled experts.

Control of the PC

It doesn't matter whether you want to sort a list, print a letter or play a game: you need to be able to tell your computer what to do. You can do this with a keyboard and a mouse, both of which are supplied as standard with new PCs, though if you'll be playing a lot of games, you might want to buy a joystick too.

The letter keys on a computer keyboard are laid out in the same way as a typewriter, but there are extra keys related solely to computer work. Although you can control movement on the screen using a keyboard, it's far easier with a mouse, which is a precise hand-held controller that can be rolled on any flat surface.
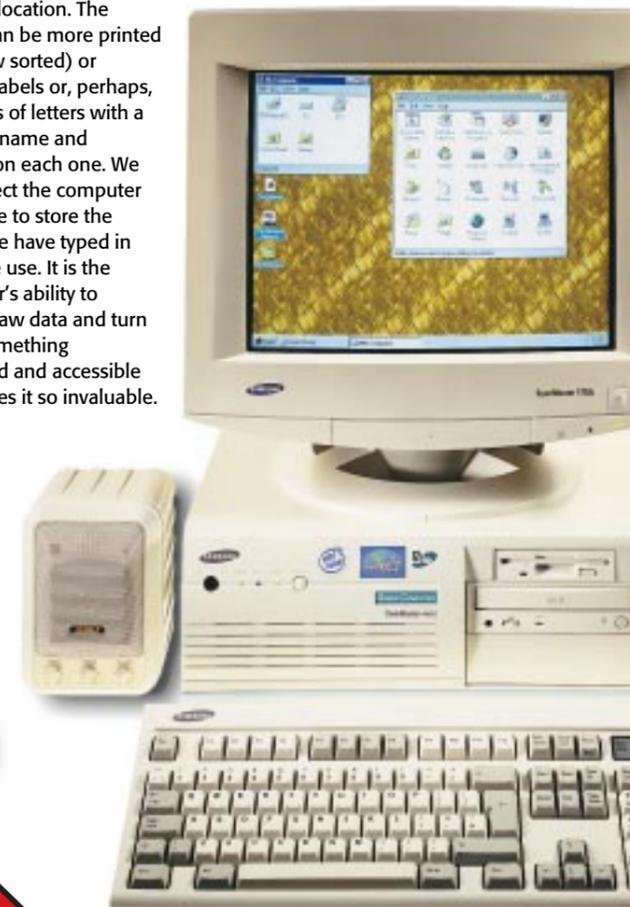
A computer joystick is modelled on an aeroplane's joystick and is used to control movement in games, as well as being equipped with a host of control and fire buttons.

What does a PC do?

A computer processes information. You put instructions and information in at one end and the computer processes them in some way to provide results (output) at the other.

This input, process and output sequence is familiar to all of us, though we don't often think of the real world in terms of these particular labels. However, call a washing machine a clothes processor, and you'll get the idea. We expect the output (clean clothes) to be different from the input. The same goes for computers: if we type in lists of names and addresses (customers, perhaps), we expect the computer to process the information in a useful way – perhaps sorting the names into alphabetical order, counting them or grouping them by location. The output can be more printed lists (now sorted) or address labels or, perhaps, hundreds of letters with a different name and address on each one. We also expect the computer to be able to store the details we have typed in for future use. It is the computer's ability to process raw data and turn it into something structured and accessible that makes it so invaluable.