



bits & bytes



Streaming revolution

The world of TV streaming is about to explode, with a series of new services launching on the Australian market. DVD rental service Quickflix is the latest company to enter the fray, allowing internet-connected Sony Bravia TVs and Blu-ray disc players to hire DVD quality films. PC and Mac users can log on from Thursday, followed by Playstation 3 users "hopefully before Christmas". They join the likes of Optus' MeTV (pictured above) and Foxtel's integration of its services to Microsoft Xbox 360 game consoles. A recent survey by Telstra of more than 1200 consumers found that about a third of Australians planned to buy a smart TV or internet-connected set-top box. Canon's Consumer Lifestyle Index also revealed that internet-ready televisions make up about 1/5 of all purchases.



New Macbook Pros

Just in time for the festive rush, Apple has launched its all-new range of Macbook Pro laptop computers. Just like the recently-released iPhone 4S, the changes aren't cosmetic – the new Macbooks look exactly the same as the models before them but boast a host of improvements under the hood. The new generation received an upgrade in processing power, with the 13-inch Macbook Pros now featuring a 2.4GHz Intel Core i5 processor or the fastest dual core available – the 2.8GHz Intel Core i7. With Turbo Boost mode, that means you'll be getting about 3.5GHz of actual speed. The new 15-inch and 17-inch models are equipped with 2.5GHz quad-core Intel Core i7 processors, running at 3.6GHz with Turbo Mode. The new range also features upgraded graphics, the new Thunderbolt I/O system, Facetime HD camera integration and longer battery life.



Call to arms

One of the biggest (if not THE biggest) game releases of the year happens today, with the first copies of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* hitting video games retailers across the globe. The hotly anticipated first-person shooter follows on from the two biggest selling entertainment titles of all time, *Call of Duty: Black Ops* and *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*. Promising an explosive, blockbuster movie style single player campaign and *Call of Duty's* formidable multiplayer, bets are on this one is going to keep a majority of the world's gamers busy for the next 12 months or so. If you're looking for a bit of a laugh this morning, check out the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* launch trailer *The Vet and The Noob* starring *Superbad's* Jonah Hill as The Noob and Australia's own Sam Worthington as The Vet. It's pretty corny – but it does show how much muscle the video games industry now has in attracting big name movie stars. Stay tuned for a full *Modern Warfare 3 vs Battlefield 3* review.

Microsoft on track for success with Forza 4



The race for motorsport simulation supremacy continues with Microsoft's Forza 4, writes ROB FARQUHAR

DEVELOPMENT studio Turn 10 has done the impossible: created a racing simulator that engages both the newcomer to racing simulators and the digital car tragi.

When you start the game using the controller, you're greeted with a menu system that combines class and simplicity; it's hard to get lost or confused.

Turn 10 made the wise decision of setting the default difficulty to easy.

I had the distinct sensation in my early career that the game was lulling me into a false sense of security.

Experienced racers will likely crank the difficulty settings up in short order.

Forza Motorsport 4 makes

the complexities of skilled race driving feel attainable.

A four-point rating system that pops up on the left of the screen tells you how well you're taking any given corner, or drifting, or even speeding.

Not only that, the game also gives a good feel for when you make a mistake; I knew I was fishtailing because I'd applied too much power at the wrong moment and not because of some arbitrary difficulty setting.

The biggest aid to poor noobs like me is the rewind function.

You can hit the Y button and cycle time backwards for about four seconds a pop, usually enough to get to just before you made that hasty decision that sent you to Crashville by way of Fishtail City.

It takes a whole heap of frustration out of *FM4's* learning curve.

FM4 wraps that user friendliness in some spectacular eye candy.

Every car and track in the game is rendered in photo-realistic detail without

a single drop in frame rate.

It's put to glorious use in Autovista, where you can use Kinect to take a high-definition walk around of several of *FM4's* cars.

Each Autovista car features several information hotspots, including one which plays a short audio commentary by *Top Gear* host Jeremy Clarkson.

The career mode and several multiplayer challenges include the famed *Top Gear* Test Track (there's even a reasonably priced car challenge).

Hardcore racernauts shouldn't lose heart: *Forza Motorsport 4* has plenty of depth and technical detail.

In fact, there's a whole two discs worth of game.

Earning experience points and credits in career or multiplayer unlocks cars and allows you to upgrade virtually every part from the engine to the roll cage and the tyres.

You can also tune your car by adjusting tyre pressure, ride hardness, wheel camber and even gear ratios.

FM4 offers a staggering

volume of multiplayer options out of the gate.

You can quick-match if you're in a hurry or choose from 25 categories of racing.

If direct competition isn't your speed, you might like "rivals", where you race the "ghost" of another player's previous performance in a given challenge.

FM4's admirable application of the Kinect system falls down at voice support.

My Kinect sensor refused to recognise some of the vocal menu options.

Matchmaking can lead to some extended waits before you're behind the wheel, even if you've selected "quick match".

Nonetheless, Turn 10 have done an incredible job at making *Forza Motorsport 4* accessible and fun for players new to racing simulation while providing enough depth and variety to keep seasoned veterans occupied for ages.

■ *Forza Motorsport 4* is available now on Xbox 360.

