

MARKETPLACE

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THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 2003 B1



PERSONAL TECHNOLOGY

By WALTER S. MOSSBERG

New Windows Laptops Feature a Processor That Stretches Battery

A NEW GENERATION of Windows laptops has arrived, powered by a new Intel processor claiming to extend battery life and by a marketing blitz promoting wireless networking. This is good news, but as is often the case in the computer industry, the hype obscures the truth.

The new processor is called the Pentium M, and it was designed from the ground up for mobile computers. One key feature of the Pentium M is that it can turn off parts of its internal circuitry when they're not being used so that less battery power is drawn.

Another key feature is that, unlike other Intel processors, it doesn't depend on a faster clock speed—that megahertz or gigahertz rating you see on all processors—for its efficiency and power.

Indeed, it has a slower clock speed than other Pentiums—no more than 1.6 GHz. But it is designed to wring more processing out of each clock cycle, so computer makers are claiming it is as fast and powerful as Pentiums rated at well over 2 GHz.

But you won't hear much in Intel's ads about the Pentium M. Instead, Intel will be pushing something called Centrino, a bundle of chips that includes the Pentium M as well as a new Intel-designed radio chip for Wi-Fi wireless networking.

You might conclude that Centrino laptops do Wi-Fi better than other laptops, or that the Pentium M or Centrino chips are needed for wireless networking. But none of this is true.

THE PENTIUM M has no special capability for wireless networking. And the Intel-produced Wi-Fi radio chip included in the Centrino bundle is actually regarded by some computer makers as inferior to other brands of radios they were already using. Not only that, but the Intel radio used in Centrino machines doesn't support the new, faster type of Wi-Fi networks called G or A.

However, Intel won't allow laptop makers to label their Pentium M machines with the Centrino brand unless they use the Intel Wi-Fi radio. So, computer makers are planning to offer two different types of laptops with the identical Pentium M processor. Some will use Intel's radio, in order to share in the glow of the Centrino marketing campaign. Others will mate the Pentium M processor with radios made by other companies, and won't be called Centrino.

With all that in mind, I have been testing four new Pentium M laptops, from IBM, Toshiba, Dell and Gateway. All are midrange models, weighing between 4.9 and 6.1 pounds, with 14-inch or 15-inch screens and CD or DVD drives. Three of the four use the 1.6 gigahertz Pentium M, while one, the Toshiba, uses a 1.4 GHz version of the processor.

I didn't do complete tests on these machines, but focused instead on the two features Intel is stressing: battery life and wireless networking.

I did find that most of the Pentium M machines I tested offered better-than-average battery life. It's impossible to quantify the improvement because the tested machines can't be directly compared with older models. They have multiple revised components, not simply a new processor. For the battery test, I used my usual harsh regimen of turning off all power-saving features and playing a continuous loop of music. A more normal usage pattern, with power-saving turned on, would yield better battery life.

Toshiba Tecra M1: This \$2,800 laptop was the battery champ in my tests, turning up in an amazing performance of four hours and four minutes. This probably means you'd get nearly six hours in normal use with power-saving turned on. One reason is that it includes a large, nine-cell battery, but the weight is still just 5.7 pounds, including a DVD-recording drive. Wi-Fi reception in my home was good. This is the only one of the four machines I tested that will bear the Centrino brand.

IBM THINKPAD T40: This slender contender was the lightest model in my tests, at just 4.9 pounds. Its nine-cell battery produced the second-best battery life, at three hours, 37 minutes. That means it could probably top five hours in normal use. It also had by far the best Wi-Fi reception, being the only machine that could connect to both Wi-Fi networks in my house. But in typical IBM fashion, it is very expensive at \$3,249.

Gateway 450: This was the heaviest and bulkiest machine in the test, at 6.13 pounds, including an eight-cell battery. But it also was the only one with a 15-inch screen (the others are all 14.1 inches), and it has the lowest price at \$2,195. Battery life in my test was three hours, two minutes, which probably means around four or 4.5 hours in normal use. The Wi-Fi reception was adequate.

Dell Latitude D600: This laptop got a miserable battery life of just one hour, 46 minutes in my test, which likely means at most a three-hour battery life in normal usage. The reason may be that it uses the smallest battery of the machines I tested, with only six cells. It's relatively light, at 5.4 pounds, and costs \$2,267. Wi-Fi reception was good, and I liked the screen a lot.

The Pentium M processor is a step forward, and I advise anyone buying a Windows laptop to get one that uses this chip. But you don't need a Centrino machine or an Intel radio to do wireless networking.

E-mail me at mossberg@wsj.com.

Twenty Years and Still Paying



Jeanette White Is Long Dead But Her Hospital Bill Lives On; Interest Charges, Legal Fees

By LUCETTE LAGNADO

QUINTON WHITE lies in bed at his home in Bridgeport, Conn., suffering from kidney ailments and the aftereffects of a heart attack and dreaming of a trip to Paris, which he has seen only in the movies.

But for Mr. White, a retired dry-cleaning worker, seeing Europe is probably as likely as a trip to the moon. In addition to his health troubles, the 77-year-old is strapped with nearly \$40,000 of debt.

He owes the money to Yale-New Haven Hospital, a distinguished not-for-profit facility where his wife, Jeanette, was treated 20 years ago. Mrs. White died in 1993, but her debt lives on, growing like her cancer because of the 10% interest charged on her original \$18,740 bill. Back in 1983, the hospital's lawyer got a lien on the Whites' house, and in 1996 nearly cleaned out Mr. White's bank account. Mr. White figures he will be stuck paying the hospital until his own dying day, though he adds, with a mischievous glint in his eye, "They will never get the whole amount. I am not gonna live that long."

Mr. White isn't alone in his predicament. Many hospitals besides Yale-New Haven have adopted aggressive collection practices aimed at their uninsured and underinsured patients as they seek extra income to stay afloat. Collection dollars are one of the ways hospitals are compensating for the squeeze on HMO and government reimbursements and counteracting their losses from caring for the uninsured.

Recently patient advocates from Connecticut to California have begun to criticize the way hospitals pursue patients who owe them money. As part of a national campaign by the Service Employees International Union, the New England health-care local has been researching Yale-New Haven's collection practices. Grace Rollins spent months looking up court cases the hospital has brought and interviewing some of

the patients involved. Some of these people "are living hand to mouth," Ms. Rollins says. "These debts are literally crippling them."

Indeed, medical bills are now the second biggest cause of personal bankruptcies, according to a study by Elizabeth Warren, who heads Harvard University's Consumer Bankruptcy Project. Along with the astronomical cost of even routine hospital procedures, she blames hospitals' aggressive collection tactics.

The patients who suffer the most aren't necessarily indigent. The very poor can get Medicaid, the government health plan that pays hospital tabs for those who qualify, while most middle-class families have health coverage that picks up the bulk of their medical bills. It is working-class families like the Whites, with some assets but no insurance coverage, who are penalized the most by the system.

"They will never get the whole amount. I am not gonna live that long," Mr. White says.

Yale-New Haven, the primary teaching hospital for Yale University's medical school, defends its collection practices. The hospital, whose board includes the university's president and the medical school's dean, says prudent business practices mean that the hospital must at least try to get back money for care rendered. "I can attest vehemently to the ethics, the goodwill, and the intent of this organization," says Marja Borgstrom, Yale-New Haven's chief operating officer.

Mr. White seems more resigned to his fate than resentful. Leaning back on his mattress, his skinny limbs covered by a worn blanket, he points to desk drawers stuffed with stacks of canceled checks. Many are made out to Yale-New Haven Hospital, tangible proof, he says, of how month after month he faithfully attempted to repay the institution for its care.

Over the years, Mr. White has paid Yale \$16,000—close to the amount the hospital originally billed for his wife's stays. But interest on the bill now exceeds \$33,000. Indeed, between the principal Mr. White has paid off, the principal that remains to be paid, and the interest and fees owed to the hospital's attorneys and others, the total bill for Mrs.

Quinton White, 77 years old, in his bedroom in Bridgeport, Conn., has been trying to pay Yale-New Haven Hospital's ballooning bill for his late wife's care for the past 20 years.

White's treatment has ballooned to around \$55,000. The hospital confirms that Mr. White still owes \$39,000. "I accept it. That's the way it is," Mr. White says with a shrug. "How are you gonna fight them?"

But E. Richard Brown, a professor at the UCLA School of Public Health who studies the uninsured, argues that a hospital's tax-exempt status should require it to steer clear of hard-nosed tactics, including lawsuits, wage garnishing, liens and unrelenting claims for payment. "If we are going to give them that status," Professor Brown says of hospitals, including Yale-New Haven, "they should be responsible for fulfilling the intent. The intent is to create a community benefit, a public good, and not simply act like a for-profit hospital but with a taxpayer subsidy."

Mr. White, who married Jeanette in 1946, says the two struggled from the beginning to make a life for themselves and their four sons. They bought a house on Seaview Avenue in the 1960s. Mrs. White worked part time as a cleaning woman and Mr. White worked as a spotter, or stain remover, for a dry-cleaning shop in Westport, Conn., a suburb on New York's Long Island Sound. The occasional movie star would wander in, he recalls, including Westport's most famous resident, Paul Newman, whom he laughingly describes as "that short, blue-eyed guy."

Then, in 1982, Mrs. White was diagnosed with throat cancer and admitted to Yale-New Haven, first in March and again in May. In return for her care, she signed a note agreeing to pay the hospital "regular charges" and late fees. A couple of months later, her husband signed a similar note agreeing to guarantee payment.

Doctors thought they had removed all of his wife's cancer, Mr. White says. Still, a pall descended on the Whites' house. The couple's son, Anthony, who lives with his father and helps take care of him, recalls that his parents' friends all seemed to vanish after his mom had her voice box removed. "She couldn't talk, and everyone stopped coming," he says.

The hospital says it held frequent discussions. Please Turn to Page B2, Column 3

Pat Robertson Aids Disney In DirecTV Flap

By JOE FLINT

CAN PAT ROBERTSON'S faithful keep the ABC Family cable channel beaming down from the heavens?

The satellite service DirecTV, in a dispute with ABC Family over pricing, started running a notice on the bottom of the screen of the channel telling viewers that it would be dropped at the end of the month. DirecTV says there was hardly a peep from its 11 million subscribers, with just a handful calling to complain.

But then Pat Robertson took up the cause. Mr. Robertson's "700 Club" religious show has been a staple of the channel since he launched it in 1977. On Tuesday, Mr. Robertson asked his followers to make their feelings known by calling DirecTV President Roxanne Austin, and listed her office phone number. DirecTV is a unit of the Hughes Electronics Corp. division of General Motors Corp.

Although Mr. Robertson's average audience is only 135,000 people, according to Nielsen Media Research, they are loyal. DirecTV "was flooded with calls," says a spokesman, who adds that it was "dirty pool" to give out an executive's number rather than the customer service line.

Ironically, ABC Family executives have never been thrilled with having to carry the "700 Club," which the channel shows three times a day. But when Mr. Robertson sold his channel to Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. in 1997 he negotiated a clause that guarantees his show a slot on the channel—in perpetuity. So now Walt Disney Co., which agreed to buy the channel from News Corp. and Saban Entertainment Inc. for \$5.2 billion in 2001, is also stuck with the show, even though it clashes with ABC Family's lineup of shows geared toward teenagers and young adults.

But when it comes to putting pressure on companies tempted to drop the channel, Mr. Robertson has turned into a crucial ally. After Disney purchased the Family Channel, EchoStar Communications Corp., another satellite operator, wanted to drop it. Disney filed a lawsuit and Mr. Robertson's followers went to bat. The suit was settled and EchoStar still carries the service. Although all the credit can't go to Mr. Robertson and his fan base, people involved in that squabble say Mr. Robertson and his followers did carry some clout and were enough of a nuisance to make a difference in the talks. (The Family Channel is available on cable and satellite systems serving over 80 million homes and, separately, "The 700 Club" is broadcast on 125 local TV stations.)

Still, the issues involving DirecTV's feud with Disney go well beyond Mr. Robertson's show. The battle is another example of the increasingly complex relationship between content companies such as Disney and distributors like DirecTV. Content companies typically pay fees to distributors, but negotiations are seldom over just one channel.

DiracTV wants to redo other deals it has with Disney, including a pricey pay-per-view contract for Disney movies, in return for renewing ABC Family. Disney wants more for its assets, such as getting compensation from DirecTV for carrying ABC-owned local television stations on its service, or to gain wider distribution for its soap-opera channel SoapNet.

This tiff is centered on Disney's request to increase the monthly license fee DirecTV pays for ABC Family to about 24 cents a subscriber from about 18 cents, an increase of almost 35%. DirecTV says that increase is too much, especially since the channel's ratings have declined dramatically during the last 12 months.

Disney counters that DirecTV's subscribers aren't getting the full story from the company: "The 35% increase that DirecTV cited is a higher rate that reflects not only carrying ABC Family, but also includes value for carrying the ABC-owned stations, so it's like comparing apples and oranges," says Peter Murphy, Disney's chief strategic officer.

Broadcasters such as Disney want cable and satellite operators to pay for carrying their lo-

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Pat Robertson

China Gets Satisfaction From the Stones

By LESLIE CHANG

YOU CAN'T ALWAYS get what you want... particularly when dealing with the Chinese government.

So the Rolling Stones have learned in planning for two coming concerts here as part of their "Forty Licks" tour for their 40th anniversary. The rock group won't be playing four of its most famous hits, essentially turning the tour into "36 Licks."

The songs—"Brown Sugar," "Beast of Burden," "Honky Tonk Woman," and "Let's Spend the Night Together"—weren't approved by the government for the album's release in China earlier this year. The ban shows how the Chinese government, known for stifling challenges to its authority, also is waging a war on what some officials see as social permissiveness.

The songs probably weren't eliminated because of politics, but for their sexual content, a hallmark of much of the Rolling Stones' repertoire.

The restrictions knock out songs that have been standard at Stones' concerts for decades. "We've probably done 'Honky Tonk Woman' ... and we've probably done 'Brown Sugar' every show," says Chuck Leavell, who plays piano with the Stones. "It's the first time in my experience as a musician that we've had to go through a procedure like this."

Some record-label executives appear to be re-



In Shanghai, a poster advertises the coming Rolling Stones concert. The aging British rock group is celebrating its 40th anniversary with a tour world-wide.

signed about the matter. "Albums cannot use very antigovernment or sexual lyrics," says Cindy Tai, managing director for EMI China, which released the album here. But the fact that the Stones are being permitted into the country at all shows that restrictions are easing, she adds. "This is the first official Rolling Stones release in China, this is a breakthrough. We have to look at the big picture."

In fact, China's music industry has become considerably more open in recent years. Domestic

rock, punk and rap groups perform regularly around the country. A high-profile rock concert in Lijiang in southwestern China last year drew 18 bands—some from overseas—7,000 concertgoers and sponsorship from the local tourism bureau. Rock acts are a regular feature on state-run radio and sometimes television. The fact that many Chinese bands generally avoid politics to sing about the concerns of youth everywhere—disaffection

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INDEX TO BUSINESSES

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For reprints of articles, call (800) 843-0008, or go to www.djreprints.com.

Table listing various companies and their page numbers, categorized by letters A through Y.

Quinton White Is Still Paying Wife's Hospital Bill

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with the Whites over how his bill would be paid. Early on, Mrs. White applied for Medicaid at St. Vincent's Medical Hospital in Bridgeport, Conn., his son concedes that he missed some hospital installments.

The hospital's attorneys quickly went back to court, seeking to seize whatever was left in Mr. White's bank account. A June 25, 2002, letter from the hospital's attorneys to the state marshal offers crisp instructions on what to do: "Go immediately to the main branch of the below named bank and make demand on the defendant's checking and/or

posited to pay his bills while he was hospitalized at St. Vincent's Medical Hospital in Bridgeport, Conn., his son concedes that he missed some hospital installments.

Many hospitals are aggressively seeking to collect payments from the uninsured.

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savings account." The letter adds that, "in addition to the judgment debt, bank fees, and your service fees, you are hereby instructed to collect legal interest at a rate of 10% from the date of judgment on the unpaid principal debt.

At Yale-New Haven, Ms. Borgstrom defends the hospital's approach. "In this business you deal with a lot of sad stories," she says. "The reality is they came to the hospital, they were given service and to the best I know it was the very best service."

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Chinese Government Gets Satisfaction From Stones

Continued From Page B1

and failed romance—seems to make them more acceptable to Chinese officials.

Ironically, a Chinese rock icon closely associated with politics is the opening act for the Rolling Stones. Cui Jian is best known outside China for performing at the 1989 democracy protests; his songs were even used as anthems by the protesters.

Chinese officials, grappling with ways to stem these social changes, are finding it is hard to legislate morality in a subtle way. For example, the government's recent effort to establish a movie-rating system was stymied by debates about implementing such a system; whether theaters would be able or willing to enforce age limits for adult-content films.

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their country in the past two decades.

An estimated 100 million people have left their villages to work in the cities, cut loose from the social moorings that once closely governed their behavior. Prostitution is rife in the big cities. Divorce, teen dating, co-habitation before marriage, and unwed motherhood—all traditional taboos—are on the increase.

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rangements with patients before resorting to collection actions. Officials also stress that the hospital doesn't charge interest when it bills patients directly.

But lawyers retained by the hospital to collect debts are permitted to charge interest under Connecticut law. The law firm that has pursued Mr. White is Yale-New Haven's most highly paid outside consultant, Tobin & Melien, which received more than \$2 million from the hospital in 2000, according to Internal Revenue Service filings.

Yale-New Haven has operated in the black in recent years, says Ms. Borgstrom, but margins are "very thin." In 2002, the hospital had to deal with \$52 million in bad debt and uncompensated care.

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between charitable mission and bottom line," she says, "but to pursue these people the way they are pursuing them is highly uncharitable."

The hospital's practices are indeed legal, says Peter Looney, the state senate majority leader whose district includes New Haven, but he suggests that legislation could change that. Noting that "no one incurs a hospital bill by choice," he argues that debt-collection laws should be amended to make hospital charges "a special area of debt."

Another issue is Yale-New-Haven's receipt of \$2.5 million in federal funds for construction projects from the 1950s to the 1970s under the Hill-Burton Act. In return for such funding, hospitals were supposed to perform public service and provide either free or subsidized care to patients who couldn't afford to pay.

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Pat Robertson's Fans Protest DirecTV Plan Affecting '700 Club'

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DIGEST OF CORPORATE EARNINGS REPORTS

Table of corporate earnings reports for various companies, including AEP Industries, American Vantage, ANV, and others.

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EXPLANATORY NOTES section detailing revenue, income, and net figures in millions, with symbols for full amount, continuing operations, and other items.

What's News Online @ WSJ.com/JournalLinks

WE ANSWER a reader who asks about claiming a loss on a limited partnership investment in an IRA, as part of a series of tax tips running each weekday through April 15. Plus, submit your own question and catch up on audits, shelters and other tax topics with our complete coverage.

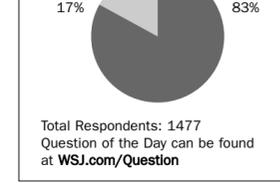
Keep pace with your favorite columnists, including Joseph B. White, Scott McCartney and Terri Cullen, by signing up to receive e-mail alerts when new columns publish.



Opposing sides in the debate over malpractice-award caps are launching aggressive lobbying and advertising campaigns, writes Mark Ingrethsen.

Question of the Day: Do you approve of Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's statements about possible war with Iraq?

Previous Question: Should regulators try to stop Americans from buying cheaper prescription drugs in Canada?



Mark Ingrethsen. Plus, an experimental artificial liver, the Texas Medical Rangers take on bioterror threats and more on health from around the Web. The Daily Scan.

John Fund on the pro-war past of Hollywood's antiwar celebs.

Sarah E. Needleman on how to stay focused during rigorous job interviews.

Journal style arbiter Paul R. Martin, author of "The Wall Street Journal Guide to Business Style and Usage," weighs in on common slang words that are best avoided in business communication.

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