

## D3: A Tale of Two PC's: a Mac and a P90

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I have been tracking defect rates on my Mac PowerPC for nearly twelve months now and reporting the fairly abysmal defect rate to you on a monthly basis. To summarise, the Mac exhibits a defect around every 3 hours and just over 50% of them lead to a reboot. Prior to now, I have only been able to hint rather obliquely at the unreliability of the competition, the mighty PC empire, and I was looking for an opportunity to redress this. So in April, I made another of my frequent long-haul trips, this time to India and Singapore, (more in a future column), and I had the opportunity of taking a state of the art AST P90 Pentium laptop with Windows '95 on it, which my company acquired for me recently. As I know sod-all about the latest PCs, and as it had lithium battery technology and a nice colour screen, I agreed and began to keep a defect log immediately as I waded into the latest Microsoft Professional Office, (an interesting use of the word "Professional" here), just as I do on the Mac.

All I can say is what a piece of junk ! The hardware is lovely, even though I tire of the "up to 6.5 hours of battery use" nonsense, (divide all battery duration claims by 3 and you are not far off). The software is decidedly wobbly and much worse than the Mac. In just 16.5 hours of use in April it clocked up 18 defects with 5 hangs leading to reboots, which is around 4 times as bad as the Mac on defects and twice as bad on reboots. It looks pretty, but is that all we really crave ?

Other eccentricities included Word files from the Mac being expanded by a factor of 4, and almost surreal floppy disc drive access. Furthermore, it took so long to copy files with the fluttering paper icon, I thought I was hallucinating, however, I will persist in using both to bring you up to date statistics.

The story had a happy ending. I decided on impulse to load Linux on my P90 out of nothing other than idle curiosity. Linux is a free Unix implementation originally the work of Linus Torvalds, and now supported by hundreds of enthusiastic volunteers around the net. My goal was to produce a laptop with Windows '95 for word processing etc. and Linux, including X11R6 for software development so I could boot either. After two days of happy hacking with file allocation tables, screen parameters, boot and root floppies and the like, I managed to accomplish this. Linux is truly wonderful, so a big thank you to all those people around the world who contribute to it. The whole point is that I have used it now for almost the same time as Windows '95, but for software development too, and it hasn't exhibited a defect of any kind as yet. I leave you to draw your own conclusions. See you next month.