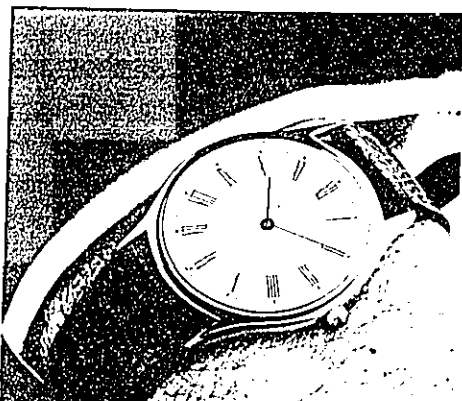


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Good things come in small computers

COMPUTERS have grown more and more powerful, and they're coming in smaller and smaller packages. This holiday season, some of the hottest gift items are bound to be those new, savvy little portable computers that can easily be toted in a briefcase or book bag.

Portable computers can be a time-saving tool for business people or students on the run, but gift-givers need to be sure they buy a portable system that matches the needs of the person who will be using it.

The wide range of sizes, prices and features among portables means that shoppers must select wisely. To start off, they should become familiar with what's on the market.

Models vary from handhelds — pocket-size machines with single-line displays — to 20- or 30-pound systems, called transportables, that are no easier to lug than a portable typewriter. In between are notebook-size computers that fit into a briefcase but still have capabilities similar to larger desk-top machines. And among those in the notebook-size category alone, prices range from \$880 to \$8,000.

"You need to begin shopping with a list of features the owner will need on the computer," said Ron Ockander, director of sales for Epson America Inc. "If you match the tasks he or she needs to accomplish with the computer, you're much more likely to spend your money on the right kind of system."

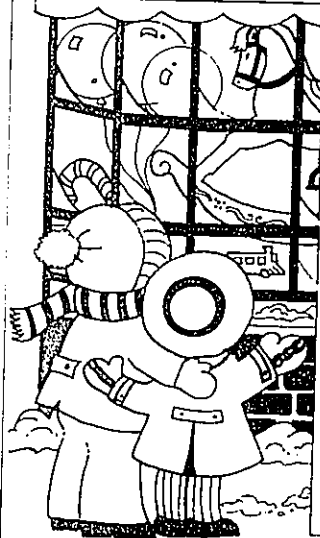
First, he advises, determine where the computer will be used. Someone who travels frequently and needs the machine to work and communicate on the road needs a lightweight, compact system. Transportables have a full-size screen and keyboard, but they're heavy and bulky.

It's also important to keep in mind how long the computer will be used at a stretch. Some systems can run up to 50 hours without recharging, others only for five. Consider, too, whether the computer should incorporate a printer. Many owners need to produce hard copies of their work right away.

Ockander recommends that you ask if the computer can be easily hooked up to a larger system or printer. One of the greatest advantages of a portable system is its ability to send information back to a home- or office-based computer.

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