Upgrade your motherboard for maximum effect.

Board meeting

I had a good look at my home PC recently and decided it was time to upgrade. Not to a new processor, nor even to a hot graphics card. No, the upgrade for which my system was crying out was more fundamental — a new motherboard. The time had come in my PC's life when the lure of new interfaces, increased bus speeds and support for exotically-fast memory had become too hard to resist.

If you have never fitted a new motherboard, I can understand your apprehension. The first time I even thought about it, it seemed an insurmountable process compared to just sliding in a new interface card or fitting a niftier processor. But once I had identified what shape and size case I had, it really was as simple as undoing a few screws, removing the old board and swapping it for the new one. The old motherboard looked a lot smaller and less scary out of its natural environment, and without its cables.

After my first board-swap, I couldn't get enough of it, and my latest motherboard has brought my PC a 100MHz front-side bus, support for the fastest memory, the ubiquitous array of ports and plenty of opportunity to tweak and overclock — and all for less than £100. Here at *PCW* we thought we were more than overdue to present a motherboard group test, so we've gathered together 18 models covering Slot 1, along with Socket 7 and 370 technologies, and the prices start at £49. So get that screwdriver out!

> **Like all phobias, the old motherboard looked A LOT SMALLER AND LESS SCARY out of its natural environment**

Being a keen amateur photographer I've been keeping an especially close eye on digital cameras. At first, their low resolutions, high prices and tricky connectivity restricted them to hardcore enthusiasts wanting to update their web site or publish tiny images in exchange-style newspapers. Admittedly, I saw some forward-thinking estate agents brandishing early models around local properties, but such examples were rare. This month we've been able to compare ten brand-new digital cameras, each boasting more than one million pixels, at very reasonable prices. These so-called mega-pixel designs provide image quality sufficient to fill an A4 colour inkjet page, or enough margin to crop for use on-line without worrying that you'll run out of pixels. Our winning model was even good enough for us to start using it for various product shots within this issue.

Exciting exclusives appear in our *New Products* pages this month and 3D gamers can look forward to seeing how ATi's 128-bit Rage Fury compares to the new 3Dfx Voodoo3. And, we grab a first look at AMD's K6-III processor running at 450MHz. AMD claims it will outperform an Intel Pentium III running at higher clock frequencies — find out what happened when we put it to the test. We also review a pair of Sony notebooks, one pocket sized and the other a desktop replacement, but both running Windows 98 faster than most office PCs. We've also got backup solutions for small businesses, part II of our Year 2000 countdown, a test of free ISPs, and a chance to win three digital cameras by taking part in our annual Reliability Survey.

By the way, it's our 21st birthday this month and I'd like to say thank you to all our readers for giving us our highest circulation yet!

Gordon Laing, Editor