

technopolis

Cruise the highways and rat runs of Gizmo City with the grand wizard of gadgetology, Jonathan Margolis.



MACBOOK AIR

Apple is on such a roll these days that I feel like I'm a teacher with a class in which there is one supremely gifted child. All the others bring their books up to my desk, some of it's good, some of it isn't, then Apple sidles up with its work and it's in such a different class it puts me in an awkward position. Do I say, "Well done, Apple, simply brilliant as usual"? Or do I try to find something to criticise, just to keep the irritating little chap from dying of his own cleverness?

The latest arrival in class is Apple's impossibly thin MacBook Air laptop, which is the size and weight of a glossy magazine. It is, I can't deny, the most beautiful gadget I've ever seen or held, with the possible exception of, harrumph, Apple's last homework, the iPhone. The top-model Air doesn't even have

a hard disk but a 60Gb flash drive, which makes it even faster and more battery efficient - expect six or seven hours' use on one charge. And the Air's features are just incredible.

I will, however, point out the Air's flaws if you're tempted to buy, which you will be, despite what I say. OK, 60Gb isn't big enough to make the Air your main laptop, so it's always going to be a deputy laptop, which makes life complicated. You can't take the battery out - so no carrying spares. It doesn't have an inbuilt CD/DVD drive, which is a nuisance, and the top model costs more than laptops of similar breeding, which I suppose is a bad thing. But, er, that's it for flaws. Take another house point, Apple. From £1,199 to £2,028, from Apple dealers or www.apple.com/uk/.

TANGENT QUATTRO MK2 INTERNET RADIO

We've been studying internet radios here for nearly four years, since they first appeared, and I've yet to find one I love. Until now. Why? Looks-wise, I think the Tangent Quattro is very nice in that understated retro kind of way of today's artfully reinvented category of "table radios". Some of you, the current Mrs Margolis among them, may think it lacks a certain grace with that big speaker plopped on the top, but I think it has a satisfying manly pipe-ish air about it. If I had a den, I would keep it there. My granddad would have had it on his woodworking bench.

It works so sublimely well that it went straight from the box to being the primary distraction in my life. There's a big, knobby knob to select a country, then you turn it to select the kind of radio station you'd like to listen to, then you choose a station from 10,000 or more. If you want to be boring, there are dozens of BBC and other UK stations. But there's more fun to be had selecting randomly. Why have Radio 4 when you can eat toast to the sounds of Arman FM Kabul, Top Albania Radio or Auto Radio Kazakhstan?

The Tangent is so idiot proof that I connected it to my Wi-Fi and was listening without having to open the instruction book, which is one of my benchmarks of excellence. The sound quality is remarkably good, even with stations in remote parts. And the Tangent gets regular FM radio, too. In internet mode, you are only limited by the quality of your broadband connection. Simply outstanding.

£180 in walnut or black, £200 in red or white gloss. See www.sennheiser.co.uk or call 01494-551 551.

ELECTROKID IPOD SYSTEM

I have introduced you before to Ricardo Franassovici, founder of hi-fi dealer Absolute Sounds and sound expert par excellence. Well, confronted by the uncomfortable truth for audio aficionados that most of us play our music on iPods, Franassovici has put together what is, to my mind, the world's best iPod sound system.

Franassovici's ElectroKid combines a dock by the ultra-high-end manufacturer Krell with speakers with built-in 200-watt amps by Martin Logan. Like all serious hi-fi, it is a mish-mash of blokeish-looking parts, so the WAF

GIBSON ROBOT GUITAR

My guitar career ended early because of the problems I also couldn't play, but of course that was *because* tuning so difficult. In my day, proper guitarists did it (or though could) by ear, while the rest of us had pitch pipes which difficult and ended up smelling of manky saliva. Electric came along later and made it a bit easier, but you were never quite certain that you were in tune.

A silver plate on this gorgeous new Gibson proclaims the Robot Guitar. Could this mean it's a guitar that plays leaving the likes of me to stand coolly pretending to be a Knopfler? Well, not quite, but it's not far off - the Gibson tunes itself. Look at the back of its head and through the windows on the back of the body, and you can see this is ordinary yakety ax - a lot of electronics and mechanics a going on almost out of sight.

The Robot Guitar's master control knob is a push-pull thing, and it is something close to magic. You pull it out, select the type of tuning you want and watch the powerheads start turning as if Jimi Hendrix has taken control of your instrument from beyond the grave.

LEDs flash different colours to indicate that each string in turn is now perfectly in tune - and you're away.

You may notice I said "select the type of tuning you want". Like me, you may have imagined that there's standard EADGB tuning and that's it. But no. With the Gibson, you can easily experiment with settings you've never heard of, such as DADGAD, Dropped D, Delta Blue, E Flat, Double Dropped D or Reference tuning, whereby the hang (sorry about this) will learn any goddam tuning you invent yourself. Far out, man. About £1,500 (see Google for best prices). See www.gibson.com/robotguitar.



SILLY STREET

Lomo was a cheap and nasty 1980s camera from the Union. The Diana was a cheap and nasty 1960s camera. The Diana disappeared into obscurity long ago, its fuzzy (OK, dreamy) images has, bizarrely, survived technology, having been adopted as an aesthetic cult