

News



Modem manufacturer **Psion Dacom** has added a 56Kbits/s PC Card modem to its range. The Gold Card Global 56K is based on the K56Flex standard and can be upgraded to support GSM and ISDN communications. The Gold Card Global is priced at £351.33 (inc VAT).

Psion Dacom: 01908 261686
● www.psiondacom.com

ISP SoftNET is offering subscribers full Internet access and a Net 200 SpaceStation set-top PC for a one-off payment of £99 and a monthly subscription of £27.95. A minimum subscription is for 36 months, after which the Cyrix 586-based SpaceStation becomes property of the subscriber.

Software Warehouse:
01675 466467

Users of **Microsoft's** FrontPage have long been complaining that not enough Internet Service Providers (ISPs) support the FrontPage extension software that allows designers to do clever things with Internet Web pages. Microsoft now has a Web site listing the 19 UK-based ISPs currently supporting the extensions, and more companies will be added as they sign up.

● www.microsoft.com/uk/referral/frontpage/default.htm

Esselte has unveiled a £23 bulk ink tank for HP DeskJet 500 and 600 printers, which fits onto the side of the printer and supplies ink through flexible tubes.

Esselte: 01954 780436

Pentium II hits home

Pentium II is set to go mainstream as PC manufacturers slash their prices.

Previously aimed at the high-end market, Intel's fastest processor is rapidly becoming an affordable option for home users.

The move follows price cuts by Intel across the board on its processors, and a huge demand for the new systems that exceeded expectations in the UK marketplace.

First to move Pentium II systems into the mainstream price bands is Dell, offering a Dimension PC for just £1,496 including VAT. The configuration includes a 233MHz processor, 32Mb of EDO RAM, 512Kb cache, a 3.2Gb hard disk, 4Mb STB Nitro 3D graphics card, 15in monitor, 12/24-speed CD, and integrated 16-bit sound. The machine comes with Windows 95 installed, and includes Microsoft Office 97 Small Business Edition.

Northwood has also announced new Pentium II machines, but its prices are somewhat higher, starting at £2,520.37 including VAT



for a 233MHz configuration with 256Kb cache and 64Mb of RAM.

Dell: 01344 720000

Northwood: 01675 468333

Intel: 01793 403000

Philips rewrites the book on CD storage

Philips has kick-started the next generation of rewritable storage with the launch of its CDD3600 CD drive.



The CDD3600 is based on the CD-ReWritable format that was announced by Hewlett-Packard, Mitsubishi, Philips, Ricoh and Sony back in October 1996.

Available either in IDE or SCSI versions, the internal drive allows CDs that use phase-change technology to be written and rewritten over and over again. It costs £470.

Two Adaptec applications are supplied with the CDD3600 – Easy CD Pro for CD mastering and Direct CD for file management.

Easy CD Pro can create both data and audio CDs, and includes software for filtering the pops and scratches on vinyl records. Direct CD is based on the Random UDF file system and allows files to be dragged and dropped to a CD, much like any other disk.

Philips: 0181 689 4444

Windows 98 beta brings release closer

Microsoft's Windows 98 is edging ever nearer with the release of the first 'private' beta of Memphis – its working title.

The Memphis Beta 1 CD-ROM arrived in the *What PC?* office to an initially unenthusiastic reception from the various members of the team. On the surface it looks much the same as Windows 95 with the only obvious difference being the menus, which open out smoothly rather than suddenly appearing as before.

Further digging is needed to find the real changes, which include the new 32-bit file allocation table system, FAT32. This allows Windows to manage hard disk space more efficiently, and it can support drive sizes of up to an incredible two terabytes (2,000Gb).

Also destined to ship with Windows 98 is a fully integrated version of Internet Explorer 4.0 – Microsoft's forthcoming World Wide Web browser. Microsoft: 0345 002000





Umax has launched a new professional-quality colour flatbed scanner set to retail at just £128 including VAT. The Astra 600-P scans at 300x600dpi, but this can be software-enhanced up to 4,800x4,800dpi using Umax's UltraView technology. It connects to your PC via a parallel interface. **IMC distribution (Umax): 01344 872800**

CYBERSitter 97 is the latest version of **Solidoak's** Internet censoring application. Designed to block access to objectionable Internet sites, this version supports lists of blocked sites maintained by third parties, in addition to Solidoak's list. CYBERSitter 97 runs on Windows 95 and costs £29.95 for single-user copies. **Pow Distribution: 01202 716726**
 ● www.pow-dist.co.uk

MetaCreations has announced Ray Dream Studio 5, the latest version of its popular 3D design package. This new release boasts powerful new object creation and animation tools, and direct support for Pentium MMX processors, along with refinements to the user interface. Available from the end of August, Ray Dream Studio 5 costs £351.32 (inc VAT). **Principal Distribution: 01756 704000**



The **Holi-Swaps** Internet Web site makes it easy to find holiday exchange homes around the world and includes advice for first-time home exchangers. **● www.holi-swaps.com**

MMX is on the move

companies announce portable PCs with multimedia-enhanced processors.

Daewoo is applying some of the techniques it has used to sell cars to its Chorus range of MMX notebooks. Each comes with a three-year warranty, free insurance, free fitting of upgrades and a 24-hour replacement service during the first year of ownership. Prices range from £2,349 to £3,107.

Compaq's announcement of five MMX additions to its Armada range coincides with price reductions of up to 23 percent on non-MMX models.

The new entry-level 1530D with 133MHz MMX processor will sell at £1,996 while the non-MMX 1550T, which has a superior TFT screen, drops to £2,231.

IBM is fitting MMX processors to its 560E ultra-portable notebooks (from £2,387) but obviously thinks there is still life in the old

duces the new ThinkPad 310 range, based on the standard 133MHz Pentium, from £1,517.

The first notebook to be sold with the latest and fastest 233MHz MMX processor is from Carrera as part of its Explorer III range. For £3,519 you also get a 13.3in TFT screen, 48Mb of memory and a 2Gb hard disk.

Daewoo: 07000 463239 (07000 GO DAEWOO)

Compaq: 0990 134456

IBM: 0990 727272

Carrera: 0171 830 0486



CompuServe users get e-mail by phone



CompuServe has added two new features to its on-line service. The first is 'e-mail by phone', where members can pick up their e-mail messages without using a PC.

The service has been developed with Premiere Technologies and uses speech synthesis technologies to read out e-mail messages over the phone. Users are issued with a 'Global Connect Card' and PIN number, which they use to call a world-wide freephone number.

The new service is free to join but calls to pick up e-mail cost 6p a minute. Messages can also be printed via a fax machine and the Global Connect Card offers benefits for other CompuServe services.

CompuServe has also added 21 on-line 'communities' divided into

seven categories, catering for such things as news, computing, leisure and education. A common interface for each community simplifies access and there is a strong emphasis on interactivity.

CompuServe: 0800 289378

www.compuserve.com

Second IE 4.0 beta released

The second preview release of Microsoft's Internet Explorer 4.0 (IE4) is on its Web site.

IE4 Platform Preview 2 is available for download now but, as with the previous preview release, it is intended only for developers and expert computer users.

This preview boasts improved stability and features, including a working implementation of Microsoft's 'Channels' technology.

Unlike traditional browsers, which only allow you to view Web content 'live', Channels uses a so-called 'push technology' that delivers content directly to the desktop so that it can be viewed off-line.

Platform Preview 2 is a big improvement upon Preview 1, but the completed IE4 is still



some way off and sources at Microsoft refused to give a likely release date.

Microsoft: 0345 002000

Compaq pushes home

Compaq has announced no less than five new Presario PCs aimed at home users.

The cheapest is the £1,229 Presario 4220, boasting a 166MHz Pentium MMX processor and an internal 33.6Kbits/s modem.

The other four machines are equipped with JBL's 3D VirtualTheater equipment, which provides smooth MPEG2 video playback and Dolby Digital Surround Sound.

Compaq claims the system offers a five-speaker positional audio effect, despite being based on just two JBL Pro speakers.

The 4506 and 4526 have 200MHz and 233MHz Pentium MMX processors respectively and cost £1,599 and £1,799.

The 4800 models have all the above, plus twice the memory (32Mb), hard disks up to 6.5Gb, 24x CD-ROM drives and Compaq's Creative Imaging Centre.

This comprises hardware to capture

images from digital cameras, VCRs and camcorders, and software to customise and incorporate pictures into calendars and suchlike.

The £2,399 Presario 4810 is based on a 233MHz Pentium MMX while the price of the 4830 (£2,899) reflects the inclusion of Intel's 266MHz Pentium II processor.

Compaq: 0990 134456



Digital camera market develops

The choice of digital cameras has expanded again with the arrival of four new models.

Sony's new MVC-FD5 and MVC-FD7 have a 2.5in colour LCD viewfinder and 380,000 pixel CCD. Interestingly, both cameras store images on ordinary 3.5in floppy disks, making transfer to a PC much more straightforward than usual.

The FD5 costs £449.99, the FD7 £599.99, both including VAT.

Panasonic's Card Shot has a 350,000 pixel CCD and 1.8in LCD viewfinder. Images are stored on a 2Mb Flash memory card, which can hold up to 47 images in economy mode.

It costs £499.95 (inc VAT) and comes with a PC card adaptor for the memory card and image-editing software.

The Praktica PD-100 is an entry-level digital camera, with an RRP of £299. It has a 1.8in LCD viewfinder, Flash and macro facility, and can store up to 64 images.

The camera also comes supplied with batteries, mains adaptor, PC link and image-editing software.

Sony: 0990 424424

Panasonic: 0500 404041

Jenoptik (Praktica): 0181 953 1688

Apple polishes Mac with new System 8

Apple has finally launched MacOS 8.0, the next version of its graphical operating system for the Macintosh.

The company claims it is the most significant upgrade since 1984.

Chief among the new features in 'System 8' is a multi-threaded PowerPC native version of Finder, the Mac's graphical front end. This greatly increases the overall speed of the system and allows multi-tasking, such as the ability to copy files and folders while simultaneously performing other operations.

Other Finder enhancements include 'spring-loaded' folders, which automatically open when a file is dragged onto them, and pop-up windows that allow folders, hard drives or network volumes to be moved to the bottom of the screen as a table which can then be opened with a single click, as in Windows 95.

Apple: 0800 127753



Tiny has announced a competitively-priced PC and printer deal aimed directly at small businesses. The untitled package consists of a Pentium 166MHz MMX PC with 16Mb of memory and a 2Gb hard drive, a 600dpi four-pages-per-minute LED printer from OKI, and the Small Business edition of Microsoft Office 97 – all for £1,056.33 (inc VAT). **Tiny: 01293 821333**

America Online (AOL) is to offer unlimited Internet access for £16.95 a month (£14.95 if paid by annual instalments). The existing hourly billing scheme will be discontinued from mid-August but a new light user contract will offer three hours for £4.95 with extra access costing £2.35 per hour. **AOL: 0800 3765432**



Microsoft has announced AutoRoute Express 98, the latest version of its best-selling route-planning package. In addition to some 65,000 place names and 143,000 miles of navigable road, it features the Les Routiers hotel and restaurant guide, together with details of 4,200 tourist attractions and 360-degree panoramas of major sights. Both UK and European editions should be available from 11 September for £59.99.

Microsoft: 0345 002000

Canon has cut the price of its LBP-1260 PLUS laser printer to £1,174. It prints 12 pages per minute at 600 dots per inch. **Canon: 0121 680 8062**

Grey Cell's new 4-in-1 series 9000 PC Cards provide fax, modem, Ethernet and GSM connections for Nokia, Ericsson and Panasonic phone users, and costs from £220. **Grey Cell: 0181 938 1000**

Microsoft's AuthenticCode system for monitoring the integrity of software downloaded from the Internet has been enhanced. Version 2.0 replaces the previous Internet Explorer security certificates, which expired on 30 June. AuthenticCode 2.0 can be downloaded free from Microsoft's Web site.

● www.microsoft.com/ie/security/authent.htm



Owners of **Lasat Safire 336** voice modems purchased after 1 February 1997 can upgrade to the latest K56flex standard by returning their modem to Lasat with a payment of £44. They will receive a brand-new 56.6Kbits/s modem in return. Potential upgraders must register on Lasat's Web page before 30 August.

● www.lasat.com



IDT has released version 8.0 of its PC-to-telephone Internet telephony software, Net2Phone. Available free from IDT's Web site, the beta version of Net2Phone 8 now has much improved call quality, bringing it closer to a normal phone call in voice clarity.

● www.net2phone.com

GamesNET is offering full Internet access plus dedicated services for games players, including multi-player Quake and technical support. Seven-day free trial.

GamesNET: 0181 561 5040

● www.gates.co.uk

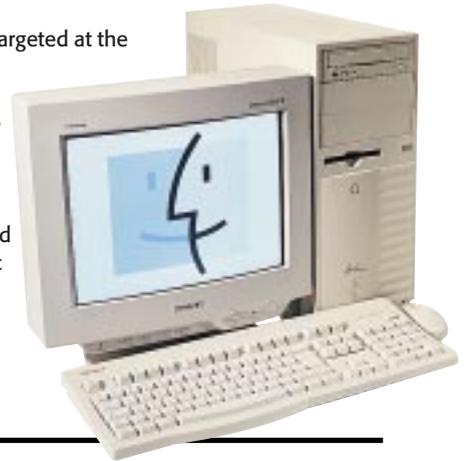
Mac clone prices fall

Mac clone maker Umax has announced two low-cost systems targeted at the consumer market.

The Apus 2000 is based on a 160MHz 603e PowerPC processor with 16Mb of RAM, and has an estimated street price of £699.12. The Apus 2000AV, which features an additional 33.6Kbits/s modem, 32Mb of RAM and video capture facilities, should come in at £1,028.12. Both prices include VAT.

Both machines are aimed at users buying for the first time, and enthusiasts looking for a truly competitive price on a home Mac system. They have 1.2Gb hard disks, 8x CD-ROMs, optional 16-bit stereo SRS surround sound systems as featured on the new Apple Mac Performas, and can all be upgraded via plug in processor cards.

IMC Distribution: 01344 871329



3D graphics cards: update

Back in February this year, *What PC?* carried out a group test of the leading two- and three-dimensional graphics cards. The performance of the 3D cards was tested in the VNU Labs using Intel's Media Benchmark, and our comments and recommendations were based on the results of this test.

However, following discussions with some of the card manufacturers, it was agreed that we should perform a second set of tests using Microsoft's DirectX 3.0 SDK.

As the results of these tests demonstrate, the dedicated 3D cards from Orchid (Righteous 3D), Diamond (Monster 3D) and Video-

Logic (Apocalypse 3Dx) offer the best performance for the rendering of 3D graphics.

For the niche gaming market, this is the most important factor.

Our chart gives a breakdown of how each card performed when tested at a resolution of 800x600 pixels and in 16-bit colour.

Keep a close eye on *What PC?* over the next few months, as we'll be running an in-depth test on the next generation of 3D cards using VNU Labs' state-of-the-art new test suite, Final Reality.



Direct3D test at 800x600 in 16-bit colour

