Hand-held computers are a study in the art of compromise. Screen size, memory and battery life are all played off in a quest to pack as much as possible into a package that fits into a pocket without emptying your wallet. Dell's latest Axim, the X50v, might be the first pocket PC to get the balance right.

The X50v is Dell's top-of-the-line pocket PC. Other models lack the X50v's VGA screen and have slower CPUs at lower prices. With the limited real estate afforded by the 9.4 cm screen, the X50v packs a lot in by running at full VGA resolution. This makes plenty of difference when browsing the internet or working with spreadsheets using Pocket Excel.

Pocket Internet Explorer has been enhanced substantially in the Second Edition of Windows Mobile 2003 so that most websites are rendered to fit the screen easily. If you prefer, you can easily assign a hardware button to toggle between portrait and landscape modes. VGA's other big advantage is everything is much clearer than with the more common QVGA. Text is easier to read and graphics are far more defined.

Connectivity is abundantly catered for with both 802.11b wi-fi and Bluetooth. Their configuration is largely wizard-driven, making it easy to connect to wireless hot spots while travelling and with a Bluetooth-capable mobile phone. Connectivity to corporate VPNs is supported through Dell's bundling of the Odyssey client.
With support for many different encryption and authentication standards, it's easy to join corporate LANs. With Bluetooth, you can use a folding wireless keyboard, turning your X50v into a quasi notebook - perfect for the road warrior. There's also consumer IR for beaming information to non-Bluetooth devices and, with extra software, for use as a universal remote control - handy for corporate AV set-ups as well as home theatre.

Memory is critical for mobile workers. The X50v has more than 150 MB of user-accessible memory, 91 MB of which is non-volatile, able to survive all but the most serious system disaster. Expanding memory is easy with both SD and CF slots, which can also be used to add IO devices such as GPS receivers, cameras, bar code scanners or VGA outputs.

In fact, by adding a VGA output, there's not much that the X50v can't do, making it a potential notebook replacement for some people. As far as performance goes, the X50v delivers. The Intel XScale processor clocked at 624 MHz makes light work of most tasks.

Applications opened almost instantly and it wasn't until we had a dozen applications running simultaneously that we started to see things slow down.

**The Axim X50v retails for $849 and the X50 range starts at $599. For more details, call 1800 812 393 or visit dell.com.au - Anthony Caruana**

**Virtual Windows**

Virtual PC for Mac 7.0 is an emulator that lets you run Microsoft Windows and Windows applications on an Apple Macintosh. It has been rewritten to take advantage of the powerful Mac G5 processors and Mac OS X version 10.3 (Panther).

The emulator and your Mac share the same clipboard, making it easy to copy and paste between programs no matter which platform you are using. Folders and removable media can be easily shared between the platforms, along with a variety of PC and Mac peripherals such as printers and external drives.

It comes either bundled with a copy of Windows or on its own and you load your own operating system. It requires a 700 MHz or higher PowerPC G3, G4, or G5 Mac with at least 512 MB of RAM and running Mac OS 10.2.8 or later.

**Virtual PC for Mac 7.0 retails for $299 or $499 with a copy of Windows XP Pro/2000 or $449 with XP Home. For more details call 13 20 58 or visit microsoft.com/mac**