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HEADLINE: CIRQUE'S GLIDEPOINT REINVENTS THE MOUSE TAP

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BODY:

There's gold in them thar Utah salt licks. If you are not a reader of computer mags, you may not have yet discovered GlidePoint.

Cirque Corp. of Salt Lake City, Utah, has produced a mouse free of moving parts and one that is truly touch-sensitive. In the "old days," clicking and dragging a mouse was considered more advanced than keyboarding. But the device proved a drag because it was not location-sensitive. Then someone wised up and pulled the pad from under the mouse, turned the device upside down and put the power of the ball at the fingertips. Handheld track balls were an even nicer improvement, but lose that ball and you are up a creek.

Later there were touch screens that proved sensitive to finger tips-and dirt! Closer to the GlidePoint but not quite there yet were touch pads that used two membranes that were not the least bit precise.

For \$99 the GlidePoint works like a charm, and is almost that small. Targeted for the busy traveler, it allows the user to tap and drag or click and drag without invading someone else's proximity. But with all the external speakers, headsets, glare screens and other accessories, GlidePoint helps cut down on workstation clutter.

For folks like me who are surrounded by computers, I can maintain a comfortable distance while testing product on the PC and typing the story on our VDT. The cord is long enough to work comfortably with the GlidePoint in my hand. But for those who like stationary mouse devices, rubber pads keep it anchored to the mouse pad.

To really test this palm-size device I used Microsoft's Paintbrush program. The precision was such that I could spell my name in cursive. The Newton and other personal digital assistant folks should tap into this penless technology.

GlidePoint takes light and heavy taps as long as they are deliberate, but the light touch works best. I also found the device is at its most sensitive when scrolling online. It is so sensitive that you can scroll even though hourglass is on the screen.

Could this be the mouse that roared? Well, it must have said something to our Compaq because much to my surprise the installation software wasn't needed. I just turned off the machine, unplugged the ol' track ball from the six-prong port and inserted GlidePoint and turned the computer on. Voila!

The device is simple enough to use, but reading the manual will reveal scads of neat maneuvers. For one, you can use the touch pad exclusively-ignoring the clickers.

GlidePoint also is remarkably resistant to dirt and is easy to clean. Hmmm, must have had Ronald Reagan as a consultant.

It's play time

Just how in the heck do computers work? Thanks to falling computer prices, it is getting easier to explore the possibility. At \$39.95 How Multimedia Computers Work is one of the most inexpensive and edutainment CD-ROMs around.

The Software Toolworks has put together an outstanding 3-D show complete with a quirky little host named Zip Data and a male and a female narrator. Should none of the above satisfy, ask four experts via video interviews. The four male (ahem) experts don't supply much insight, but it's a nice touch.

Based on the best-selling Ziff-Davis Press book "How Computers Work," there is also a 500-word glossary and 8 computer tours from booting up to how a program works.

A menu includes a monitor, modem, hard drive, keyboard, mouse, speakers and printer. Clicking on any of the components causes it to expose its innards, allowing you to learn more in detail.

Note the disc is strictly a teaching tool as it does not recommend brands or models. However, knowing the function of each component will let you know whether a sales person is selling you too much or too little.

- Available exclusively on America Online/Chicago Online for the Macintosh is a map of Chicago to customize SimCity 2000. Named Chicago.sit, the file is 44,680 bytes with a download time of 1 minute on a 9600 baud modem. Besides a Mac, the user needs the software SimCity for Mac by Maxis, Unstuffit or AOL 2.x. Keep watch for this column or the Cyberspace column as to whether a DOS version is in the wings.

- American Laser Games gets a handle on shoot-'em-up titles. Designed for the 3DO and Sega CD, the Gamegun is a lightweight pistol in shocking orange. To test the gun I put on my imaginary Clint Eastwood 10-gallon topper and popped Mad Dog McCree in the Genesis CDX. It works well enough, but I found it a bit steep at \$44.95 for Sega and \$54.95 for the 3DO. Other bang-up titles for the Gamegun are in the making.

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GRAPHIC: PHOTOS 2; **PHOTO:** Cirque Inc.'s touch-sensitive GlidePoint has no moving parts. So unlike the track ball, there are no parts to lose and wear out. And unlike the mouse, there is no need for a pad. A little tap will do.; **PHOTO:** Clicking on any of the computer hardware will give more info in 3-D.

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