Logitech Cordless Freedom Optical
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The Australian
SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

IF a man can write a better book, preach a better sermon or make a better mousetrap than his neighbour, though he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door - Ralph Waldo Emerson.

What Emerson said still applies, but many inventive people have applied themselves to building a better computer mouse rather than a rodent killer.

The better mouse has been a bit of a Holy Grail ever since Steve Jobs liberated the computer mouse he saw in a Xerox research lab, where it was born and had looked like it would remain, never to be released.

There were some early deriders of the pointing device. Gadgetman recalls reading in the early 1980s an item extolling the virtues of the PC and labelling the Apple Mac a WIMP - an acronym for windows, icons and pulldown menus.

It was a tidy little slur, but the PC empire fell to the charms of the mouse when Microsoft introduced Windows.

Back to the better mouse: Gadgetman has had a conversion on the desktop to Damascus and become a fan of the ball-less optic mouse.

I could never previously think why anyone would bother improving on the mouse. It works fine most of the time and usually can be tweaked with a clean.

But a week with a ball-less and cordless mouse has changed my mind. I now find the balled mice just do not come up to scratch.

The mouse that ran away with Gadget's scepticism is the Cordless MouseMan Optical from Logitech.

I have no idea how it works, but it does so wonderfully and is a breeze to use. I thought it large at first, but its size does not generate the mouse cramp that comes with using standard mice.

Cramp is also reduced by the fact that it is pinpoint accurate and only needs to be directed once. Sometimes, dealing with a standard mouse can be like threading a needle, going back over the same territory tediously until the task is done.
The laying-on of hands that converted Gadgetman was made that much better by the pairing of the mouse with a wireless multimedia keyboard in a package called Cordless Freedom Optical.

The keyboard is programmable so it can jump directly to applications such as search engines, email, banking, chat or even toggling between functions or opening an app.

It also has specific-function multimedia buttons for playing music from the hard disk, CDs or DVDs, a volume control wheel and a mute button.

The mouse has a third button that sits under the thumb (if you're right-handed) and a webwheel that can be programmed as a fourth button.

The package has one drawback: it is optimised for right-handed users, although Logitech does have left-handed stock in its range.

Readers with children should be aware that the mouse is vulnerable to kidnapping (pun intended) during full and frank discussions about whose turn it is on the PC.

If you find the price a bit scary, an advertiser in these pages last week, www.iswh.com.au offered the combo for $215.

**Home-grown mice**

As delightful as the Logitech set-up is, its improvements on the keyboard and mouse are linear. They add functionality but do not expand or alter the basic principle of the keyboard and the mouse.

But Ari Zagnoev, an inventor from Perth has converged the keyboard and mouse by breaking the keyboard in half and working on the right-hand side to integrate mouse functions. (He has plans for a left-handed one).

There is extensive documentation on his efforts at http://members.optusnet.com.au/~azagnoev/mouse/mouse. It's worth a peek.

That site has had some 60,000 visitors since May when an article on the invention appeared in Slashdot, the self-proclaimed News for Nerds.

Zagnoev has included a little video of his device. The concept looks very interesting.

The inventor has gone through a bunch of prototypes and even done bench tests to show that his device is 25 per cent easier to move than a conventional mouse.

Hopefully, when interest builds, there may be a bit more development on the naming front - at present it delights in the monicker Keyboardmouse.
Still, Ralph Waldo Emerson must have had inventors such as Zagnoev in mind when he penned the above quote.

*Cordless Freedom Optical*  
*Logitech; $249; Mouse alone $159; iTouch keyboard alone $149*

This report appears on AustralianIT.com.au