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JS		Macworld, February 1996, "Touchpads", pp.68-69

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Touchpads

THREE NEW INPUT DEVICES

FIND IT UNNATURAL TO POINT AND click with a mouse or trackball? One of the new touchpads may be your salvation. Like the Trackpad on Apple's newest PowerBooks, these input devices let you move the cursor by sliding your fingertip (but not a fingernail or stylus) along the smooth, rectangular surface and click by lightly tapping your finger on it.

TouchPad

The sexiest-looking of the bunch, the Touché TouchPad would look right at home on the bridge of the starship *Enterprise*. (It's also the only touchpad that comes close to matching the PowerBook's dark case.) I also like Touché's solution to
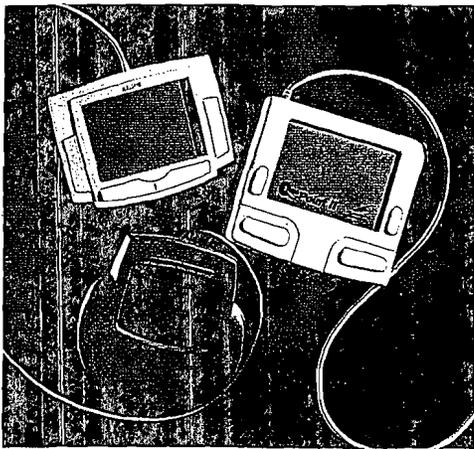
Clockwise from top left: Alps Electric's Desktop GlidePoint, MicroQue's QuePoint II, and Touché's TouchPad.

an annoyance that results from the pad's small active area (a problem shared by all touchpads): when you're dragging an icon, your finger may hit the edge of the pad before the cursor has reached its destination, forcing you to lift your finger and repeat the movement. The TouchPad's Edge Motion feature, which you activate with the control panel, keeps the cursor moving even when your finger runs out of room. The control panel also lets you specify how the pad should respond to finger taps. For example, you can set the TouchPad to drag-lock when you tap and glide your fingertip along its

surface, so you can lift your finger without dropping the object you're dragging.

Unfortunately, the TouchPad suffers from a few serious limitations. Unlike the GlidePoint and QuePoint, the TouchPad doesn't let you customize the operation of its control-panel buttons, the claim "programmable buttons" on the package notwithstanding. (That's probably just as well, because the two buttons are so narrow and hard to press they're too difficult to use anyway.) And while the large, curved surface in front of the pad may look cool, it serves no real purpose.

Desktop GlidePoint

Even though it's a bit more utilitarian in appearance than the TouchPad, Alps Electric's Desktop GlidePoint comes out ahead in several areas. The most obvious improvements are in the GlidePoint's three buttons, which are larger and easier to press than the TouchPad's. A control panel lets you assign one of nine functions to any button. The control panel also lets you specify the GlidePoint's orientation, so you can use it with any side of the pad facing you. Another plus is a detachable base that clamps onto four short pegs under the pad. You can tilt the base at three angles to position the GlidePoint more comfortably. (It also makes the pad less prone to sliding around on your desk.)

Like the TouchPad, the GlidePoint has an adjustable drag-lock setting on its control panel. Say you lift your finger from the pad while dragging an item; the pad registers that as a release only after a user-specified delay, giving you time to reposition your finger and resume dragging. The control panel also lets you adjust cursor response and acceleration to suit your work style.

QuePoint II

I didn't expect to find much difference between the QuePoint II and the Glide-Point. After all, the two pads use identical sensing technology, and both sport a rectangular shape with buttons on the sides and bottom. On closer inspection, though, it's plain to see that the engineers at MicroQue have done their homework. For example, the QuePoint goes beyond

the GlidePoint's suite of button functions with an additional setting called Slow Mode: a click of a button overrides the current speed and acceleration settings, slowing the cursor to a snail's pace for fine adjustments. Another welcome feature is an extra ADB connector. While it may not seem crucial, a spare port can be a godsend if you like to keep more than one ADB device hooked up.

I also like being able to customize the QuePoint's functions, including button actions, cursor acceleration, and pad response, for specific programs. When an application becomes active, its Que-Point settings load automatically. There's even a tutorial program that teaches you how to use the QuePoint. The only features it doesn't offer are an adjustable base and the option to adjust the automatic-release delay in drag-lock mode.

The Last Word

If you're convinced your mouse is to blame for the pain in your arm, wrist, or hand, you may be tempted to turn to a touchpad for relief. After a few weeks of using these pads, however, I noticed that my index finger was beginning to ache—perhaps because it was forced to carry more of the workload than with my mouse. If you decide to try a touchpad in spite of the drawbacks, the QuePoint's excellent software makes it the clear winner in this group.—FRANKLIN TESSLER

Desktop GlidePoint

RATING: ★★★/6.0 PROS: Adjustable base and cursor-release delay. CONS: Less stable when used without base. COMPANY: Alps Electric (408/432-6000). LIST PRICE: $99.95.

QuePoint II

RATING: ★★★★/7.0 PROS: Customizable application settings; extra ADB connector. CONS: No adjustable base. COMPANY: MicroQue (801/263-1883, 100015.715@compuserve.com). LIST PRICE: $79.95.

TouchPad

RATING: ★★/4.3 PROS: Edge-detection feature. CONS: Buttons are small and can't be programmed. COMPANY: Touché Technologies (612/830-1414). LIST PRICE: $59.95.