

Tektronix Inc.

## Tektronix Phaser 350, Tektronix Phaser 550



Tektronix offers two printers in the color laser printer category, and both of them merit Editors' Choice status. The Tektronix Phaser 550 color laser (\$6,995 list, \$6,300 street) offers 1,200-dpi resolution,

reasonably fast performance, and impressive output quality. That makes it a prime choice for anyone who wants to print graphics and photographs on plain paper, with or without black text on the same page. The Tektronix Phaser 350, which is a solid-ink printer, offers 600- by 300-dpi resolution and lower output quality. But it also offers fast performance and a budget price: \$3,495 list or \$3,150 street. Note that the basic units offer no network support, but internal Ethernet and Token-Ring options are both available.

If you thought you were in the market for a color laser printer, you should consider the solid-ink 350. It's much easier to set up and keep going than most color laser printers. The printer comes with its wax-based ink already loaded. To set it up, you plug it in, slide in a tray that collects excess wax, and load paper. When it's low on wax, it alerts you at the front panel so you can open the cover and drop more wax blocks into the keyed slots. (One drawback: If you turn the printer off and allow the wax to solidify, you'll have to wait about 15 minutes for it to melt again.)

Not only is the 350 less expensive than any of the true laser printers, but full-color pages range in cost from a claimed 5 cents per page for 10 percent coverage up to 27 cents for 75 percent coverage—about half the cost of similar pages for most lasers in this roundup. (Tektronix is also offering black ink for free, a promotion the company says will continue for the foreseeable future.)

For graphics, the 350 offers brilliant colors, sharp edges, solid lines, completely filled in areas of color, and gradients that are free of banding. The error-diffusion dithering shows as a speckled effect on solid areas, which some purists might not like. Photos are grainy and slightly posterized, but they approach photographic quality at arms' length. Text is laser quality. The 350 has a claimed engine speed of 6 ppm in its fastest color mode. It came in as one of the fastest laser-class printers overall in our tests.

The 550, which uses an engine from ISME (a subsidiary of Matsushita), is easier to set up than most color laser printers are. Slide in the imaging unit, the fuser, and four toner cartridges, then load paper and install the driver. With a claimed 10,000 pages per cartridge for the black toner and 8,000 pages per cartridge for the colors, you won't have to change cartridges very often.

Output quality is superb—the best we've seen from a color laser. Photos are just one step shy of true photographic quality. Graphics offer sharp edges, smooth gradients, and solid thin lines. Most important, you won't see



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the thin light or dark bands along the edges of solid areas that mar the output from most color laser printers. Text is as crisp and clean as what you would expect from a 600-dpi monochrome laser printer. Note too that in most of our print speed tests the 550 came in first or second among 600-dpi PostScript laser printers.

Each of these printers is impressive in its own way. If you're looking for laser-class quality on a tight budget, the Phaser 350 is a laser printer killer that should turn your head. If you're looking for the highest-quality color laser output regardless of cost, the Phaser 550 is a printer that others have to beat.—MDS

**Tektronix Phaser 350.** List price: \$3,495.  
**Tektronix Phaser 550.** List price: \$6,995.  
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