State-of-the-art PIII or tried-and-tested PII? It's your choice.

Pentium poser

PIII or not PIII, that is the question. It's a tough decision for PC buyers when Intel launches its latest processor. Do you pay through the nose just to have this month's state-of-the-art chip, or do you stick with the old one, described only weeks earlier as 'being the best there was' and which now, with discounting, appears to represent pretty good value for money? In this month's PC group test we asked five manufacturers to submit two systems each: one built around the old Pentium II, the other housing a brand new Pentium III. To make it more interesting, both systems were built for exactly the same price. Will processor discounting allow the PII systems to boast greater-quality extras, or will the sheer muscle of the PIII bully its way to the top? Turn to page 128 to find out.

Meanwhile, Intel's advertising seems to have confused the public about what the Pentium III does best. I was certainly slightly baffled when the TV ads claimed that the Pentium III brought the internet to life. Personally, I've always found that accessing quiet sites with faster connections brings the internet to life. A faster processor will greatly benefit games players or anyone number-crunching, using, say, Photoshop filters or maths packages, but a faster chip makes little difference to exploring the web. Intel's argument must boil down to decompressing and processing heavily encoded multimedia web content, which the Pentium III presumably eats for breakfast. Well, it should do, once the programming world starts to include code that makes use of the PIII's Katmai New Instruction set (KNI). Like MMX before it, KNI-enabled software will run faster on a chip with KNI support – so far, that's the PIII or the new Xeon (*also reviewed this month*). However, like MMX when it first came out, there's not a great deal of KNI-optimised code currently out there. Until the software world starts writing for KNI, the only benefit a PIII has is a potentially higher clock speed – currently only 10 percent faster than the speediest PII.

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If you're slightly bemused by the ever-increasing speed of main CPUs, you can't help but marvel at the meteoric rise of 3D graphics performance. Hardly a month goes by that there's not a new contender to the 3D throne. Now the dust has settled on the arrival of 3Dfx's Voodoo3 and ATi's 128-bit processors, which will come out top? Our graphics card group test (page 176) shows you. With VideoLogic's PowerVR Second Generation (as seen on Sega's Dreamcast console) and Riva's TNT2 just round the corner, PC gamers have never had it so good.

Also in this issue is a report on the Government's controversial white paper on eCommerce and encryption which could seriously infringe on your privacy (page 124). It's a hot topic that we should all keep our eyes on very closely.

Finally, this is my last issue of *Personal Computer World* as Editor. I'd like to thank everyone for their support over what have been the best seven years of my life, and to wish my successor, Bobby Pickering, the best of luck at the helm of Britain's greatest PC magazine.

Gordon Laing, Editor