



In the Market for a Mac

by Craig Savage

We all know how much fun it is to buy a new power tool. Our heads are full of reasons why we need it, and what it will do for our productivity and the quality of our work. Even if we haven't used that particular tool before, we are confident we can master it, and soon it becomes an integral part of our toolbox.

Computers don't inspire us in the same way, but they should. They offer us more help with productivity and quality than any other tool we can buy for our business. The Macintosh line of computers is expanding, so it's a good time to survey the available Macs to see what they have to offer.

You Get What You Pay For

The entry-level Macintosh computer is called the *Classic*. At a suggested retail price of \$999, this is the cheapest way to start computing on a Mac. A thousand bucks buys the built-in, 9-inch, black-and-white monitor, a 1450k 3 1/2-inch floppy drive, the keyboard, a mouse, system software, and built-in networking. It's enough to get you started. You can run word processors, spreadsheets, and project management programs on this machine, as well as painting, drawing, and even some CAD programs. You can add a 40-megabyte hard drive (plenty of storage for the beginner) for about \$300. An ink-jet or bubble-jet printer costs another \$400.

The next step up is the *Classic II*. You can upgrade the *Classic* or start new, if \$1500 isn't too much for your budget. For the extra cash, you get more speed, a built-in 40-megabyte hard drive, and the ability to run the new *System 7* operating system. All of this is well worth the extra money. The hard disk will keep you from having to swap floppy disks in and out of your computer, and the speedy 68030 processor runs applications nearly twice as fast as the *Classic*.

Bigger Screen, Plus Color

If you are new to computing, it might take you a year or more to realize that the *Classic* is "slow" and that the screen is too small and not in color. The next step up is the *Macintosh LC*, the most affordable color Mac available. With its separate 13-inch, 256-color, high-resolution RGB (red/green/blue) monitor, the *MAC LC* is a great small business computer. It is the minimum CAD platform for those of you who want to do drafting with your computer. Don't get me wrong: I did shop drawings,

and even complete house drawings, with my *Mac Plus*, which has a 9-inch screen. But the larger the screen, the better. The *LC* also comes with a 40-megabyte hard drive, and internal "expansion" slots let you add optional cards so you can hook up a scanner or digitizer, or match the functions of ("emulate") the *Apple IIe*. You can buy one for about \$1800.

Mac II

The Macintosh II line of computers includes the *IIsi*, *IIci*, and *IIfx*, each faster and more expensive than the one before. Unlike the *Classic*, these computers need separate monitors. They all sport the 68030 processor, and the *IIci* and *IIfx* also come with a 68882 math coprocessor chip. Graphics and complex CAD or database operations demand the increased speed of the coprocessor. A *IIsi* with 3 megabytes of RAM and a 40-megabyte hard drive can be purchased for about \$2000, and the *IIci* with 5 megabytes of RAM and an 80-megabyte hard drive sells for about \$3000. The *IIfx* jumps to just over \$4100. For all of these, you'll need to buy the monitor separately (they start at \$400).

State-of-the-Art Mac

The new *Quadra* series uses the newest Motorola 68040 chip. These machines are several times faster than even the *IIfx* computer, but are also more expensive. Pricing starts at \$4995 and extends past \$9000, making *Quadra* a choice for only the most committed user. A computer this fast and powerful can be used as a "server" to store and disseminate information to other computers on your desktop. You'll also need this much power if you plan to do large color renderings. The same is true of multi-media applications, which add movies, sound, and even 3-D computer animation to your company's toolbox.

Take It With You

Portable Macs offer a great price-to-value ratio, and there are three new ones. The *100* (\$2100), *140* (\$2400), and *170* (\$4350) *PowerBooks* are lightweight, portable computer systems with all the features, power, and ease-of-use found on the stationary models mentioned above — and you can take them with you. With a built-in fax/modem, you can even send and receive a fax wherever you are. And, by faxing yourself a document, you can use any fax machine as a printer.

Compatibility

Apple continues to offer machines that are "downward compatible," meaning that software which runs on earlier versions of the Mac runs on the new models as well. This is very important if you have an investment in software and want to upgrade your machine. Also, all Macs run the same way, so the data created in one application is compatible with data created in other applications. For instance, you can transfer estimate data created in the *Excel* spreadsheet to *Mac Project*, your scheduling application, and then move the schedule data into a word-processing document, all with simple "cut and paste" commands. More on this, and *System 7*, next time. ■

Craig Savage, a longtime builder and Macintosh user, owns Savage Co., in Palm Desert, Calif., and publishes the newsletter Macintosh Construction Forum. He alternates this column with Morris Carey, who writes on IBM-compatible systems.

Computer Bytes

Filing your tax return is almost painless with *TaxCut* (\$89.95), tax preparation software that helps you select the forms you need, explains obscure IRS terminology, performs all the math, and spots any omissions in your 1040. Two other versions are available — *Taxcut EZ/A* (\$29.95) for those who only need to file 1040A or 1040EZ returns, and *TaxCut Windows* (\$99.95) which runs on Microsoft Windows 3.0 and can display more than one form on the screen at a time. All three are manufactured by Meca Software, P.O. Box 912, Fairfield, CT 06430-0912; 800/288-6322.

Hydron handles the complex calculations involved in hydronic heating system designs that use finned-tube baseboard radiators. The program, which runs on PCs, allows you to design individual baseboards in conventional one-pipe and multi-zone systems, and thermostatic radiator valves that control the temperature in each room. *Hydron* is available through Technology Transfer Associates, P.O. Box 5187, Utica, NY 13505; 315/733-4732.

An add-on module called Home-Builder Payroll was recently released by Timberline software. The program tracks federal, state, city, and county taxes, and distributes the data to the appropriate job cost, general ledger, and accounts receivable functions of the company's *Home-Builder* software package. Suggested retail price is \$490 for the single-user version, available from Timberline Software Corp., 9600 S.W. Nimbus, Beaverton, OR 97005; 503/644-8155.

— Sal Alfano