

Generations

The mouse is back

I was thrilled to read the article "Useful After All These Years" by Harry McCracken, courtesy of www.fastcodedesign.com, because the mouse has been something near and dear to my heart for years.

No, I'm not referring to the furry little creatures that seem to pop out when you least expect them, some of which outsmart the cat and/or any animal-friendly trap and release box you may have tucked away in a corner.

And I don't mean Mickey or Minnie, created by Walt Disney in 1928, whose gross profits number somewhere in the billions.

I'm referring to the little gizmo that has sat next to me for years in front of my 27-inch screen (which grew from 12 inches in the prehistoric dinosaur age to the current model, a necessity for eyes that appreciate being able to view contents with as little squinting as possible).

Yes, the electronic mouse that has never left my side, even though computer makers love to make the public use a trackpad that I just can't seem to manipulate, is on its way back.

According to the article, Microsoft tried to kill its familiar corded IntelliMouse Explorer years ago, but users refused to give it up. History seems to be repeating itself — or perhaps designers are finally listening to the people who work on computers day in and day out (i.e., formatting bullets in Word without swearing).

Microsoft shipped its first mouse in 1983 in hopes of speeding along the industry's transition from text-based operating systems like MS-DOS to graphical user interfaces. The mouse looked like something out of an old sci-fi movie with green, sliver-like buttons mounted on the front, like a pair of evil eyes looking up at the user.

By the time Windows 3.0, the first widely used version of the software, arrived in 1990, Microsoft had created an all-new mouse in collaboration with a design firm that later merged with two others to become Ideo. The rolling ball tracked movement toward the front for better precision, made the buttons larger, and introduced a more comfortable wedge shape. It was nicknamed the "Dove Bar" mouse because of its shape similar to the popular Dove soap bar.

Mice became familiar, trusted companions and, to me, perhaps the most important part of the computer because without it, I can't do a thing.

So, as the years passed, Microsoft mice kept up



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with technology and offered optical sensors and wireless connectivity. But recently, Microsoft did something unexpected: It introduced a mouse whose selling point is that it's based on the old-school design and technology.

A revival of 2003's IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0, which the company last sold in 2012 — and which was itself an updated version of a design that dated to 1996 — the \$40 Classic IntelliMouse has a look that's rather than fresh, and connects to a PC via a USB cable rather than Bluetooth.

Sales of laptops outsold those of desktop PCs well over a decade ago with that difficult to maneuver (my opinion) built-in pointing device in the form of a trackpad. However, a Twitter poll of laptop users revealed that almost half admitted to using a mouse at least some of the time.

Among the mouse's most ardent fans are gamers, who almost universally find it to be the most swift and precise way to interact with fast-paced games. I don't have much time for games these days except for an occasional game of gin rummy before closing down for the night with one of a host of characters that I've created and who seem determined to beat me. With movement set on the quickest deal of the cards, there's no way a trackpad would ever keep up with me and my opponent.

It was demanding traditionalists, like me, whom Microsoft had in mind when it revived the IntelliMouse Explorer as the Classic IntelliMouse. The model, which debuted in October, brings back the IntelliMouse Explorer 3.0 industrial design in a slightly tweaked fashion: It sports a new, two-tone gray color scheme, and the flashy red LED on the old version's rear end has been replaced with a more tasteful white one on its undercarriage. But the company hasn't tampered with the circa-2003 swooping movement and button positions.

Whatever the fate of the Classic IntelliMouse, I'm hanging on to the model that sits next to me. We belong together.

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