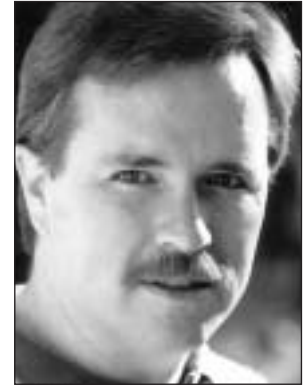


Timothy Perrin



Pocket-Sized Toys

I am writing this on my pocket computer. You know, the one that actually fits in my shirt pocket, the tiny one that weighs about four ounces.

Now, that would be no huge deal except that I'm not entering this text by hand on the screen but typing it at a keyboard—a keyboard that also weighs about four ounces and fits into my pocket, yet unfolds to be a full-sized keyboard. So, in less than half-a-pound, I've got a computer with more power than my original Osborne 1—or even my early Windows models—right in my pocket(s).

Neat! That's what I love about doing this column. I get to play with the neatest toys.

The keyboard is called the Stowaway from Targus, the same people who make top-quality laptop bags. It costs about \$150, and folds up into a package 6 x 3 inches. Take it out of your pocket, pop the latch, spread it out on a flat surface, and you're in business. Word processing, spreadsheets: anything your pocket computer can do, you can do from this portable gem.

The keyboard has all the normal keys on it (home, end, delete, insert, etc.) and even has quick-start keys for the most popular Pocket PC applications. Targus makes versions for the Pocket PCs running windows CE (the HP Jornada, Compaq, and Casio models), as well as the Palm Pilot/Handspring Visor family of hand-helds.

Add a modem on the Flash Memory card, and you've got a capable travel computer to replace that 10 pound "laptop" you've been lugging around on the road—all in under a pound.

HP Jornada 565

I'm also writing this on a new handheld, Hewlett-Packard's Jornada 565. This is a step up from the Jornada 545 that I've had for the past year-and-a-half. It has more built-in memory—32 megabytes, rather than 16—and uses version 3.0 of the Windows CE operating system, rather than 2.0.

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But, frankly, I can see no real advantage to it.

The price of the new model is about \$900, while a 548—like mine, but with 32 megabytes of memory—is available for about \$600.

In my opinion, HP has made one major mistake in this model. In the 540 series, the stylus you use to write on the screen is stored inside the hard cover; you just reach up with your thumb and slide it sideways to get it out. On the new models, the stylus is in a vertical chamber on the back that invariably takes me more than a few tries to pull out. It is just this

kind of (in)convenience feature that drives me nuts!

If you want to pick up a 540 series HP Jornada, you'll have to move fast. As often happens with these things, HP will stop making the 540 series machines, and they will likely be sold out soon. If you can't find one in the stores, I suggest seeing if you can pick one up on eBay at auction for a good price. You'll quickly get hooked at having a computer in your pocket.

The memory issue is easily solved with Compact Flash memory cards that fit into a slot on a Pocket PC. With memory prices the lowest they've been in several years, you can pick up a 128 megabyte memory card for about \$125, so it's a good time to buy. (Conventional memory for your desktop is also being virtually given away: \$20 for 128 megabytes. Now is the time to max out your machine.)

I've used both the Palm Pilot—I have two of them sitting on a shelf, if anyone is interested—and the Pocket PCs, and much prefer the Pocket PCs. Of the three main Pocket PCs from HP, Compaq, and Casio, I prefer the HP model for a variety of reasons. The first is the hard cover that flips up out of the way when you are working, and down to protect the machine when you are not. You don't have to slip the computer in and out of an overly bulky leather pouch each time you want to use it, and you never put the pouch down someplace then forget where you put it, and spend a few seconds—or minutes—looking for it.

With the impending merger between HP and Compaq, I don't know if both those brands of Pocket PCs will remain in the market but I doubt it; I would hate to see the new company pick the wrong one.

As I write this, the merger has been approved by Canadian regulators, is part-way through the process in the US, and has just started in the EU.

Digital Photography Revisited

Last summer, I wrote about digital photography. The upshot was that I didn't like it that much; the big qualifier is that I shoot semi-professionally, and have pretty high technical standards. In an effort to change my mind, the folks at Hewlett-Packard asked me to take a look at their new PhotoSmart 612 fits-in-your-pocket model. "Take it on vacation at Christmas," they said, so I did and I'm still not impressed.

The issues continue to be two: picture quality and photo storage.

As it comes, you can only take seven photos at the highest quality on the 612 before you need to download them, to at least a laptop computer. If you want high quality, you either have to lug around a laptop, or you have to buy memory cards. The 612 uses the same Flash Memory cards as the Jornada, so the price is better than it has been in a long time, but still adds up quickly. That 128 megabyte card I talked about earlier would hold about 65 photos. If that's all you are going to shoot on your vacation, then I guess that would be fine. But I often shoot hundreds—if not a thousand or more—on a trip. (They say the difference between the professional and the amateur photographer is that the professional takes more bad photos . . . and that I do!)

At lower resolutions, the camera can take more photos. If you don't care about being able to produce an 8 x 10 from your best photos, then you can get 15 on the built-in memory, about 130 on 128 megs on a Flash Memory card. Those are

good for a 5 x 7 printout, says HP. If all you are going to do with your pictures is email them to your folks in Nova Scotia, then you can take lots: 105 on the built-in memory, more than 1,000 on a 128 meg memory card.

The camera is certainly convenient. It's a bit slow on the autofocus, so you can often sit there for a few seconds while it decides how it is going to take the picture. But, for snapshots, it will probably handle the job. ▲

Timothy Perrin, a former lawyer, is a technology writer for a variety of magazines. He teaches writing in the Professional Writing program at Okanagan University College in Kelowna; online for the Community College of Southern Nevada; and through his own school, WritingSchool.com. www.TimothyPerrin.com