ONE way of ensuring your computer keeps up with the ever-increasing demands of bloatware and power-hungry operating systems is to regularly exchange it for a new one.

A cheaper option is to upgrade what you already have.

These days, Intel is not always inside.

Many new computers have one of the AMD chips as the standard CPU, and increasing numbers of vendors, including Hewlett-Packard and Compaq, are switching.

The Athlon XP 1900+ is the latest chip in AMD's XP range.

XP, in this case refers to the Extreme Performance of the chip, and should not be confused with the Windows eXPerience, although AMD has worked closely with Microsoft to ensure its XP range works well with the new Windows operating system.

AMD is also using a controversial system of model numbers, as opposed to MHz clock speeds, to describe the relative performance of the new processors.

The higher the model number, the better the performance.

I am still trying to make sense of this naming system, but the 1900+ chip's frequency is 1.6GHz, and it compares favourably with Intel's 2GHz Pentium 4.

I tested the AMD Athlon XP 1900+ with an EPOX motherboard and was blown away by its performance.

Initially, I was a bit hesitant to plug it all together, but it is really not rocket science.

Anyone who can handle a Philips screwdriver and cope with the clumsy way generic PC cases are designed should not have a problem. Most peripherals can just be plugged in, but it is important to make sure the chip matches the motherboard.
The 1900+ is a Socket A processor that is backward-compatible with most motherboards.

The Epox 8KHA+ motherboard I used conforms to the ATX form factor.

Instructions on inserting the chip are easy to follow and it is almost impossible to insert it incorrectly. Jumper settings can be changed, but I went with the defaults.

Everything else is clearly marked, so plugging in the hard drive, floppy, CD-ROM and other peripherals is simple.

But having been brought up to believe Intel had to be inside everything, what I was doing seemed sacrilegious.

So, after lighting candles and placing crystals around the computer, I switched it on and held my breath as it whirred into life.

I installed Windows: it worked.

I installed software: it worked - quickly. And so far I've not run into any problems.

I use a wide range of graphics and multimedia software, which the 1900+ is taking in its stride.

So, if you need to upgrade your PC, and don't mind annoying Intel, get hold of an AMD Athlon XP 1900+ - the price alone is sure to appeal to business and home users as well as backyard enthusiasts.