# The 15 biggest technology failures

**Gadgets that didn't revolutionise the world**

Emru Townsend

For every tech invention that has revolutionised the world we live in, there are just as many products that have failed to take off. Whether because they were all hype and no substance, or they just didn’t capture the public's imagination, they have now been resigned to the dustbin.

We've rounded up our 15 favourite examples of products that, beyond a few prototypes, never actually saw the light of day. We've also added some honourable mentions that we think deserved to be remembered.

## Ovation

The early 1980s was an interesting time in office-software development for [IBM's](http://www.ibm.com) still-new IBM PC and the MS-DOS operating system. WordStar, [WordPerfect](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/reviews/index.cfm?ReviewID=1978), [Microsoft Word](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/reviews/index.cfm?ReviewID=1763), and Lotus 1-2-3 were just some of the must-have word processing and spreadsheet titles released in the three years after the platform made its debut.

In 1983, Ovation Technologies, a startup founded the year before, announced an integrated package that promised to include word processing, spreadsheet, [database management](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991), and communications software. By 1984, though, the company declared bankruptcy, having burned through about $7m (£3.5m) in investor money without releasing a single product.

The problem was one that might be familiar to survivors of the dotcom bust: Ovation spent far more time, money, and energy promoting and selling its product than actually creating it. The [software's](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991) only lasting effect on the market is that it's supposedly the reason the phrase 'vaporware' was coined.

## Duke Nukem Forever

It's hard to come up with something new to say about [Duke Nukem Forever](http://www.3drealms.com/duke4/), largely because people have had so much time to make fun of it. Last week marked the eleventh anniversary of 3D Realms' first official announcement of [Duke Nukem](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991) Forever's release, which was supposed to be in mid-1998. That optimistic announcement came before the developer's decision to switch game engines - something the company would go on to do repeatedly in the ensuing years, while occasionally rewriting most of the existing game design from scratch.

Over the past 10 years, the developer has released a few trailers (including one last December), screenshots, and demos to show the game's progress. Though 3D Realms wisely stopped providing hard release dates (it'll be released "when it's done"), president Scott Miller did confirm a 2008 release date in an email sent to the [Dallas Business Journal](http://dallas.bizjournals.com/) back in February.

Still, as the years have gone by, each new tidbit has prompted increasing amounts of snide commentary rather than anticipation. The best of the bunch has to be The Duke Nukem Forever List, which documents how the [gaming](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991) and technology industries - as well as the world at large- have changed since that first announcement in 1997.

If Duke Nukem Forever does actually see the light of day, which may surprise its creators as much as anyone else, its role of whipping boy in the world of tech snarkiness might be filled by Darkfall, a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) in development for almost seven years... so far.

## Amiga Walker PC

No list of technologies that almost made it would be complete without something from the Commodore Amiga's tortured history, one in which remarkable [hardware](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=2) was often tripped up by questionable marketing decisions, bad circumstances, or a mixture of both.

After Commodore went bankrupt in 1994, the Amiga brand and technology were purchased by the German company Escom Technologies and marketed as Amiga Technologies. In early 1996, the company announced a plan to sell an upgraded version of the Amiga 1200 [computer](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=2) with a strikingly designed dark purple case that stood on four tiny feet, hence the Walker name.

Was it genius or madness? Even the company didn't seem sure, as it also intended to offer the motherboard separately, so that people could buy it and put it in a standard PC case. The reaction of the Amiga faithful was mixed, with some saying the case looked like a beetle, or Doctor Who's K-9. We'll never know if the Walker would have swayed the Amiga community or not; only a few prototypes were built before Escom went bankrupt in 1997.

## Sega VR

Before the madness of the dotcom boom really got under way, the serious buzz was all about virtual reality. Aside from the movie 'The Lawnmower Man' and VR cafés springing up in tech-friendly cities, a potential battle was shaping up between two giants of the video [game industry](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=2), both aiming to bring the wonders of virtual reality gaming to the home.

[Sega](http://www.sega-europe.com/) had decided to create the Sega VR as a virtual-reality add-on to its wildly popular Genesis system. Although the twin-LCD headset made the player look like a cross between Battlestar Galactica's Cylons and Knight Rider's KITT, it was one of the sleeker-looking VR headsets of the day. And, by all accounts, that was the best thing about it.

Despite ambitious specs, including 320x200-pixel resolution, head tracking, and a colour display, the few people who tried the system outside of Sega, mostly at tradeshows, were far from impressed. While the Sega VR did meet its specs on paper, in practice the images were a blurry mess. The company scrapped the project in 1994. (But not before making an arrangement to offer the Sega VR as a prize in a breakfast cereal competition. What the winner actually got is a mystery.)

Sega probably breathed a sigh of relief when a year later Nintendo's [Virtual Boy](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=2) also flopped spectacularly.

## Glaze3D Graphics Cards

[Graphics](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=3) card makers have always played a game of spec leapfrog, with each company squeezing higher resolutions and higher framerates out of graphics chips as new technologies appear and components become smaller and cheaper.

In 1999, the Finnish company [Bitboys Oy](http://www.bitboys.com/) announced the first two cards using its Glaze3D architecture, with even the less-powerful of the pair promising render speeds that were spectacular by the standards of the day. They weren't playing leapfrog so much as doing long jumps. The not-so-secret secret behind the Glaze3D family's amazing performance numbers was that the chips relied heavily on embedded DRAM, bypassing the bottlenecks that came from using external memory.

While the numbers were enough to inflame any [gamer's](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=3) ardour, including [Apple](http://www.apple.com) [gamers](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=3) as the Glaze3D family promised to be Mac-compatible, the overall reaction to the news could best be described as cautious optimism; many people adopted an 'I'll believe it when I see it' attitude. Still, most folks gave Bitboys the benefit of the doubt. After all, the company and the people behind it already had a reputation for their graphics architecture work, and they had partnered with [Infineon Technologies](http://www.infineon.com/) to produce the chips. Would Bitboys' unconventional method actually work?

We'll never know. For two years, the company missed release dates. Of course, during those two years the rest of the industry didn't sit still. As new technologies came along (for one thing, DirectX went from version 7 to version 9), Bitboys promised that Glaze3D would support them; the company also increased its performance claims, adding a third, even more powerful chip to the family. Ultimately (mercifully?) everything came to a halt when Infineon stopped producing embedded DRAM in 2001; lacking a manufacturer, Bitboys threw in the towel. Bitboys went on to produce [processor](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=3) designs for the mobile graphics market, and ATI acquired the company in 2006.

## Atari 2700

Someone at [Atari](http://www.atari.com/) had a great idea: Take the insanely popular [Atari 2600](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=4) gaming system, put it in a new cabinet, add spiffy new controllers, and call it the Atari 2700.

The end result was almost a licence to [print](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=4) money. The cabinet designers skipped the dated 1970s look of the faux-wood panel and went for a then-futuristic sleek, wedge-shaped design with matte and glossy black finishes, topped with a built-in storage container for the controllers at the top.

The controllers themselves were innovative for the time, featuring built-in select and reset buttons (providing even less motivation to get off the couch), a touch-sensitive fire button, and a joystick that doubled as a rotating, 270-degree paddle. The killer feature: the controllers were wireless.

Advertising and packaging were created, but the [Atari](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=4) 2700 never reached store shelves. In quality assurance testing people noticed that the controllers had a broadcast range of 1,000ft. Since the controllers didn't have unique identifiers beyond 'left controller' and 'right controller', playing a game would affect any Atari 2700 unit within that radius. To top it off, the electronics were based on garage-door openers, so interference with other remote-control devices was a possibility.

In the end Atari decided that redesigning the system and the controllers would be too expensive, and it scrapped the 2700 project. The 2700 didn't exactly vanish without a trace, however. The cabinet design was slightly retooled for the [Atari 5200](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=4), and the 5200 controllers also used elements of the 2700 controller design. The wireless functionality wound up in an Atari 2600 add-on, which relied on essentially unusable fat-bottomed versions of the classic 2600 joystick.

## Secure Digital Music Initiative

In the late 1990s, the MP3 format and Napster (the original, bad-boy Napster) had the music industry running scared. While the [Recording Industry Association of America](http://www.riaa.com/) (RIAA) was in the middle of its lawsuit against [Diamond Multimedia](http://www.diamondmm.com/) over that company's Rio MP3 player, a consortium of computer, consumer electronics, and entertainment companies got together to form the Secure Digital Music Initiative (SDMI).

The goal was to create a new digital music format that would incorporate watermarking files as a means of digital rights management (DRM), as well as a standard for audio players so that they wouldn't play SDMI-compliant files that the owner didn't have the right to listen to. This arrangement would, theoretically, provide the safety net required for the music companies to start distributing music digitally.

In late 2000, the group offered a $10,000 prize to any person or group that could, among other things, successfully remove the watermarks on four music files they provided, within a three-week time limit.

A team at Princeton led by computer science professor Ed Felten did just that. The SDMI threatened to sue Felten, citing the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), when the group learned that he planned to discuss his research at the 4th International Information Hiding Workshop the following year. The Electronic Frontier Foundation backed Felten by suing the RIAA, SDMI, Verance (one of the companies whose watermarking technology was cracked), and the US Justice Department on First Amendment grounds.

Felten presented the paper at the 10th USENIX Security Symposium a few months later, but by then the SDMI's prospects had dimmed, and it soon dissolved altogether.

## Action GameMaster

Active Enterprises was a gaming company that valued quantity over quality, releasing cartridges for the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) and [Sega Genesis](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=5) jammed with 52 games, each of dubious quality. The Action GameMaster, which Active announced in 1994, was no deviation from the philosophy. The portable game system would not only play its own cartridges but would also handle NES, Super NES, and Sega Genesis games (with the help of adaptors), as well as CD-ROM games, via another adaptor. Contributing to the kitchen-sink approach were a TV tuner add-on and car and AC adaptors. (Even with all that functionality, Active claimed that the GameMaster would have "lightweight portability".)

Despite a wildly enthusiastic press kit distributed at 1994's Consumer Electronics Show, the Action GameMaster failed to materialise. Small wonder, considering it would never have been able to licence the required [hardware](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=5) from Nintendo or Sega. And even its own concept design revealed that Active's concept of 'portable' was clearly different from the rest of the gaming world's: if the company's claim of a 3.2in LCD could be taken at its word, the design suggested that the Action GameMaster would be at least 10x8in. The company, which was likely banking on a flood of orders that never came, disappeared soon after.

## Infinium Phantom

Sometimes a product name is just too perfect. Almost from the moment that Infinium Labs' January 2003 press release announced the Phantom, a console that would "outperform the Xbox, Sony PlayStation 2, and GameCube", it encountered skepticism.

The release was chock-full of tech marketing jargon yet remained entirely free of details about the Phantom itself, while promising a March unveiling and a November launch.

Details did emerge soon after: The Phantom was slated to be, in essence, a PC running the embedded version of [Windows XP](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/reviews/index.cfm?ReviewID=112), which would allow gamers to play PC games, but the primary hook was Phantom's on-demand system, where subscribers could download any game they wanted over an internet connection. At one stage, the company even planned to give the console away free to anyone who subscribed to a two-year service.

Bloggers and forum posters had a field day with the Phantom, deriding the lack of a physical product or any reliable information on Infinium.

Imagine everyone's surprise when a Phantom unit was actually shown at 2004's E3 tradeshow, complete with the wireless LapBoard (a keyboard and mouse that fit on a tilting tray), and a new launch date, which, of course, came and went with no Phantom.

A revamped Phantom was on display at the 2005 Consumer Electronics Show, but a string of missed and reset release dates eroded any goodwill that its public appearances may have generated. Later in the year, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) gave notice that it would bring charges against former Infinium CEO Timothy Roberts. The SEC filing several months later revealed that Infinium had lost over $62.7m (£36.3m) in three years, with only $3.5m (£1.75m) going to actual development. A few months after that, Infinium officially ended the Phantom project, changed its name to [Phantom Entertainment](http://www.phantom.net/), and focused its efforts on the LapBoard, which, despite an order from Alienware, has yet to materialise.

## Apple Interactive Television Box

These days we watch movies on game consoles, browse websites on our mobile phones, and listen to music on, well, just about anything. But for the longest time so-called convergence was always just out of reach, and the Holy Grail of the convergence craze was interactive television, where couch potatoes could, say, visit a company's website when it was displayed during a commercial, or vote on the outcome of a TV show while watching it. (No, The X Factor hadn't been launched then.)

In 1993, Apple partnered with [BT](http://www.bt.co.uk) and [Belgacom](http://www.belgacom.be/) to produce a set-top box to go along with their interactive television services. The Apple Interactive Television Box was a modified 25MHz Macintosh LC-475, and, rather modestly, allowed users to download and watch content (and fast-forward or rewind, similar to today's Sky+). Future plans included interactive gameshows and educational content for children, as well as add-on [hardware](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=6) such as a mouse, a keyboard, and a CD-ROM drive.

In 1994, selected households in the UK and Belgium placed the black set-top box sporting an Apple logo on top of their TVs, and trials began a year later in the US. Apple quickly learned that consumers simply weren't interested in interactive television.

The trials ended, and the Interactive Television Box was shelved. Fast-forward to 2008 (skipping 1996's internet-enabled but failed Apple Pippin @World gaming console), and the company's sleek [Apple TV](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/reviews/index.cfm?ReviewID=741) lets you rent HD and standard-definition iTunes Store videos directly from your TV.

## Palm Foleo

[Palm Computing's](http://www.palm.com/) founder, Jeff Hawkins, is a lucky guy. What few people have done once - define a product category - he has done twice, first with the original PalmPilot PDA and later with [Handspring's](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=6) Treo smartphone. (Both categories existed before Hawkins' inventions, but Palm's products made them accessible enough for nontechnophiles to latch on to.)

On May 30, 2007, Hawkins went for the hat trick when he announced the Palm Foleo, a $499 (£250) Linux-based sub-laptop designed to synchronise with a smartphone so that [business](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=6) travellers could, among other things, work on documents and email without cramping their thumbs.

Even such notable features as its 1kg and its instant-on feature failed to muster more than a collective 'Why?' from the digerati. Stuck somewhere between a PDA and a notebook in power and size, it seemed to be only an extra device to carry around, with too much feature overlap.

Barely three months after Hawkins presented the Foleo, [Palm pulled the plug on it](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?NewsID=10622), citing a need to "get our core platform and smartphones done first".

Some people might argue that Hawkins could yet be vindicated, as low-cost, lightweight laptops such as the [Asus Eee PC](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/reviews/index.cfm?ReviewID=1370) seem to be catching on. Despite being underpowered, they are good enough for some tasks, but not as feature-packed as a full-featured laptop.

## Taligent and Microsoft Cairo

Steve Jobs, ousted from Apple's board of directors, left the company in 1986 and founded NeXT [Computer](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=7). In 1989, NeXT released its first computer to great acclaim. Though the NeXT computer was only a modest commercial success, its launch and the technology it demonstrated (including the advanced NeXTSTEP operating system) galvanised three companies in particular: Apple, IBM, and [Microsoft](http://www.microsoft.com).

What NeXT had done, seemingly out of nowhere, was create an object-oriented operating system. (Among other things, such a design makes reusing programming code easier.) Apple had already started work in 1987 on an object-oriented operating system code-named Pink, but was struggling against internal politics to deliver anything even close to a finished product.

In 1992, the Pink project moved to Taligent, a joint venture between Apple and IBM. IBM, having recently parted ways with [Microsoft](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=7) over OS/2, had already started work on a microkernel called WorkplaceOS. Taligent merged the work on Pink and WorkplaceOS, with the intent of releasing a multiplatform operating system named TalOS.

While the group did eventually release an object-oriented programming environment named CommonPoint for OS/2 and various flavours of Unix, the actual Taligent operating system never surfaced. The company was absorbed into IBM in 1998.

In 1991, Microsoft launched the Cairo project - by several accounts, as a direct response to NeXT. Cairo promised a distributed, object-oriented file system (Object File Store, or OFS) that indexed a computer or network's file structure and contents automatically.

Several versions of Windows NT came and went as Cairo continued development, shifting targets all the while. Eventually the company referred to Cairo as the successor to Windows NT [Server](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=7), and then as a collection of technologies. Cairo development ended in 1996.

Incidentally, two of these object-oriented ventures ended up generating technologies that lots of people use today. Bits and pieces of Cairo (in addition to conventions from Mac OS and NeXTSTEP) helped inspire the Windows 95 interface, and formed the building blocks for Exchange, Server, Active Directory, and Windows Desktop Search. (The OFS vision morphed into the Windows File System, aka WinFS, which was promised for Longhorn but removed from the feature list by the time it became Vista.) Apple bought NeXT in 1997 and got Steve Jobs with the deal; NeXTSTEP became the foundation of [Mac OS X](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/reviews/index.cfm?ReviewID=970).

## Silicon Film EFS-1

At the end of the [Digital Imaging Marketing Association](http://www.pmai.org/index.cfm/ci_id/24402/la_id/1.htm) (DIMA) show in February 1998, a company called Imagek announced its Electronic Film System unit, the EFS-1, to a small group of journalists. The EFS-1 aimed to fulfill the dreams of many professional photographers: In principle, the EFS-1 would act as a replacement for a 35mm film cartridge in any camera, allowing anyone to use their existing, familiar photo equipment to take [digital pictures](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=8).

Despite the considerable engineering challenges that the company faced, Imagek expected to have a working demo unit a few months later, and a sub-£500 unit on store shelves a few months after that.

Observers greeted the announcement with some skepticism, and to no one's surprise Imagek missed its target dates. However, it did release specs, some of which were admittedly modest: the (e)Film cartridge had a 1.3Mp CMOS sensor, able to fit 24 1,280x1,024-resolution uncompressed images in its on-board memory before the user needed to offload them to a computer or a CompactFlash card via the included (e)Port carrier. (The entire [hardware](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=8) and software package was now collectively referred to as the EFS-1.)

Because of the sensor size, the captured image would be only about 35 percent of the camera's full frame.

And forget universality for the time being: The EFS-1 worked with just seven Canon and Nikon cameras.

Aside from a name change (to Silicon Film), some website updates, and a few sample images, nothing new came out of the company until the 2001 PMA show, when Silicon Film publicly demonstrated the EFS-1, exactly three years after the initial announcement.

Skeptics were less inclined to mutter "vaporware," but the projected June release date passed with no product to be seen. That September, Silicon Film suspended operations when Irvine Sensors, a 51 percent shareholder of Silicon Film, withheld further funding over problems with European environmental standards. Irvine Sensors' press release also obliquely noted "present market circumstances", which may have been a polite way of referring to the falling prices and increasing quality of digital cameras, including SLRs.

Silicon Film's last gasp directly addressed that last point: the EPS10-SF, announced the following year, produced 10Mp images while supporting more cameras and providing a 2.5 frames per second (fps) burst rate and an LCD preview screen. And then the company was gone.

## Project Xanadu

In 1960, Ted Nelson first came up with the term 'hypertext', which he envisioned as something different from what it has come to mean.

Hypertext as implemented now is unidirectional; you can link to a document without the document owner ever knowing. If the other party moves or renames the document, the link breaks. Nelson's hypertext, which he now calls 'deep electronic literature' to avoid confusion, was meant to be bi-directional, so that two linked documents would stay linked, regardless of how they were moved or copied. More to the point, such a setup would allow for side-by-side comparison, version management, and an automatic copyright management system in which an author could set a royalty rate for all or parts of a document; linking would initiate the necessary transactions. In 1967, Nelson came up with a name for his project: Xanadu.

The first working code for Xanadu was produced in 1972, and since then the project has largely been marked by near-misses and flirtations with bankruptcy. It is still remarkable for a number of reasons, however.

First, of course, is Nelson's tenacity: he and his shifting teams haven't stopped working on Xanadu for nearly fifty years, making it one of the few existing computing projects to span longer than the entire history of [personal computers](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=9) and computer networking.

Second is that, even with the advent and popularisation of hypertext as we know it, especially on the web, Nelson's ambitious vision hasn't wavered. (He says the web as it is "trivialises our original hypertext model".) Third is that, even after all this time, with his undeniable influence on the way we work and play today, he is still, as he puts it, "not a techie".

It's also worth noting that Project Xanadu isn't completely vaporware. Nelson released the Xanadu source code in 1999, and XanaduSpace 1.0 was released last year.

## Apple WALT and VideoPad

Before there was an [iPhone](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/reviews/index.cfm?ReviewID=1005),in fact, before there was an 'i' anything, Apple attempted two ventures into 'portable' communications. Developed between 1991 and 1993 in conjunction with [BellSouth](http://www.bellsouth.com), Apple's WALT (Wizzy Active Lifestyle Telephone, easily the worst name the company has ever come up with) was a tablet that doubled as a PDA; its killer app was the ability to send and receive faxes from the screen. The WALT was never released to the general public.

Tenacious as ever, Apple offered up the possibility of a new portable videophone/PDA concept at 1995's MacWorld Expo. The Newton-like VideoPad three-in-one prototype combined a mobile phone, PDA, and videophone, and (get this) sported an integrated CD-ROM drive. While the idea of holding a phone with parts of a CD-ROM unit sticking out of the sides was a little questionable, it was more ambitious than the WALT. It too failed to pass the prototype stage, however, and Apple would stay away from telephones until 2007. Of course, we all know what happened then.

## Honourable Mentions

## Apple Copland

While "Pink" continued to slowly run aground as Apple/IBM's Taligent, Apple still found itself needing an operating system that took a great leap forward from System 7.5. Code-named Copland, this new operating system was to include preemptive multitasking (the type of multitasking we enjoy today, versus the less-efficient cooperative multitasking that earlier versions of the Mac system [software](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=10) offered); a full-colour, shaded interface (up to that point, Macintosh GUIs still echoed their black and white origins); and multiuser capabilities. As time progressed Copland picked up more planned features, such as QuickDraw GX, themes, and user interface improvements, while the development team's productivity dwindled, bogged down by the increasing requirements and the need to get a growing number of developers up to speed.

In 1996, Apple and most notably, CEO Gil Amelio, was referring to Copland in public as the forthcoming System 8, and the usual prerelease hype - including tradeshow demos, T-shirts, and other swag - got into gear. Apple eventually had to give up on the unworkable Copland, with its technologies only starting to appear in Mac OS 8. Apple got its great leap forward a few years later with Mac OS X.

## Sky Commuter Cars

What are the persistent, defining visions of the future? Marauding mutants, to be sure, but also jetpacks and flying [cars](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=10). Though the jetpacks are (mostly) on hold, researchers continue to tease us by working on various kinds of flying cars, envisioning a utopia of uncluttered roadways and conveniently forgetting the first 20 minutes of 'The Fifth Element'.

One such attempt was the N2001C - the Sky Commuter [car](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=10) - a personal vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) plane designed by [Flight Innovations](http://www.flightinnovations.com). The details are sketchy, but the upshot is that after more than $6m (£3m) in funding, the project was shelved. An [eBay](http://www.ebay.co.uk) auction claiming to be of the last Sky Commuter prototype in existence caused some excitement (and raised some skeptical eyebrows) in January.

Oh, well. No Sky Commuter, but at least there's still the Falx Stalker or the Transition (a light aircraft that folds its wings to drive on the road) to look forward to.

## XtremMac MacThrust G4

In 1999, Swedish company Xtrem promised the XtremMac MacThrust G4, an overclocked Macintosh (a rarity in the Mac world) that could hit 1.2GHz. There was just one problem: the fastest PowerPC G4 [processor](http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=10) at the time was a mere 500MHz. Xtrem claimed that it could achieve the incredible speed increase by exploiting existing features in Apple's hardware, and, of course, by cooling the daylights out of the CPU.

Xtrem missed its August shipping date, and then its January shipping date. By February the company had relaunched its website and retrenched on specs: The new XtremMac would hit only 1.066GHz. Meanwhile, Mac G4s had climbed to 733MHz, and the few Mac users who weren't skeptics collectively shrugged. If it ever got released, no one noticed.

Reference:

http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news/index.cfm?newsid=12991&pn=1