



Ability Newsletter

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DANA Test Drive

Wonderful!

We've finally got our hands on an AlphaSmart Dana - and we've not been disappointed. It purrs! The combination of AlphaSmart reliability with the Palm OS is a winning formula, filling an important gap in the market.

There are thousands of programs available for the Palm, and these all run on the Dana (including Palm versions of Adobe Acrobat, FileMaker Pro and MYOB). As it is, the Dana comes with a powerful Word-compatible word processor called AlphaWord (with adjustable font size and styles), the usual Palm applications, and QuickSheet spreadsheet.

The Dana screen, which is a very handy size, can be rotated 90 degrees in either direction. It prints to a range of printers. File transfers can be direct (as with the AlphaSmart 3000) or via a HotSync (as per the Palm).

How is it in practice? I enjoyed it very much. It is not perfect however. The screen seems a little vulnerable to me - some form of built-in lid would be better. A bright colour screen would be wonderful, especially if it could survive a whole school day on one battery charge. The LCD screen is good but suffers the same limitations as all LCDs in dim light. And sending AlphaWord files to a computer via a Hot Sync is very slow, so go and make a cup of coffee while it is taking place!

A great device overall, at a reasonable price (\$990). It is ideal for students who need more than just a notetaker.



Trackball Pro (DT225)

An old favourite revived

The old Trackball Pro (formerly called the Roller Mouse) disappeared several years ago as a consumer product. They are really legendary products - you can tell that when customers ring you up and say: "You sold me a trackball six years ago... (my mind is thinking - what do they want? Their money back?)..." "I want to get another one".

The good news is that we can get them again. They are now called the DT225 and are an OEM rather than consumer product. They have the familiar smooth stainless steel shafts, five point encased ball bearings support and large 2.25" ball. They are now available in USB as well as PS/2.

The bad news is that they will be very expensive. They will cost around \$400 each, so we don't expect to be run off our feet with orders!

USB - PS2 adapters

At last there is an inexpensive way to link PS/2 devices (such as keyboards and trackballs) to an iMac. We have discovered a \$30 cable that will do the job very well. It has one USB connection (for the computer) and two female PS/2 connections.

We have tested it on a range of products, and while we can't promise it will work for all products, we so far haven't had a failure.

They are available from Ability Technology.



From the Workshop

Reboot options

We have had a number of enquiries recently on how to reboot a computer when it locks up. Pressing CTRL-ALT-DEL is the first step, but for those who rely on *Sticky Keys*, the locked up computer excludes that option. What they look for is a single key reboot alternative.

One possibility is to use the **Cherry Numeric Pad**. This device has four programmable keys, one of which you could set up as a reboot key (activating CTRL-ALT-DEL with one key). While it is true that CTRL-ALT-DEL isn't always the answer when your computer locks up, it is more helpful than it used to be. Under Windows 2000 and XP you will be taken to the Task Manager, giving you the option of closing down the offending program rather than having to reboot the whole computer.

But if you want a 100% guaranteed reboot option, then it requires a cable to be connected to your computer's motherboard with a switch socket (and switch) at the user end. This however requires your computer to come to our workshop. Or we can talk your local computer shop though the process.



USB Flash drives

We have been testing these recently. They are tiny devices with a built-in USB connector. They hold from 8 Mb to 1 GB of data. They are reliable, quick and very convenient. A true replacement for a floppy drive for backups and for transferring commonly used files between computers.

To give you an idea of price, a Sony 32 Mb device costs around \$75. A 128 Mb version costs \$195.



Evolution keyboard

Wireless keyboard and trackball unit

Wireless devices extend the independence of people with disabilities by removing the need for devices to be wired to a computer. While there are plenty of wireless keyboards around, only a few incorporate a pointing device. And fewer still include a trackball. That is why the Evolution keyboard caught our eye. It comes with two PS/2 connectors and gives both keyboard and mouse functions.

We found it worked well and had a good, solid feel. It has a good range as well. Our only complaint (apart from the price) is that the trackball is on the top right corner, while the two buttons are on the left. This will make the unit difficult to use by some people with disabilities. Cost is \$375.



We are testing other wireless keyboards with pointing devices. Promising among these is...



Maxtron

This keyboard doesn't have a trackball, but a disc that tilts in different directions. It requires soft touch to use - it could possibly be controlled with a mouth stick. Cost: \$78

MacAilly makes a similar one for the Macintosh called the iWeb keyboard. It sells for \$160.

Point n Click

There are many people who can use a pointing device to position the cursor, but who are unable to click the buttons. One solution in such situations is to use software that activates a click after a set "dwell" period. Dragger is one such program. The software that comes with the Smart Nav AT also does this.

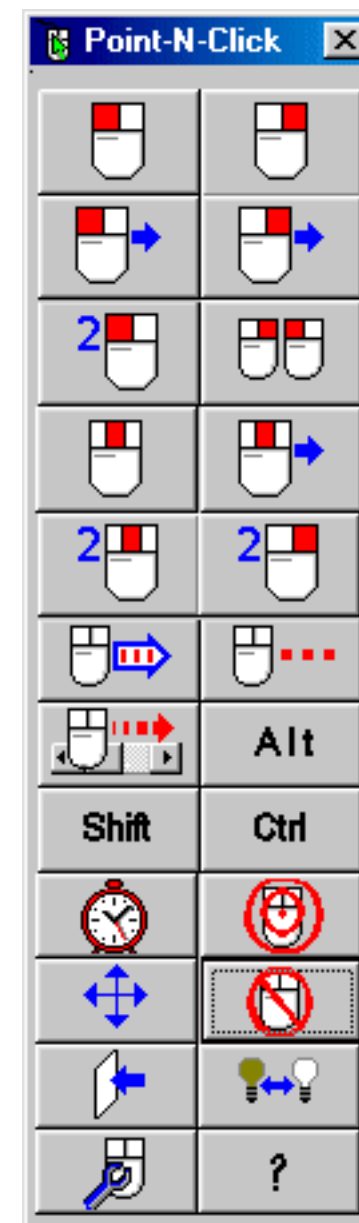
Now there is a **free** program that also seems to do the job very well. It is called Point n Click and is available from www.polital.com

Smart NAV for the Mac

The track IR (now called Smart NAV) is now available for the Mac. We have tested the product and found that it works well. Note that this product only works on USB Macs.

The cost for the upgrade is \$299. You need to have the track IR (Smart NAV) AT first, making the total cost of the Mac version \$828.

Still cheap compared to some of the alternatives, but a heavy premium for Mac users. As a gesture of support for harried Mac users, we are bundling the Smart NAV AT and the Mac upgrade for \$799.



News

Talking

Graeme Smith spoke at a recent conference on Catastrophic Injury in Sydney recently. It was a joint presentation with Greg Killeen from AQA. He also spoke at the "Setting Directions" Expo at Bankstown, this time sharing the podium with Andrew Downie. The theme in both cases was to do with technology, disability and employment.

Canberra trip

We are visiting Canberra in early December to undertake some assessments and also to have some follow-up meetings with senior bureaucrats on employment policies. This will surely be the last trip for 2002!

New OT

We would like to welcome **Linda Hutchinson** to the Ability team. Linda, who has considerable experience with the Computer Access service in Launceston, will start with us in January 2003. Her involvement will strengthen our team at a time when our work is growing considerably.

Technology Workshop for insurance sector

In February Ability will be hosting a Technology Workshop in the Sydney CBD. This will be for insurance company staff, to alert them to assistive technology options and trends. If you would like to participate in this event, then contact us for details.

*We wish all of our readers happiness this Christmas
and peace in 2003*

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