

dren how to proceed. It may suggest they find Barney a shirt of a particular color to wear or a specific breakfast food to eat. It may invite them to play an activity. Whenever youngsters carry out spoken instructions, the voice speaks encouraging words of positive reinforcement.

Even young preschoolers will have fun with Barney Bear. Kids discover several interesting objects to explore. It doesn't take them long to learn that when the cursor changes from a hand pointer to a smiley face, they can select the underlying item—simply by clicking the mouse—to hear a realistic sound effect or music clip. There are words to spell, numbers to count, and 15 black-line pictures to color. The mysterious voice counts to 10 or recites the alphabet, if prompted.

Barney Bear Goes to School is an engaging early learning program reminiscent of Brøderbund's Playroom—though not quite of the same caliber. It introduces preschoolers to computers while building basic skills.

Colorful graphics and realistic Sound Blaster sound effects elicit squeals of laughter. Kids enjoy manipulating the mouse as they explore software activities.

So encourage your children to visit the little red schoolhouse with Barney. It's a great way to get them ready for their own first days at school.

CAROL S. HOLZBERG

IBM PC and compatibles, 512K RAM, EGA or VGA, Sound Blaster, mouse—\$39.95

FREE SPIRIT SOFTWARE
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Circle Reader Service Number 366

U.S. ROBOTICS SPORTSTER V.32/PC

This Cadillac of modems makes my four hours online each day just cruise by. What's so special about this internal modem? For one thing, 9600 bauds. For another



Listing at \$549, the U.S. Robotics Sportster V.32/PC isn't cheap, but it's a full-sized, full-featured modem.

er thing, as close to glitch-free communications as I've ever experienced. It's a well-engineered piece of hardware that will give you many years of fine-tuned service.

The last dozen modems I've installed here at COMPUTE have been compact models. It's almost like the manufacturers are trying to get better mileage by leaving out parts and making the cards smaller. These modems don't reject line noise very well. But this U.S. Robotics modem is a full-size card that's jam-packed with stuff. It combines all of those parts for great line-noise rejection. They don't add to the probability that the modem will break down; in this age of solid-state circuitry, that's unlikely.

And there's more to the card than line-noise rejection. MNP error-control proto-

cols and MNP5 compression are implemented. These are techniques that help modems communicate more accurately, and, in some cases, with fewer data bits sent for the same amount of information. Not all services support MNP features. When I connect to America Online, I have to make sure these features are disabled or I have

transmission, then it's an even better choice. This modem won't be obsolete next year or even the year after. It's on the forefront of consumer electronics and will serve you well for years to come.

Since I spend many hours online, this modem is a good investment for me. Rather than send back the one loaned for this review, I'm planning to buy it when the U.S. Robotics rep calls to ask for its return.

RICHARD C. LEINECKER

U.S. Robotics Sportster V.32/PC—\$549

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TOPTRAK

Are you mousebound? Short on scurrying space? Amazed at the maze of paper and equipment your mouse must negotiate? Kraft's sleek and capable Toptrak offers a sensible solution.

I put it on top of my monitor, on my leg, beside a keyboard—anywhere I can find a little spare room. It plugs into either a 9-pin or a 25-pin serial port, and the long cord gives you plenty of room to place it where you need it.

Kraft's memory-resident Speed Panel program lets you adjust sensitivity (how fast the computer responds to movement) up to 1150 dots per inch. Want to use Toptrak with programs that aren't mouse-driven? Try Kraft's Menukey program.

You'll like the way this trackball feels. It's smaller than other trackballs and contoured with rounded corners and a forward-sloping design to fit the hand more comfortably. If you want, you can pick it

trouble connecting. The manual offers adequate technical assistance with these problems, though casual computer users may have trouble plowing through the jargon.

The card was simple to install. It comes set for the most common configuration found, COM 1 and IRQ 4. That fit my system perfectly, so I didn't have to mess with switches. But if you do have to make changes, the DIP switches are on the back. That means you don't have to take your computer's case off to change settings.

This modem isn't inexpensive. The list price is \$549, but street prices are lower than that. For many people, the price tag is too high. But if 9600 bauds will save you money in connect charges, it starts to make sense. And if you rely on error-free data

up and operate it with one hand, even more easily if you plug in the optional foot pedal (not the ideal tool for double-clicking). Large left and right buttons above and to the side of the ball give way with relative ease—only slightly harder to press than the buttons on some mice. Pressing the button directly above the ball achieves the same effect as pressing the right and left buttons simultaneously. The fourth button, just above the middle one, comes in handy with programs that involve dragging. You don't have to hold down the left button and operate the ball simultaneously. Just press once to lock the button. Then manipulate the ball and your cursor in the right direction, and press the locked button again to unlock it. Grooves run across it to provide tactile, as well as visual, differentiation from the other buttons.

I found the ball in this trackball a real pleasure to use—smooth and responsive with no skidding or grinding. As far as I can tell, you can't remove the ball for cleaning as you can with other devices, so you'll need to keep this one from getting dirty.

Laptop users, take note. The Toptrak's low-current, compact design makes it a candidate for portable pointing, though it's not as compact as the current crop of notebook-specific pointing devices. If clutter cuts into your productivity and you're tired of mousing around, consider the Toptrak.

MIKE HUDNALL

Toptrak (bundled with foot pedal and TelePaint)—\$99.95

KRAFT SYSTEMS
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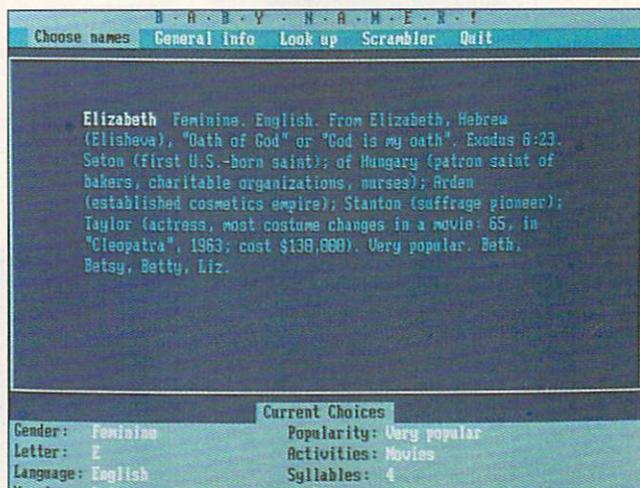
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BABY-NAMER!

One day you'll probably have to bestow a special name on someone or something—possibly your newborn child. Since I'm a confirmed bachelor, though, babies don't much concern

advice that didn't sway me in any particular direction. The manual's tips on searching proved more useful, and the appendices offer the necessary explanations and descriptions of search categories. Clearly targeted at the expectant couple, Baby-



Give your kid a handle with Baby-Namer!, which gives the expectant parent more than 14,000 names from which to choose.

me. Even so, using StudyWare's Baby-Namer!, I did run across a number of choice monikers for my future cats, dogs, and short story characters.

Baby-Namer! puts more than 14,000 names at your fingertips, each complete with definitions, namesakes, and other related data. You'll need to limit your search to fewer than 14,000, of course, and to do that you merely check items off a menu. Want a unisex, unusual name meaning "intellect"? Baby-Namer! supplies several, with *Channing* the most notable. Ever wonder what your own name means? Ask Baby-Namer!. *David* means "beloved," and I found myself in the good company of a saint, a playwright (Mamet), and a pop star (Bowie).

Baby-Namer! offers some abbreviated online naming

Namer! should provide them with all the names a child will ever need.

DAVID SEARS

IBM PC and compatibles, 512K RAM, hard drive—\$39.95

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Circle Reader Service Number 369

SITBACK FOR WINDOWS

With computer viruses, power spikes, and software incompatibility lurking out there, we have every reason to follow the advice of computer professionals: Back up your hard drive frequently. Because of the time it takes, however, few of us do. Sitback and its new relation, Sitback for Windows, help.

You don't have to take time

out of Excel or Word (or Tetris or Solitaire) while saving your precious files. Sitback for Windows initiates backups while you continue with more immediately pressing business. Or it waits until your computer is unattended and then institutes the backup itself.

The first method makes use of Windows' multitasking capabilities and Sitback's own support for backups on a user-chosen day of the week and time of day. You determine Sitback for Windows' buffer size and priority level as a background activity, as well as which files to back up.

The second method—the lazy person's preference in backups—earns Sitback its fame. This backup utility waits a predetermined length of time (anywhere from 1 second to 60,000 seconds—slightly under 17 hours—is acceptable). If the computer remains unused at the end of that period, Sitback goes into action. Since most of us work on just a few files during any given computer session, an incremental backup of the day's effort makes perfect sense. Just slip in a floppy, move on to other business, and Sitback eventually takes care of the rest.

Menu selections are sensibly chosen, and documentation (both online and in the accompanying booklet) is more than adequate. Sitback for Windows' implementation is as carefully thought out as that of DOS-based Sitback. Data security and ease of use make both versions of Sitback well worth considering.

BARRY BRENECAL

IBM PC and compatibles, Windows 3.0 or higher—\$139.95

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