

hine In B Flat

[Mark Tennent](#)

For ten years I have waited patiently, if a little frustrated, for UK telephone company to remove the dongle protection on Leoshare.

It is about the size of a small refridgerator or a built-in oven. At 27.5 kilos it weighs so much the courier needed help to deliver it. It has features that may be able to change your life. What is it? Only the best bargain in laser printers that you'll see this side of the millennium - Apple's LaserWriter 8500.

For a lot less than a thousand pounds you get a 20 pages per minute printer, capable of churning out 50,000 prints per month on huge pieces of paper. Inside the 8500 is a fast AMD RISC chip that rips even the most complicated files in almost real time. Coupled with true Adobe Postscript Level 3 and you have pretty much the state of the art in laser printer technology.

[aserWriter 8500 dwarfing an A3 inkjet alongside](#)

Apple's inclusion of a real Postscript interpreter is not to be taken lightly. After all, it was Apple's first laser printer, with Postscript, that spurred the rise of the desktop publishing that changed the face of the publishing industry in ways not seen since Caxton was messing around with potato prints. Some printer manufacturers keep costs down by emulating Postscript output. This is because Adobe, the inventors of the Postscript language, charge a high price for the inclusion of the fruits of their ingenuity. Postscript emulators try to achieve the same result and can be excellent at it but they can also be the source of frustration caused by weird output problems and unexplained glitches.

The LaserWriter 8500's resolution is so outstanding that photographs look like the real thing rather than dotted photocopies. It is capable of printing up to 150 lines per inch which is the same standard as a magazine page. At this level, photographs get a little too dark but line art and text are crisp and can be used as artwork for high quality printing. With enough RAM the LaserWriter 8500 can use both Photograde and Fineprint, Apple's proprietary resolution enhancing options.

Living with the LaserWriter 8500 can be difficult. For a start, with a second paper tray underneath it the LaserWriter 8500 is half a meter tall and wider still. It needs dedication to accept such a lump of plastic in the corner of your living room. It is styled in Apple's new curvy design, with iMac-like translucent covers and sliders for the paper trays and output hopper. It is possible to stack further paper trays under the printer, building a desk-high tower.

Through its multi-purpose tray the basic printer has the capability of taking up to 150 sheets of a second paper stock, envelopes, transparencies or postcards. This will take the maximum sized paper 330 x 500mm if the door is left open, A4 paper sits neatly inside and the door can be flapped closed because it handles smaller pages in landscape format. Paper up to 120gsm passes easily through the printer including Mellotex and coated stock which give superb print output.

When it is running the LaserWriter 8500 is relatively quiet and it has user-definable energy saving features that put it to sleep after 15 minutes of inactivity. Printing commences with a whine in B flat, followed by a plastic against plastic whir before settling into a quiet "whir-click, whir-click" as the pages pass through and collect neatly in the output hopper. This compares well against other laser printers, the LaserWriter 630 Pro the 8500 replaces had an annoying "squeek-shush-clunk" printing action as it proceeded to churn pages all over the floor. That is, if the pages fed through properly. The LaserWriter 8500 returns its pages in a neat pile though a jogger is fitted to the duplex option (£250 approx.).

It is the duplex, the ability to print on both sides of the paper, that makes the LaserWriter 8500 so special. With its high speed, wonderful quality and large paper handling, the LaserWriter 8500 can become a miniature printing press capable of churning out newsletters, reports and books in short print runs, complete with halftone images. It is also ideal as a networked printer for large work groups and has just about every cabling port you can think of including AppleTalk, serial, parallel, ethernet, Novell IPX and

TCP/IP, plus software to run on MacOS, Windows and Unix systems.

The cost of the toner cartridges is an off-putting £160 but they last for 14,000 copies - just over a penny a page. If you include paper prices and electricity, double-sided output on large pages is roughly a quarter the price of commercial photocopying and far better quality because photographs can be used, so prices should really be compared with off-set litho printing.

[LaserWriter 8500 with 12" ruler](#)

There are two minor niggles with the LaserWriter 8500. First, if the printer is capable of printing on larger than A4 or A3 paper, why doesn't it do edge to edge printing? The non-printed borders are only 5mm all-round but that is just big enough to miss pagination or headers and footers. A call to Apple's support line showed that they too had assumed it was an edge to edge printer. Instead it is a "full bleed" printer. This means you must put in larger paper than the size you want to print onto if you need to print closer than 5mm from the edge, then guillotine the paper to size.

The second niggle is the quality of two tiny plastic paper sensors that are essential to the operation of the printer but look very flimsy. Our local guru and dealer, Mick the Mac (aka Business Computer Resources, Brighton), told us that pulling jammed paper out the wrong way can break the sensors and the only way he can repair them is with Superglue. We have been warned!

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