

hotgear

Reviews by Richard Conrad



Fancy mobile phones

NOT impressed by the new iPhone and in no hurry to upgrade? Sony Ericsson has three beauties due about October: Satio, Yari and Aino (above, from left). Satio started life as "Idou" but, whatever the name, the main attraction is a 3.5-inch touch widescreen designed for enjoying video entertainment such as downloaded TV series and movies. Satio packs in a 12.1MP camera with a flash and a long list of features including video recording and turn-by-turn A-GPS navigation. Yari is the pick for games because they can be played with gestures and there is a "games carousel" for accessing games from the 2.4-inch screen. Aino has a slide-down keypad and a 3-inch touchscreen and will appeal to PlayStation 3 fans — it can be used for "Remote Play" with PS3s via wi-fi or mobile broadband.

www.sonyericsson.com



Spy camcorder \$139

Swann Communications' new, improved and cheaper PenCam DVR mini video camera and recorder looks like a ballpoint pen but contains a pinhole video camera hooked to a 2GB USB memory stick. After recording on the sly, plug the PenCam into your PC's USB port to transfer up to three hours of video recorded in AVI format to do with as you wish. But first cross your heart, spit three times and promise to use only for good, not evil.

www.swannsecurity.com

Cordless home phone \$149.95 (for two)

A FINALIST and Australian International Design Mark recipient at the recent Australian International Design Awards, Telstra's new digital cordless home phone — Colombo — is designed to please. Out now in black or white, Colombo (above) can be wall-mounted and has an in-built digital answering machine, large screen, hands-free speaker and a phone book.

www.telstra.com/colombo

Computer chair \$224

THE Herman Miller Aeron mesh chair is an icon of modern office furnishing and typically sells for about \$2000. The original earned a place in the New York Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection. The Milan Direct Aeron-inspired mesh ergonomic office chair with headrest has a similar style, an ergonomic design and is adjustable (including arms and backrest) at a fraction of the cost of the real thing. Is it as good? As the Fonz says, "Sit on it!"

www.milandirect.com.au



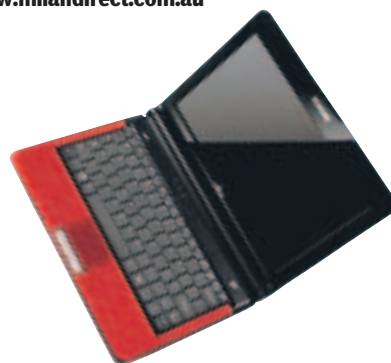
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Netbook \$749

AS IF we weren't already spoilt for choice of netbooks, along comes Fujitsu PC's M2010 (right). Out now in black, red and white, the M2010 has a 10.1-inch screen, Intel Atom processor, Windows XP operating system, 1GB memory, 160GB hard drive, Bluetooth, 802.11b/g wi-fi, webcam, stereo speakers and a card slot, and weighs 1.3kg. However, this netbook ships with XP so Microsoft's Windows 7 Upgrade Option doesn't apply. PCs purchased with Vista Home Premium, Business and Ultimate systems can be upgraded for little or no cost when Windows 7 is launched on October 22. (Details: www.windows.com/upgradeoffer)

<http://au.fujitsu.com/pc>



Taken off the menu

This tiny camera has promise but doesn't click, writes **Jennifer Dudley-Nicholson**

>> first look

A NEW breed of compact camera is making it easier to take photos of your international adventures.

No longer do you need a backpack, several lenses and a Sherpa when you leave your hotel.

Plenty of these travel cameras now come with extended zoom lenses that can put the farthest landmark in the picture.

But smart photographers will need to look beyond a camera's specs and investigate how it uses its hardware.

That is the lesson from the Olympus Mju 9000: a camera Olympus bills as the smallest to offer a 10x optical zoom.

A diversion from Olympus's usual water and shockproof range, the Mju 9000 is rugged, yet slim enough to slip into a pocket.

Its zoom is as impressive as it promises, stretching from 28mm to 280mm, in film terms, and it's capable of sharp photos in 12-megapixel quality.



But using the Mju 9000 can be frustrating. Some crude menu options ruin what is otherwise a solid travel camera and thwart you taking photos quickly in good light.

Extratech took this Olympus camera to Singapore to test it like a traveller.

The first thing we noticed was the lack of an SD card slot, the format common to most digital cameras. Thankfully, a 512MB xD card came with it to get us started.

Next we noticed that each time we removed the battery to charge it, we were asked to reset the date and time. Fail to do that and you will be prompted to rethink your stance each time you restart the camera.

We were encouraged to see that

Olympus added an iAuto mode to this shooter: an increasingly popular addition designed to choose the best scene mode and settings for the scenario at hand.

Unfortunately, this version is not as foolproof as that of its rivals. The Mju 9000's iAuto mode often misjudged the lighting and wanted to use the camera's flash in almost every situation.

When we tried to turn off the flash, it refused.

Instead, users have to choose a scene setting, such as Indoors, and manually turn off the flash. This requires six button presses and is far from quick.

Worse, the camera won't remember the last setting you used, so you must repeat the process each time you turn it on.

>> at a glance

Olympus
Model: Mju 9000
Price: \$599
Specs: 12 megapixels, 10x optical zoom 28mm wide angle lens, 2.7-inch LCD screen, image stabiliser, face detection, shadow adjust, intelligent auto mode and in-built panorama
www.olympus.com.au

Some scene modes proved difficult to use. Night Scene mode, for example, seemed to think we owned a tripod, and set a several-second exposure.

If you can get past these frustrations, the Mju 9000 has some worthwhile additions. They include a CCD image stabiliser, face detection and shadow adjustment, a Panorama mode that lets you stitch photos together and a Beauty mode that identifies faces and attempts to fix facial anomalies (in a second photo in case you prefer the before picture).

And once you find the right mode and the right settings, the lens is capable of sharp focus.

It's a shame the menus and settings are not more user-friendly, and it won't accept a full-sized SD card. If it weren't for these issues, Olympus's travel camera could have been great.

As it is, shooters might find more worth in a Canon or Panasonic with a smarter intelligent auto function.