

# realitycheck

YESTERDAY'S HYPE MEETS TODAY'S REALITY



**STATS** 30 hours between recharges / \$1000 price tag / Offered handwriting recognition

## Newton's life lesson



Apple Computer's Newton MessagePad PDA wasn't a big commercial success, but the complex product served a life lesson—to keep it simple—that Apple took to heart in its blockbuster iPod.

The Newton was to be Apple's next step in personal computing and portability beyond its Macintosh lineup. The system had a lot of leading-edge hardware and software to perform a large number of tasks. It combined word processing, a calendar, a calculator, an address book, and an infrared transceiver for wireless communications, among other features, as well as its main feature: handwriting recognition.

The system was one of the first major commercial devices to incorporate low-power ARM processors. The early units used an ARM6-based ARM 610, and later devices used a StrongARMSA-110. The Newton also used 4 Mbytes of flash and 4 Mbytes of DRAM. It offered 30 hours of runtime before needing a recharge—impressive for the mid-'90s. The device also incorporated a versatile OS that synchronized internally running applications with handwriting recognition.

Ultimately, the device failed to take off because it had trouble synchronizing with the outside world, it was too large to fit into a pocket, and it had a \$1000 price tag. Ridicule of the handwriting-recognition feature in the *Doonesbury* comic strip didn't help, either.—by Michael Santarini