



**DIMINUTIVE
DESKTOPS**

3XS CUBIT 5 MEDIA

Cost: £1,156 Details: 01453 840171

There's something almost perverse about attempting to disguise the latest up-to-the-minute technology in retro garb, but that's what 3XS (the brand name of Scan) has done with its Cubit 5 – a small form factor PC with a distinctive case design by Hoojum that could be mistaken by the unwary for a toaster. But don't go sticking any comestibles in the disc drawer; this chrome-finished box

of tricks can do a lot more than just toast crumpets.

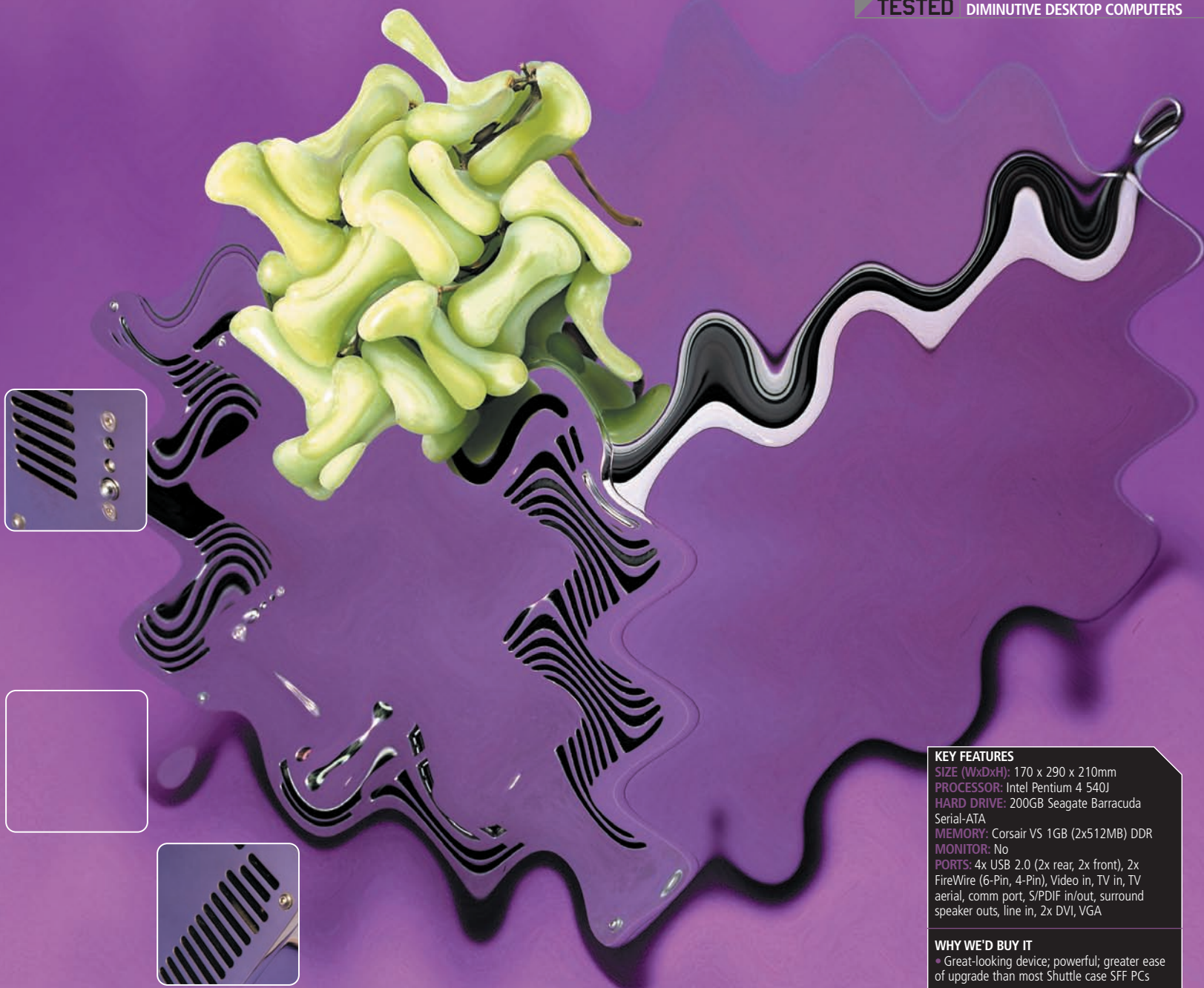
Hoojum is a British company that makes SFF PC cases. The Cubit 5 is the largest in its range (there's also the Cubit 3 and Nanode) but it's also arguably the most beautiful. The casing is made from a solid piece of aluminium and while ours came with the aforementioned Dualit-style chrome finish, it's also available in

matt black or white, as well as a few other limited-edition colours – even some with clear Perspex ends for maximum geek points.

That solid metal casing means it's no lightweight, but it is very strong and feels as though it would stand up to quite a few knocks before anything inside would feel it (not that we'd recommend dropping it, of course). Despite its

diminutive proportions, all the inner technical gubbins slides in on a series of trays, which makes it much easier to get in there and upgrade, if that's your bag.

Switch-on results in an alarmingly noisy start-up with a distinct, sharp whooshing noise as the fan kicks in. After that though things settle down nicely, apparently due to Shuttle's heatpipe-based CPU cooling system,



IT'S GOT PRETTY MUCH EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO QUALIFY AS A TOP NOTCH ENTERTAINMENT STATION

CENTRE

**BOYSTOYS
GOLD**
★★★★★

with heatsink and pipes transferring heat away from the processor. It also uses smart fan technology, which only increases fan speed when necessary, such as during fast gaming – but when it does kick in, believe us, everybody knows about it.

There are no markings on the front, but there are slots for SM/SD, MS and CF data cards, plus a slot for the DVD/CD burner (no flimsy disc

tray to mar the clean simplicity of the polished aluminium finish here).

Around the back meanwhile is a feast of connections, including two USB slots (two more in front), PS/2, FireWire (four-pin on the front, six-pin on the back), plus two DVI, VGA and S-video connections for monitors, as well as optical S/PDIF in and out. There's also coaxial out, video and TV in and a TV aerial.

In other words, it's got pretty much everything you need to qualify as a top notch entertainment station, whether you're watching TV, playing DVDs or music, or even getting down to some serious gaming action (we didn't come across any problems with our *Halo* test).

In short, this is a dinky desktop that walks the walk every bit as well as it hot-steps the talk.

KEY FEATURES

SIZE (WxDxH): 170 x 290 x 210mm
PROCESSOR: Intel Pentium 4 540J
HARD DRIVE: 200GB Seagate Barracuda Serial-ATA
MEMORY: Corsair VS 1GB (2x512MB) DDR
MONITOR: No
PORTS: 4x USB 2.0 (2x rear, 2x front), 2x FireWire (6-Pin, 4-Pin), Video in, TV in, TV aerial, comm port, S/PDIF in/out, surround speaker outs, line in, 2x DVI, VGA

WHY WE'D BUY IT

• Great-looking device; powerful; greater ease of upgrade than most Shuttle case SFF PCs

WHY WE'D LEAVE IT

• There are smaller PCs available; fan can get very loud when the processing power calls for it

PERFORMANCE

★★★★★☆☆☆ **9**

The XFX GeForce 6600GT PCI-Express graphics card and Intel Pentium 4 CPU handled our 3D games trial with aplomb.

PRACTICALITY

★★★★★☆☆☆ **8**

The largest PC here, but still compact enough. And with looks like this you're not going to want to hide it away.

STYLE

★★★★★☆☆☆ **8**

Variety of finishes available, though this retro chrome look is in our opinion the coolest.

VALUE

★★★★★☆☆☆ **7**

Not the cheapest device for the money, but when it looks and performs this good, who's counting the pennies?

OVERALL

★★★★★☆☆☆ **9**

Not the smallest SFF PC, but certainly one of the most stylish. Very respectable processing power and a full complement of connections qualify it as a more than capable entertainment station.