

GIZMO

Be top of the class with a £99 laptop



A new cheap computer aimed at schoolchildren is about to be launched. Mark Harris tries it out

A new laptop computer for just £99 sounds like the kind of offer found in a spam e-mail or on a dodgy auction website. But the British company Elonex is launching the country's first sub-£100 computer later this month and hopes to be making 200,000 of them by the summer. It will be aimed at schoolchildren and teenagers, and looks set to throw the market for budget laptops wide open.

Called the One, it can be used as a traditional notebook computer or, with the screen detached from the keyboard, as a portable "tablet" — albeit without

the planned touchscreen that Elonex had to abandon to hit its £99 price tag. Wi-fi technology lets users access the internet or swap music (and homework) files between computers wirelessly.

Personal files can be stored on the laptop's 1GB of built-in memory or on a tough digital wristband (1-8GB, from £10) that children can plug into the USB socket of whichever computer they happen to be using, be it the One, a PC at school or their parents' laptop.

So how can Elonex make a computer for so little? After all, UK consumers paid an average of £477 for a new laptop in 2007, according to the retail analyst GfK.

The secret is simple: open-source software. The One runs on Linux, which is a rival to Windows but completely free to use. Open-source software can be freely swapped or modified by anyone who wants it. In the past such operating systems (there are several of them) have been outgunned by the more sophisticated Windows programs. However, an open-source operating system is ideal for low-cost devices as it performs well on less powerful, cheaper hardware. Naturally, the One is more basic



The One laptop, which is aimed at the youth market, has a screen that can be removed from the keyboard to be used as a tablet

GAMES



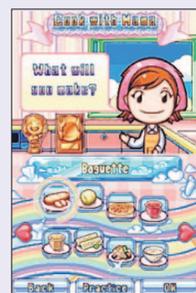
Devil May Cry 4 ★★★★★
Xbox 360, PS 3, PC £35-£50
Age 16+

If you asked a clutch of heavy-metal-loving 14-year-old boys to create a game, Devil May Cry 4 would probably be the result. This latest episode of the long-running demon-slaying saga takes place in a fantasy

world of baroque architecture and improbably buxom warrior women. This time we have a new hero — a stropky part-demon named Nero — but otherwise it's business as usual for Devil May Cry.

As Nero, you must leap around, pausing only to solve simple puzzles as you blast foes with a handgun or slice hell-spawn into chunks with a sword. Nero even has a new trick up his sleeve: a demon hand that grabs evil beasts to bounce them off walls.

The game looks great, with vibrant colours and detailed scenes of vast scale, shocking colour and incredible surface detail. It does all feel a bit old-fashioned, but who cares when the action is so much fun? The final third lazily retreads chunks of the first part of the game, yet even this is weirdly enthralling. Give this Devil his due. **Stuart Andrews**



Cooking Mama 2 ★★★★★
Nintendo DS
£30. Age 3+

The original Cooking Mama game turned out to be something of a surprise hit, and the sequel follows much the same recipe. The goal is to practise your

kitchen skills while conjuring up a selection of virtual dishes, doing so mainly by tracing lines on the touchscreen of your Nintendo DS to slice a lobster into chunks, stir a pan or even smear garlic butter onto your fancy creation.

At the end of each stage, the game's digital Delia, known as Cooking Mama, marks your efforts for you. Successfully completing a dish will open up the possibility of being able to try a new one, and once you have a few tucked under your belt, you can go on to cook them to win over some cartoon friends.

On one level this game is really too simple, with no career mode or tournaments, and preparing bog-standard ravioli felt little different from creating a detailed Japanese delicacy. It ultimately lacks any real long-term challenge, despite which it remains strangely moreish — it's difficult to resist just one more bite. In that respect it's ideal fodder for any ankle-biter who displays a culinary bent. It's more McDonald's than Michelin three stars: tasty enough, but only when served up in small portions. **Stuart Andrews**

★★★★★ KO ★★★★★ A-OK
★★★ OK ★★ So-so ★ No-no

than all-singing, all-dancing notebooks. Nonetheless, it includes a free word processor and spreadsheet, a free web browser and free e-mail software. It has a 7in screen, a rubbery little keyboard and no CD drive. And it all runs on an ageing chip that was designed before its target audience of seven-year-olds were even born.

InGear had an exclusive hands-on look at a pre-production One. The keyboard was slow and spongy and the built-in speakers could be louder but the screen was bright and the software package impressively varied (if rather sluggish) on this prototype.

Pre-loaded programs ranged from instant messaging software and a photo editor to games and an MP3 player. Moving files to and from the USB wristband was easy enough — and there's a Bluetooth version with 2GB of memory (£120) that lets you swap files with mobile phones too.

Elonex will be launching the computer at the Education Show at the NEC in Birmingham at the end of this month, and is targeting schools as potential buyers.

The Elonex One isn't the only low-cost educational laptop out there, however. Asus launched an open-source laptop in the run-up to Christmas last year. The Eee PC (about £200) has proved popular with adults as well as children, with its first shipment selling out nationwide within hours of its November release.

The One Laptop per Child initiative, which began in America, hopes to offer a "Give one, get one" event this year in Britain, where consumers can buy two computers — one for themselves and one for a child abroad — for about £200.

But open-source software has its problems. If no one owns it, there's no one to complain to when things go wrong — and the One has no antivirus or firewall software built in. The old-fashioned feel of the One's programs could also flummox modern cyber-kids used to the slick menus, wizards and plug-and-play simplicity of Windows.

Of course, in the context of laptops costing more than £1,000 — and even copies of Microsoft Office software retailing at as much as £120 — paying £99 for a fully functional, internet-ready laptop packed with software isn't a huge risk to take.

And it's this magic price that is the One's biggest asset. The more that parents choose to buy Ones, the more music and games their kids will share, and the more sought after it will become. A laptop as the coolest thing in the playground? Stranger things have happened.

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TECHNOLOGY NEWS

CANE AND ABLE

Calfee Bamboo Mountain bike frame
\$2,695 (£1,368) www.calfeedesign.com

Is this the ultimate green machine? The mountain bike pictured has a frame made from bamboo, inspired by a project that is producing environmentally sound bicycles for people in Ghana. Bamboo frames are about as rigid as aluminium ones and as heavy as the steel type, so they can provide a smooth ride over the rutted roads of Africa — or the potholes of London. The frame is held together by natural fibres and resin, and a basic bike can be assembled with nothing more fancy than a Swiss army knife, although you'll have to choose components to turn the frame into a full bicycle. The only ecological downside is that you'll have to have this hand-crafted beauty shipped all the way from its Californian factory.



SPEEDY SNAPPER

Casio Exilim EX-F1 camera, about \$1,000 (£507)
www.exilim.co.uk 020 8450 9131

Digital cameras used to be much slower than their film counterparts, but those days are long gone. The all-digital EX-F1 is the world's fastest consumer-level camera, capable of shooting 60 frames per second (fps) at its full 6Mp resolution, or a blistering 1200fps at a lower quality for ultra-slow-motion video clips. In fact, it's so fast that it can even take pictures "in the past". There's no time machine involved, though, it can be set to record pictures constantly to a buffer memory, only saving them to its memory card if you hit the shutter-release button. The Casio is fast at night, too, and with flash is capable of snapping 20 photos in one burst, at a rate of seven images per second, without having to wait for the flash to recharge itself. It has a powerful 12x zoom lens that lets you get closer to the action, and an anti-shake function to keep pictures crisp. It can also record high-definition digital movies, and uses an HDMI socket for playback on modern HD televisions. However, high-speed and high-definition shooting will fill memory cards in a trice, so you should budget

£10-£20 for a large 4GB card — or even buy a pair.



RADIO STAR

Nokia N78 mobile phone
£350 (£260) without contract www.nokia.co.uk

The annual Mobile World Congress in Barcelona last week saw phone makers showcasing their latest technology. Among the new devices was this 3G handset from Nokia. Like many phones, it can pick up FM radio stations and play MP3 tunes, but unlike others it can also broadcast the tunes. Take your N78 on the road, tune it to your choice of FM frequency and it can beam the tunes to your car's radio (this type of widget struggles to work in cities, however). If concentrating on your music means you've lost the N78 has a built-in GPS receiver and mapping software to get you back on track. It can even "tag" its 3.2Mp snaps with location data, letting you view on a map exactly where you took each photo. The N78 will be available from the summer.



DON'T PANIC

NIGEL POWELL ANSWERS YOUR TECH-RELATED QUERIES

Q I want to use wireless broadband with my Windows XP PC. What's the best way to go about it?

Paul Mullen, via e-mail

A An add-in card such as the Linksys WMP54G (see tinyurl.com/2x3b6x) should get you working with wi-fi at home, but you'll need to open up the PC to fit it, and install some software. If web browsing still feels slow, fit more Ram memory into the PC. You may have to buy a new PC to enjoy multimedia such as streaming video.

Q I use Outlook Express for e-mail but would like to change to Microsoft Outlook. Is it a simple procedure?

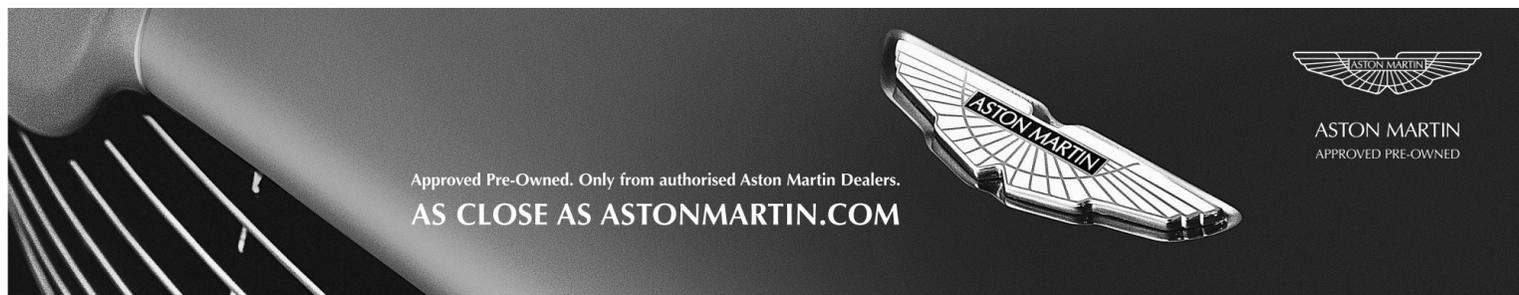
Eddie Mulholland, Eire

A Moving from the free Outlook Express to Outlook (which is part of Microsoft Office) is only really necessary if you want to use its powerful contact and task functions. See the major differences at tinyurl.com/38uyls. If you still want to upgrade, first back up your current e-mails and addresses (see tinyurl.com/aym7n), then transfer your current Outlook Express settings to Outlook (tinyurl.com/ywbs2h).

Q How can I simplify logging into multiple webmail accounts?

HJ, via e-mail

A Try DynAdvance Notifier (£5 at tinyurl.com/ysf96a) This software logs you into several webmail accounts without you having to enter your password each time.



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