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NEC Silentwriter2 90

by Alfred Poor

It's little, it's fast, it's new. And it's going to shake up the Postscript printer market. The NEC Silentwriter2 90 is a 6-ppm printer with 2MB of memory and true Adobe Postscript (as well as an HP Laserjet emulation) at a stunning list price of just \$2,495.

Most "personal lasers" are assembled around the new generation of 4-ppm print engines. NEC went for a competitive edge by using a 6-ppm engine from Minolta, which gives it a 50 percent speed advantage over the slower designs. The print generally looks a lot like a Canon design, using a one-piece toner and drum cartridge for ease of handling. One big difference between the Minolta and the Canon engines, however, is the cartridge life: While the Canon cartridge is rated at 3,500 pages, NEC's Minolta engine claims a whopping 8,000 pages per cartridge.

The print quality of the new engine is excellent. The blacks are smooth and solid, the lines are crisp, and there are no obvious problems in the output.

A faster engine does not necessarily make for a faster or better printer, but NEC has made the most of this solid foundation. The printer uses Adobe Postscript, version 5.2, and comes with a full complement of 35 font outlines in ROM. If you need more memory for downloading outlines, you can add a second 2MB of memory for a list price of \$995.

Not only do you get Postscript, but you also get HP Laserjet IIP emulation. The new performance on our PCL test was flawless: the Silentwriter2 90 handled even the trickiest positions with aplomb. The printer includes the PC-8 symbol set so that you can access the line-drawing characters under HP emulation-----a feature overlooked by some Postscript printers that emulate Laserjets. The only apparent shortcut is the NEC doesn't provide a true line printer font in HP emulation; as with its more expensive sibling, the NEC Silentwriter2 290, a small version of Courier is substituted.

Nevertheless, you needn't sacrifice speed for savings. The 90 churns out text at a respectable 5.8-ppm under Postscript and 5.5-ppm under its Laserjet emulation. When printing graphics under Postscript, however, the printer truly shines: Its 0.7-gppm output puts it among the fastest Postscript printers we tested this year----more than twice as fast as some of the 8-ppm machines.

The Silentwriter2 90 has a number of other attractive qualities. It comes with parallel, serial, and Appletalk/RS-422 interfaces. Instead of the open bin found on many personal lasers, there is a real paper tray that accepts up to 250 sheets at a time----25 percent more than with a Canon SX engine.

You get a

full range of paper-path choices: faceup or facedown, tray or manual feed, and a nearly straight-thru paper path available for heavier stock.

There is a lot to like about the NEC Silentwriter2 90. It's among the lowest priced Adobe Postscript lasers and comes with the full complement of 35 fonts-----including HP Laserjet IIP emulation with HP's Postscript cartridge-----and it offers a 6-ppm engine instead of the usual 4-ppm version into the bargain. With the arrival of this machine, personal postscript printing has suddenly become more affordable and more attractive.

**FACT FILE
EDITOR'S CHOICE**

NEC Silentwriter2 90

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List Price: \$2,495; upgrade to 4MB RAM, \$995; downloadable fonts, \$200, optional faceup tray, \$139.

Standard Warranty: One year on parts and labor, 90 days on-site.

Dimensions (HWD): 8.4 x 18 x 24.6 in.

Weight: 40.4 lbs.

Emulations: Postscript, HP Laserjet Series II.

In Short: With a 6-ppm engine, true Adobe Postscript in a fast controller, and plenty of extra features, the Silentwriter2 90 is able to compete with full-size laser printers. It's low list price represents an excellent value.

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