



"In Quotes"

Paul Bray

# Leopard: Has Mac OS changed its spots?

“ My seven-year-old is making a nasty wailing noise so I've decided to get a new one. But before you ring the NSPCC, please be reassured that I'm talking about my computer, not my children.

I've been a PC user since Microsoft Windows was a twinkle in Bill Gates's eye, and I was just on my way to buy an HP, when I remembered Mac Leopard – not a dealer in exotic pets based north of the border, but the latest version of Apple's Macintosh operating system, which launched recently.

I've always fancied myself as a right-brain sort of person, and thought planting a Mac on my desk might help me get in touch with my latent creative side, so I started to investigate. Next to its predecessor, Tiger, Leopard apparently comes equipped with more than 300 new and improved features, and to someone who's still in the New Stone Age of Windows 98, they sound jolly impressive.

There's Time Machine, for unearthing long-deleted files you never bothered to back up; Cover Flow, which lets you browse documents like album covers on iTunes; a remote access feature, in case you forget to take your Mac when you go out; up to 16 desktops (which I'd probably cover with yellowing paper, stained coasters and biscuit crumbs); 64-bit support (I've no idea what that's really all about, but it sounds great); a thing called Boot Camp for installing Windows applications (in case you wish you'd bought a PC after all); and, of course, an indispensable 25,000-word Japanese thesaurus.

So that's Mac enthusiast hyperbole and enthusiasm covered (and boy are they enthusiastic!) But what say the Windows camp? Sure, they nod, Leopard's clever.

But so's Vista. In fact, they opine, Leopard and Vista are pretty similar. For Leopard's Time Machine read Vista's Volume Shadow Copy. For Leopard's Quick Look read Vista's Live Thumbnails. For... well, you get the picture.

Damn, I thought. Now I'll never be able to choose. But should we really be surprised? People who design software aren't stupid (OK, most of them aren't). I'd be amazed, not to say perturbed, if their conclusions were radically different.

Is Leopard better than Tiger? Yes. Is it very clever? Certainly. Is it cleverer than Vista? Who knows or, more to the point, cares? Will it give Mac OS chops enough to entice Windows users switch? Probably not.

Why? Because, frankly, operating system wars are for geeks. Ordinary mortals just want a bedrock of solid, useful features, some tasty bits of icing on top, and a computer that doesn't fall over when they're sweating under a deadline. The latest incarnations of Windows and Mac OS both deliver. So let's forget the squabbles, and just sit back and say... "at last!"

