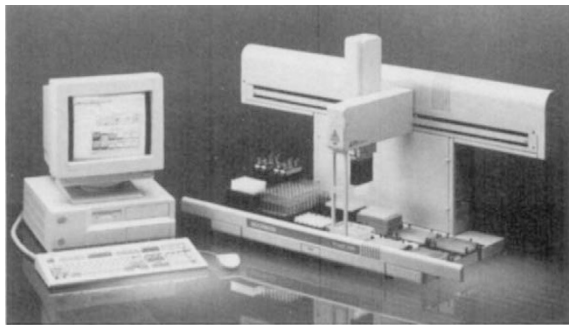


New on the market

Marketplace is a new product review section that will appear on an occasional basis in *Nature Genetics*. Our intention is to highlight a selection of new products that are directly applicable to the genetics community. We welcome suggestions for future features.

Beckman has just replaced the Biomek 1000 workstation, the long standing workhorse of the automated life sciences laboratory, with the



The Beckman Biomek 2000 basic set-up.

imaginatively named Biomek 2000. The new workstation boasts an enlarged working area with 12 positions (up from 4), an improved lower volume accuracy (down to 1 μ l) and a plethora of pipetting tools and gadgets. However, arguably the most impressive single improvement is the new icon led software that makes programming this new and versatile robot child's play and on an entertainment par with the best from Super Nintendo.

Olympus has launched a new range of microscopes to replace the ageing BH-2 range. The new BX models are not just cosmetic upgrades but feature new optics which claim better contrast, sharpness and flatness across the entire field of view. Olympus claim



The Olympus BX59 microscope.

that much effort has been put into improving the ergonomics of these microscopes which allow the operator to make many adjustments aimed at more comfortable operation.

The relative ease with which sequence can now be generated and the resulting massive data sets that are accumulating have given rise to a competitive sequence analysis software industry. Two recent additions to the competition represent the extremes now available. **Biosoft** have launched GeneJockey II, which for \$1,000 (or £500) offers improved basic functions of editing, manipulating and analyzing nucleic acid and protein sequences. It will also scan sequences for optimal primer pairs and can be used to search GenBank, EMBL or its own files.

At the other end of the market, **Time Logic** has announced the DeCypher sequence similarity search system, a hardware and software workstation for performing ultra fast DNA sequence data bank searches. For those impressed by figures, the entry level system (i486DX 50 mhz microprocessor with 2 "Sequence Similarity Engine" boards) can perform nearly 4 GigaCompares of base pairs per second and the modular design allows this figure to rise to over 10 Gbp s^{-1} . At \$19,000, it costs a little more, but then, you get a little more.

To the ever imaginative life sciences consumables market come a number of neat products. **Invitrogen** announce the "DNA Dipstick" that will quantitate DNA, RNA or oligonucleotides at concentrations as low as 100 pg μ l⁻¹. The ten minute assay involves dotting 1 μ l of sample onto the Dipstick and incubating in a series of three buffers.

Beckman has launched a slightly more involved assay, the LIFluor dsDNA kit, that claims exquisite sensitivity. The assay is capable of sizing and quantitating double stranded DNA of between 100 and 1,000 bp DNA in the zeptomole range (10^{-21}). A DNA intercalating dye is



The Invitrogen DNA dipstick.

detected using laser-induced fluorescence following capillary electrophoresis of the sample.

Both basic and clinical researchers within the cancer community may find the new Apoptosis kit, from **Oncor**, of value. Extension of nucleosome sized DNA fragments, with Dig-dUTP and subsequent detection with an anti-DIG peroxidase conjugate and appropriate substrate results in the permanent staining of apoptotic cells, *in situ*. **Oncor** claim that this direct 'on slide' method is a significant improvement over existing DNA ladder analysis techniques.

Students and Post docs around the world will rejoice at the news that **AutoGen instruments** (UK) have launched two benchtop automated nucleic acid extractors that are particularly suited to plasmids and other common vectors. The basic model (AutoGen 540) takes twelve samples through a 60–90 minute cycle that yields purified nucleic acid. The 740 model can accommodate up to 160 samples. □

These notes are compiled by Adrian J. Vinson.

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