

Computer Owners' Group Magazine Notes: February – April 2022

All the computer magazines reviewed below are held in the SeniorNet office or at the Wellington Public Library, and are available for borrowing. We do not review every magazine we receive.

R M D Munro

TECHLife Australia (February 2022)

Sour cider

You've heard it before: "Apple hardware just works!" And while that's usually true, it's not of course an inviolable rule. After all, cider is not always drinkable. The lead article in this issue is a Super Guide – "57 ways to fix your Mac" (pp. 46 – 59). Superb journalism: the article is intensely practical and well-illustrated. If I had the good fortune to own a Mac, I'd photocopy it immediately.

Australian Personal Computer (March 2022)

Fixing the big ones

The flagship article in this issue is "Save your system!" (pp.54 – 62). It suggests that, after reading it, "you'll be well-equipped to deal with the worst that Windows can throw at you". That assessment is wildly optimistic. Now it is true that the article is well written, comprehensive and informative. But it assumes skills and competence that are far above the level of most of our fellow SeniorNet members. It is worth reading though to get some limited idea of the complexity of the machines which so enhance our lives, and of how hard they are to fix.

TECHLife Australia (March 2022)

Back to School

In the old days it was a pencil; then it became a fountain pen; then a Biro; and now, for many school students, a laptop computer seems to be the key writing instrument – and is officially required. So, a question

for grandparents is how to choose what is an appropriate device for those young ones we may be helping. There is an article here "The Best Laptops for School or Uni" (pp. 49 – 59) which I had high hopes for. Now don't mistake me, it's a good, informative, well-written article. It does what it set out to, and lists the *best* laptops for school or university. But I realise that what I was looking for was something quite different. I wanted an article which set out what were the cheapest, though adequate, laptops suitable for 11-year-old Intermediate School students - which would survive the rigours of a New Zealand classroom on a Friday afternoon. It turned out that the present article did not go far enough down the stack to meet my requirements. Even so, if you're looking to splash out for a graduate student, then I'm reliably informed that the Apple MacBook Air (M1,2020) at \$A1,499, is hard to beat.

Driving a model T

Some of us still have Windows 7 computers. Indeed, some of us are still using them. Are they safe? Not without considerable effort. Microsoft wants us to use Windows 11, and is certainly no longer supporting Windows 7 – even though it still works. An article here is "Learn how to stay safe in Windows 7" (pp. 80 – 82). Well-explained advice set out here includes: install all available updates; switch web browsers; install virus and malware protection; update all software; remove outdated and insecure software; use a limited account; stop using Windows 7 apps; minimise time online; backup, backup, backup; and, strongly consider upgrading. If you fit the profile - essential reading.

We want to do it but we just don't know how

Backup is so important. So, it should be easy to do. As we've noted, Microsoft want us all to move to Windows 11. But an article here "Windows 11 backup" (pp. 98 – 99) points out that, in this new operating system, "there is no longer a simple accessible option for actual file backup". That's not to say, the article explains, that "File History" (the new and frankly unnecessary name that Microsoft has given to the transparent and familiar term, "Windows Backup") doesn't still exist. It's there; but it's "buried in the often incoherent mess of Windows 11 settings and options. You just have to know how to find it." This article tells you how.

Australian Personal Computer (April 2022)

Top of the Pops

Most of us don't want to change our tech gear. Often slowly, we have got to know it and we've grown comfortable with it, while always trying to get the best out of it. But it is in the nature of things that, sooner or later, tech gear wears out. Or it simply, for one reason or another, stops working. Then there are indeed important decisions to be made. Now in such circumstances sensible people take advice. And there is good advice to be had from our SeniorNet discussion groups. There is also good advice in this context to be found in this and other issues of this magazine. A significant, regular article called "The A-List" (pp. 28 – 31) records what the editors say are currently the best products on the market. The result is very brief reviews on a useful range of equipment. So, if you need guidance concerning a new, say, laptop, this is a good place to go. By the same token, another good place to go, which is mentioned in this issue and which helpfully is online, is techradar.com/au (or techradar.com/nz for the New Zealand edition). I've looked at them and they are both useful sites.

Best value writer

I hope every member of SeniorNet is aware that there is a free alternative to Microsoft Office. There is an article here on LibreOffice 7.3 (see p. 48) whose key sentence I will quote here: "the free full suite keeps getting better". (And, as you will know, it was already a fine product.)

Up the creek

So you've lost a key file, or, imagine it, a whole partition. Everything's gone: no paddle. Or so it seems; because there are things you can do. First, arrange through Sandra an appointment at our SeniorNet Help Centre. Or, if you can't wait, dig out the copy of "Data Recovery" (pp. 72 – 81) that you made from this magazine. It's a pretty comprehensive article that will hold your hand if you want to try to do things yourself. (I'm not going to list key headings here; far better if you have followed previous advice given in these reviews about backing up using Macrium.) But consider if you've been hit by ransomware. What do you do then? There is a very useful box here on p.79 that would give you

a sporting chance of getting through even that. But the advice remains: whenever possible, backup; and don't forget Sandra.

You will cooperate

Microsoft has a command-and-control problem. It wants us to do as we are told, and to snap to it. As you will know, we have received clear instructions from HQ to give up Windows 10, and move to Windows 11. Now there is an article here "10 Expert Tips for Windows 11" (pp. 66 – 71) which illustrates my thesis. The article explains that in Windows 11 Microsoft makes it clear that it does not want you to use Chrome, Firefox or any other third-party browser that you might have chosen, and might well be perfectly happy with. No, it wants you to use its own browser called Microsoft Edge. To this end, if and when you install Windows 11, you will find that the new operating system has gratuitously replaced your choice of browser with Microsoft Edge. Further, you will find that, if you are not happy with this, there is a rather laborious process to undo what Microsoft has done, and to set up your computer the way that you happen to want it. The article explains how you might proceed to exercise your own judgement (pp. 68 – 69). But if you have problems doing this, send an email to Sandra at our Help Centre.

TECHLife Australia (April 2022)

Good for Apple

Apple has two major articles dedicated to particular equipment in this issue. Even if we don't have an iPhone, we all know they're great devices. "Master your new iPhone 13" (pp.48 - 57) is described as a "round-up of the most essential features and secret settings that every iPhone user needs to know". The article is certainly comprehensive and well-illustrated, and if I had an iPhone, I'm sure I'd find it very useful.

The other article is a Super Guide, "macOS Monterey" (pp. 58 – 71). This OS is the latest big free Mac upgrade. From having read it, I tend to think that while it's informative and interesting, it's not essential. Nevertheless, if your hobby is endlessly tweaking your Mac, then this article will be a pleasure to explore.

TV in your pocket

Can you watch TV on your smart phone? The answer to that is clearly yes - if you're streaming it. But let's say you're out of range of Wi-Fi, and you're on a pay-as-you-go phone plan. You're at Kuratau on Lake Taupo and – for whatever reason – you want to watch free to air TV. Now there's a relevant article here, "How to receive television on an Android device: I want my FreeTV" (pp.94 - 95). The point is made that many smart phones available in Australia (and perhaps New Zealand too) have radio tuners built into them. But not TV tuners. And yet it is claimed that many smart phones in other countries do have the *capacity*, without external assistance, to receive television.

But if, out here, you want external assistance, how do you get it? This article answers that important question. It says that the writer ordered a tiny \$A20 plug-in receiver from eBay. It came with a micro-USB connection. But he discovered that his set-up actually needed a USB-C adapter, so he bought one of those. He found that the aerial supplied with his receiver was inadequate, so he bought another bigger, cheap antenna. Then, at last, when he plugged it all in, it worked! Later on, using this equipment, he was able to get television onto an old 10-inch Android tablet. He was understandably very pleased with his efforts. Now if any of our SeniorNet members have done this sort of thing, do let us know. There will be many more of us wanting to hear how you went about it. (Bring along your device – and connectors.)

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