

letters

Send your letters to:

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PUBLICATION DATES

I know this is an old chestnut from the *Letters* page, but *please* could you make the magazine date match reality! I have renewed my subscription and was told it would start with the April issue due out on 18 February. This is (a) silly and (b) confusing for everyone involved in the subscription process.

Thanks for a great job on the magazine – I always look forward to it crashing through my letterbox!

PAUL HERITAGE-REDPATH

WILL HEAD replies >

The reason magazine cover dates are slowly creeping forward is competition within the marketplace. When we started back in 1978 our magazine cover date tallied with the calendar date. As more and more competitors entered the market, magazines had to stand out on the newsstand. One way to do this was to come out a little bit earlier than everyone else. If all the magazines are, say, on the January issue and your magazine is on February and then it will look more current than the rest. Of course, this leads to everyone else pulling their issue forward so as not to be outdone. If we put our cover date in

line with the calendar months then our magazine would appear to be two months out of date compared to the competition, and who would buy a magazine labelled January when everybody else's says March?

However, I see your point that it does get confusing. Internally we tend to think of the cover date as a 'Best before date'. Therefore our May edition comes out at the end of March, runs through April and expires in May. Although how long we can realistically use this metaphor remains to be seen.

CAUSING A SPLIT

I have just graduated from Windows 3.11 to Windows 98 and need to transfer an important file to my new computer. Unfortunately, the file breaks the 1.44MB limit imposed on my humble floppy drive. Is there any way I can achieve this?

I tried to backup the old and restore to the new but it says something along the lines of the file not being in a catalogue and will not accept it.

SHAIK A AHAMATH

WILL HEAD replies >

Unix has a fantastic command called split, which splits large files into more manageable chunks. Unfortunately, this never made it across into MS-DOS. There are a number of file splitters available, just put 'file splitter' into a search engine and it should come back with a few results. Another approach is to use good, old pkzip (or WinZip). Set the target as A: and it will happily prompt you for a new disk when the current one is full. Restoring the file set on the other machine is simply a matter of inserting the first disk, starting the unzip process and then following the instructions on screen.

SORE LOSER OF THE MONTH

I hope you'll forgive this 'sour grapes' letter. I don't really know if I want you to print it, but I am really curious to know the criteria for winning the prize for 'Letter of the Month'.

I submitted a poem recently and was very proud when I saw it in print in the April issue. I was also very impressed with the standard of all the letters again.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

REGISTRATION IRRITATION

I hope I am not the only one who gets annoyed about this subject. Why are we repeatedly asked by software companies to 'register' the software we buy? It's not as if we get anything useful for the act of sending in our personal details, is it? Most of the time we are simply making ourselves a target for junk mail, at best solely from the software publisher and at worst from every direct mail company from here to Outer Mongolia.

Occasionally the carrot of a 'Free Prize Draw' is dangled before us. 'National Lottery' enthusiasm kicks in and convinces us we actually have a sporting chance of winning a holiday for two in the Seychelles or a second-hand, coffee-stained mouse mat emblazoned with the publisher's logo. That is, if the draw exists at all.

As far as I know, most patches and updates are now available on the Internet and technical support can often be gained from the many forums and newsgroups around. So, as there is very little support that can be offered by them or requested by us, I have to ask: what do the companies do with all the information we give them? Answer: someone somewhere is making big money buying and selling all this data. Does it really make any difference that you ticked the little box at the end of the small print and did you interpret the double-negative question correctly?

IRFAN SHAFFI

However, with due respect to Mr Wilkinson's winning submission, he must agree that his letter simply agreed with the Deputy Editor's previous article and was not particularly original.

Is it compliments you're looking for, trying to reward new readers of your mag, or is the winner simply pulled out of a hat? If my poem promotes correspondence as a regular feature, as you suggest, may I please still be eligible for a retrospective 'poem of the month' monitor?

BRIAN SOUTAR

RIYAD EMERAN replies >

There is no hard and fast rule for deciding who the prize goes to and it usually comes down to which one stands out from the crowd and catches our eye. Although you may deem Mr Wilkinson's letter inferior to your own contribution, we felt that his letter was topical and showed that there are people who agree that parents should take a greater role in protecting their children from the evils of the Internet. The letter backed up the article and showed that Nik Rawlinson's comments related to opinions of real people. (Nik would again like to take the opportunity to clarify that he does not browse the Internet for porn).

WHAT DO YOU GET IF YOU CROSS A PENGUIN...?

I heard a really good joke recently and just thought I should share it. It went along the lines of: Linux is the great hope for the future for PC users and offers a real alternative to MS Windows.

What's that I hear, you can't see the joke? I didn't think it was funny either until I tried Linux for myself. Being of an open mind I acquired a copy of this marvel, whose virtues are extolled in every computing magazine. I built a machine to run it on and was shocked to find most of the installation documentation relates to how to install on a machine running MS Windows – not very independent. I did eventually complete the installation with the hard drive formatted for MS-DOS, then the 'fun' started.

First, the sound card couldn't be found. Now let me make one thing clear: the machine I built to test Linux uses four-year-old components and the sound card is the exotic SoundBlaster Vibra 16. I had used very common components to give Linux a fair chance, but no luck with this SoundBlaster. A search of www.linux.com and the very comprehensive 'how to' files enlisted the advice that the Linux kernel has a problem with this particular sound card.

MS Windows, both 95 and 98, had no problem with this PnP sound card. I didn't trawl the site to see if other hardware would be similarly afflicted.

ISA cards in general seem to be a problem; it is necessary to run a program in a terminal window to obtain information on the PnP devices in your system, this must then be inserted in another file and a modification to the kernel must be made, etc.

I'm sorry but the funny side must be showing by now. I haven't even started on navigation using the supplied GUI, or how on earth you can find out how much space is left on your hard drive, since Linux doesn't acknowledge it exists. Then there's the fun of creating shortcuts to programs by typing in the program name or searching for it through a forest of folders with ambiguous titles.

Face it, Linux is written by computer nerds for computer nerds, and being a computer nerd myself for the past 20 years I can appreciate their efforts. MS

Windows, on the other hand, is a fully functioning operating system which anyone can install and use.

MS Windows receives very bad press in the computer world, probably a case of knocking the successful because of their success. In future, anyone who knocks MS Windows should be made to install and use Linux as their sole operating system for one month; after their release they'll be only too glad to reinstall that 'awful' Windows. The fact that Linux is so often supplied with a means to run it on a machine already running MS Windows really shows that even the suppliers do not take it seriously as an alternative to Windows.

Linux may be an interesting diversion, it may be very useful for servers etc, but as a serious alternative to MS Windows, for the average user, I think not.

PETER HENDERSON

BENCHMARK COMPARISON

In December I decided to upgrade my system, having owned a PC for the last four years. All I wanted to do was install a larger hard drive. However, after talking with the man in the shop, he

explained that I could upgrade my whole system by changing the motherboard, CPU, etc. I was interested in the challenge but decided, before purchasing anything more than the hard drive, to do a bit of reading up on the subject.

This is where your magazine came in. I was attracted by the sheer size of the magazine and on glancing through, it appeared to have great lumps of information that would help me on my quest for greater knowledge. I have now purchased your magazine for the past three months and have even taken out a subscription. Anyway, to my question.

When comparing the speed of various systems in February you gave a SYSmark 98 score of 205 and 3DMark 99 of 4,099 to the Dell Dimension XPS T500 and in March the Asus K7M



3DMark 99 and 2000 can't be cross-compared, unfortunately

notched up a SYSmark 98 score of 295. However, come April the Atlas Meridian scored 152 and 4,465 in SYSmark 2000 and 3DMark 2000 respectively. Am I missing something or is there a magic number I have to multiply SYSmark 2000 and 3DMark 2000 scores by, so they are comparable with 98 and 99 scores?

That said, I think it's all becoming clearer. By reading the reviews and then referring to the manufacturers' home pages I reckon that I am going to be able to piece together a stonking system, exactly to my specifications, if not to my original budget (because I never knew what was out there).

STEPHEN WILLISHER

WILL HEAD replies >

Unfortunately the bad news is that newer benchmarks do not allow cross-comparison with the old. We took the decision to move over completely to the new benchmark scores from the April issue onwards as they offer more rigorous testing of current hardware.

When cross-comparison is an issue, such as the Gigabyte motherboard featured in Reviews this month, we've run both benchmarks. For more information on how the benchmarks stack up, take a look at How we did the tests in this month's PC Group Test.

BEOS, LINUX MYTHS AND BIASED MEDIA

After finding that the 'perfect OS' is not going to appear in any form of Windows, I decided to try something completely different in the form of Linux and then BeOS. Here are some facts from my experience of the above OSs along with their claims:

- Linux claims to be the most stable, yet under moderate to heavy usage in general apps, Corel Linux crashed twice per hour and SuSE twice per week. Be just states that its OS is stable, without trying to outdo anyone, yet I found it was truly rock-solid with no OS or apps crashing.
- Linux claims to be small and fast, yet it ran the slowest, to the point of the cursor locking up on a dual-processor system with vast amounts of memory and only two tasks running.
- It is the most memory-hungry, with X-Windows and KDE using up to 63MB of RAM, more than Windows 2000!
- BeOS is smaller than Win 95 and I found it to be the fastest OS I've used, running five video clips simultaneously with enough left for a go at minesweeper. Windows and Linux struggled with two at the same time on the same hardware.
- Linux claims to be 'free'. I'm sure it is with an unmetered Internet connection and years of experience, but for most, the cost of obtaining it added to the cost in time and money of learning how it works, makes it more expensive than Windows. BeOS is available for £25 and from version 5 will be free for personal use, with learning costs a fraction of that of Linux.

Many others I know have experienced the same thing as I mention above and have dumped Linux after being duped by its 'whiter than white' attitude and also due to little reporting on its flaws because it's the 'in thing' at the moment. Over 100,000 have already pre-registered for BeOS 5 which will be free to download from free.be.com from 28 March. If this continues to expand, will you be considering a BeOS column, even if it's just a single page? Despite having a tiny workforce and not being open-source, it is in a more advanced state after just a few years than Linux and



Even on the big screen Hackers garnered very little popularity, despite Angelina Jolie

Windows 2000 are in today and may well be the most underestimated OS to date.

KATIE BUTLER

WILL HEAD replies >

No one OS is going to do everything well and this is the reason there is more than one OS available on the market today. There are compatibility benefits from having one dominant OS, as is the case with Windows, but there are some functions it is simply not suited for. Linux is, was and always will be a Unix clone and as such it is designed for stability in a multi-user, networked environment, a task it does extremely well. BeOS was designed as a multimedia OS for streaming video and audio, and this is why it can run five video clips concurrently and still have space left for minesweeper.

As for the cost argument, Linux has always been said to be free as in speech, not free as in beer. This means that the project as a whole is open source and no-one owns the copyright on it, it is merely protected from someone modifying it and claiming the copyright. While downloading it from the Internet is a little unfeasible, there is nothing to stop you from obtaining it on CD for minimal production costs, Aquila Vision (01274 775117) sells Red Hat 6.0 on CD for £3.50, which hardly breaks the bank. The download version of BeOS, while fully functional, has a number of restrictions, meaning that if you're serious about using it you'll have to pay to upgrade to the professional version, costing £43.75.

At the end of the day, different people have different needs and, for some, BeOS may be the solution. Others are happy to plod along with Windows and some like to get their hands dirty tinkering with Linux. It's a case of evaluating the options and seeing which suits you best.

HACK OFF

On reading David Fearon's article entitled *Hack off and get a life*, I found I was truly amazed! How this person could say that hackers are mindless and sad is amazing. I myself am a hacker. I believe the word hacker is being wrongly used here! A hacker does not want to destroy property and cause damage on purpose. The correct term for this is a *cracker*!

The true meaning of a hacker is someone who wishes to learn the full ability of their machine (PC, Mac or any other flavour). I do not and never will cause damage. A true hacker will tell a network administrator of any security holes they have found.

I urge David Fearon to reconsider what he has said and make considerable changes. I think this person has been led astray by myths passed around by the governments of various countries!

TONY AYRE

DAVID FEARON replies >

Your response is just one of several dozen I've had following the hacking column, pulling me up on the differences between hackers and crackers. But I'm afraid I'm unrepentant on this score. You have every right to cling white-knuckled to your own specific definition of 'hacker', despite the fact that 99.9 per cent of the population think differently.

Getting all uptight about the fact that it now has a meaning outside the traditional geek's definition, and has done for about the past 20 years, puts me in mind of the type of old farts who despair because the word 'gay' doesn't mean happy and smiley any more. Words are slippery things, and their meaning often depends on context. The context in this case was pretty clear, I think.