

Viruses in medicine and in science

D.J. Rowlands

Vaccine. Editor R.E. Spier. *Butterworths*. 4/yr. UK £82 (institutional), £20 (individual); North America \$162 (institutional), \$40 (individual).

Virus Research: An International Journal of Molecular and Cellular Virology. Editors-in-chief Brian Mahy and Richard Compans. *Elsevier*. 8/yr. Dfl. 448, \$154.48.

ADVANCES of the past few years, particularly in molecular biology and genetic engineering, have paved the way to novel approaches to vaccine technology which hitherto had basically remained unaltered since the days of Pasteur. So it is a propitious time to launch a new journal covering the wide range of topics relating to immunoprophylaxis, and *Vaccine* has set itself this task.

Many of the developments which may have great significance in future vaccine production are in areas at the forefront of molecular biology and immunology research, and consequently tend to appear in established "prestige" publications. *Vaccine*, however, is a very rounded journal in that it regularly includes editorial comment and readers' letters. Each issue also features a short review article on a topical subject, patent reports and a meetings' calendar. The editors have therefore produced a journal in the broadest sense as opposed to a collection of papers. The four issues comprising each volume include some 30 or so refereed original papers, published eight to nine months after submission. Most of the contributions are



concerned with virus vaccines and are submitted from many countries throughout the world. The price is reasonable.

Virus Research is a more specialized journal and does not have the interdisciplinary goals of *Vaccine*. Its scope is principally molecular aspects of virology, and it can therefore be seen as a rival to the long-established *Journal of Virology* and to a certain extent *Virology*. It is questionable whether a new journal was required in this particular arena but one or two features of the organization of *Virus Research* should give it some competitive advantages. Paramount amongst these is the arrangement of having a chief editor in both the United States and Britain, which should overcome the suspicion (whether well founded or not) of discrimination that some authors from Europe feel about submitting their work to American journals

and vice versa. Examination of several issues shows that authors from Europe and the United States are contributing similar numbers of papers, although it is probably too early in the journal's history for a stable pattern to have emerged. In contrast to *Journal of Virology*, *Virus Research* does not demand page charges, a great advantage at a time when research funding is lean.

The eight annual issues together contain some 50–60 papers, and these are refereed and appear about six months after submission. The quality of work published and the calibre of the authors is generally good. The overall standard of printing and presentation is quite acceptable (with the minor criticism that the paper used is of a type that allows printing on the reverse side of the page to show through to some extent, a point that also applies to *Vaccine*), and the price is not exorbitant.

The rivals in review

John Birch

Biotechnology Advances: Research Reviews and Patent Abstracts. Editors M. Moo-Young, J.D. Bu'lock, C.L. Cooney and B.R. Glick. *Pergamon*. 2/yr. UK £65 (institutional), £29 (individual); North America \$110 (institutional), \$50 (individual).

Critical Reviews in Biotechnology. Editors George G. Stewart and Inge Russell. *CRC Press*. 4/yr. North America \$104; elsewhere \$124.

PUBLISHING in biotechnology has been a growth industry over the past few years and it must be increasingly difficult to find a niche that is not already well served by an existing journal. This must be particularly true for these two journals, both of which were launched in 1983 as vehicles for review articles.

Pergamon's *Biotechnology Advances* has an unusual format, being made up principally of mini-reviews and patent abstracts with a very short section giving summaries of technical reports released, for example, by government agencies. The reviews are intended to address all the main areas of biotechnology, and indeed in the issues to date they have covered a wide range of topics, from recombinant DNA and monoclonal antibodies to waste-water treatment.

The editors have the declared aim of satisfying both the specialist and the generalist but in so doing may end up pleasing neither. Although the papers give extensive literature references, they are brief to the point of austerity and lack adequate discussion. Hence, while the specialist may find them rather superficial the generalist will find them very dry reading. One is further deterred from browsing through the journal by the unattractive

A few meetings announcements apart, *Virus Research* contains no material ancillary to research papers. While it is stated that invited reviews will be published, none have appeared to date, and there is no space devoted to comment, either editorial or from readers. The journal is therefore a compendium of papers and

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lacks the sense of involvement in its subject that is evident in *Vaccine*. It does, however, have its strengths, and it will be interesting to follow the evolution of this journal with respect to its major competitors in the United States. □

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camera-ready script. This may be essential for rapid-publication journals but I really wonder whether it is necessary for a twice-yearly publication.

I did not find the patent abstract section particularly useful. It only covers US patents, is not as well done as in specialist publications such as *Derwent Biotechnology Abstracts* and, for commercial users at least, is infrequent. The abstracts are divided into subject areas on what seems at times to be a fairly arbitrary basis. This, combined with the absence of an index or any cross-references, makes the section awkward to use. The final part of the journal summarizing technical reports is again very brief and, as with the patents, there are better ways of accessing this information.

The CRC offering is an addition to their extensive list of *Critical Reviews* journals. To date at least it has concentrated on the applied process end of biotechnology, with articles on industrial enzymes, biomass and ethanol production as well as aspects of fermentation technology such as the use of immobilized cells. The journal is attractively produced and the reviews are well written. Topics are covered in considerable depth with typically two or three reviews per issue. Unusually, the paper's referees are cited.

The question with this journal, as with *Biotechnology Advances*, is whether it really fills a gap — there are already first-rate review publications in this area, such as *Advances in Biotechnological Processes* and *Advances in Biochemical Engineering/Biotechnology*. *Critical Reviews in Biotechnology* may find devotees in the particular areas they are addressing, but *Biotechnology Advances* could find it harder to achieve popularity with the general readership at which it is aimed. □

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