

PCW How You Can Contribute To The Long Term Tests Section

We welcome contributions from readers for our Long Term Tests section. If you've been using a piece of hardware or software intensively for some time, just write a 450-word article (for hardware) or a 750-word piece with screenshot GIF format — for software and send it on disk, in MS Word (Mac or PC) or ASCII format, to: The Editor, *Personal Computer World*, VNU House, 32-34 Broadwick Street, London W1A 2HG. Mark your envelope clearly "Long Term Tests". We'll pay for any contributions we use.

HARDWARE

Acorn Archimedes A310



Jonathan Barnes is happy to continue using his seven-year-old Archimedes and sees no reason to change, as it suits his purposes admirably. He finds it simple, reliable and unobtrusive while he is working.

I cannot be one of the computer industry's favourite sons; my desktop machine remains the Acorn Archimedes which I bought from Watford Electronics in December, 1987.

I hope I am not noted for my parsimony as I am just as prone to techno-lust as the next person, hence my choice of the Archimedes: the first mass-produced RISC computer (Apple, please acknowledge).

However, I do not believe that the software which would be applicable to my needs, has yet evolved to the stage where a hardware change would make sense. Being an author, I need something that allows me to produce and reproduce text with ease, and this the Archimedes does. Because it is simple, reliable and unobtrusive in use, the computer does not get in the way of the creative process: text composition is as "transparent" as it used to be on my typewriter.

The Archimedes has its own multitasking GUI in ROM, which is ideal for

desktop publishing. The operating system, RISC OS, is likewise in ROM: when you switch on, the machine is almost immediately ready to use. Among the other goodies in ROM is a handy, structured Basic with a built-in assembler and full access to RISC OS.

A second, 5.25in disk drive was included by Watford Electronics as part of the deal; except for a RISC OS upgrade and the addition of a hard disk and fan-silencer, the thing remains (like myself) entirely unreconstructed. Its monitor is a Hitachi green-screen, handed down to me by my brother when he junked his Apple II. The display is crisp, clean and rock-solid. The Archimedes is robust and well designed. True, the Caps Lock key stopped working in 1991, but otherwise the machine has been entirely trouble-free. Software crashes have always been my fault.

Acorn has made little impact on any but the education and hobbyist markets, and I think that this is a classic example of our national failure to exploit our own technologies. Inept and prejudiced coverage in certain areas of the press (but not *PCW*) hasn't really helped. But proselytising Acorn owners have become the pub bores of the nineties. Yet I must say, that were I a self-employed person looking for a very fast machine today, I would not buy a Pentium. But I would buy an infinitely upgradable and versatile RISC PC: this is about the same price and is served by lots of excellent and affordable native-mode software. With the PC emulator or an on-board 486 processor, a RISC PC would also run Windows, should you wish it to.

And if I couldn't afford a RISC PC, I'd buy a second-hand Archimedes.



Eureka! The Archimedes is still going strong in the Barnes household

PCW Verdict

As good today as it's always been.

Price The A310 is no longer in production

Contact Acorn 01223 254254