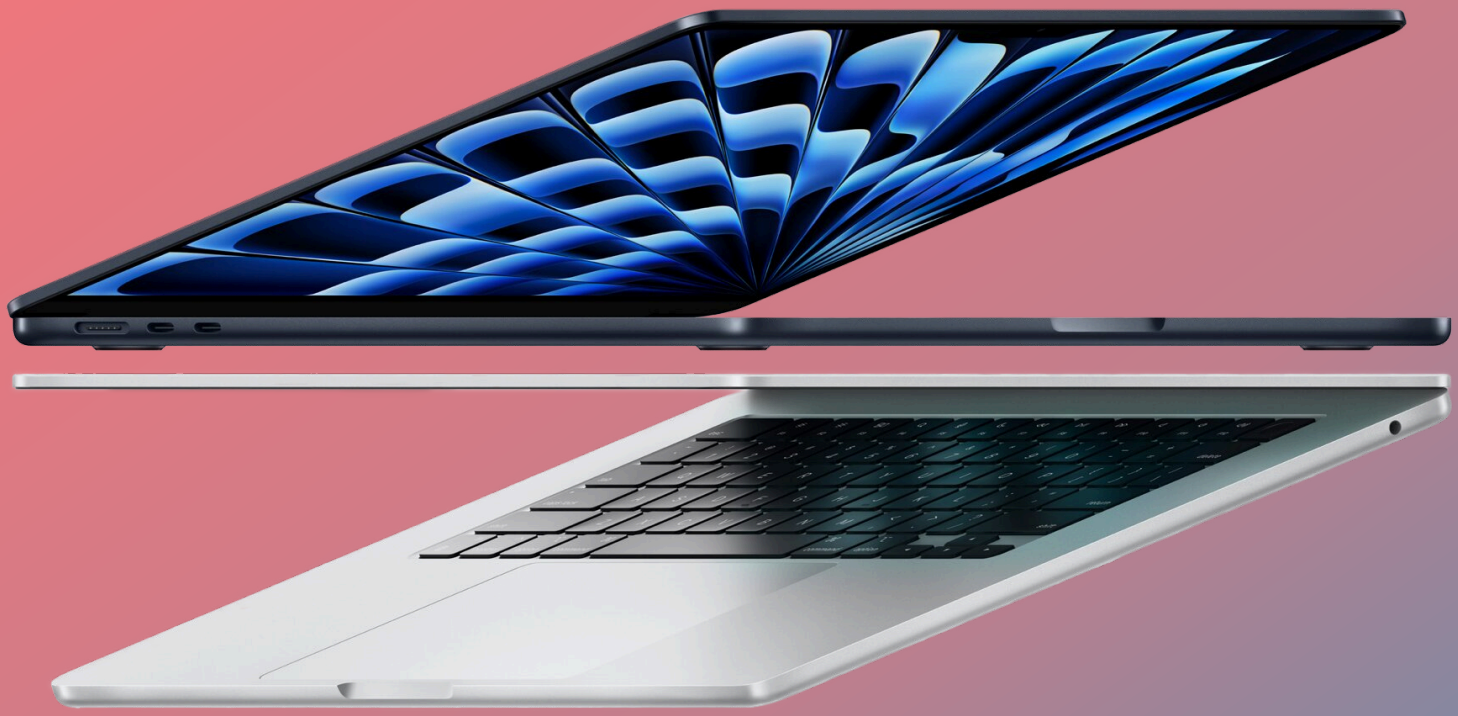
market info

Be Valued



FRESH AIR...

AIR UPDATES

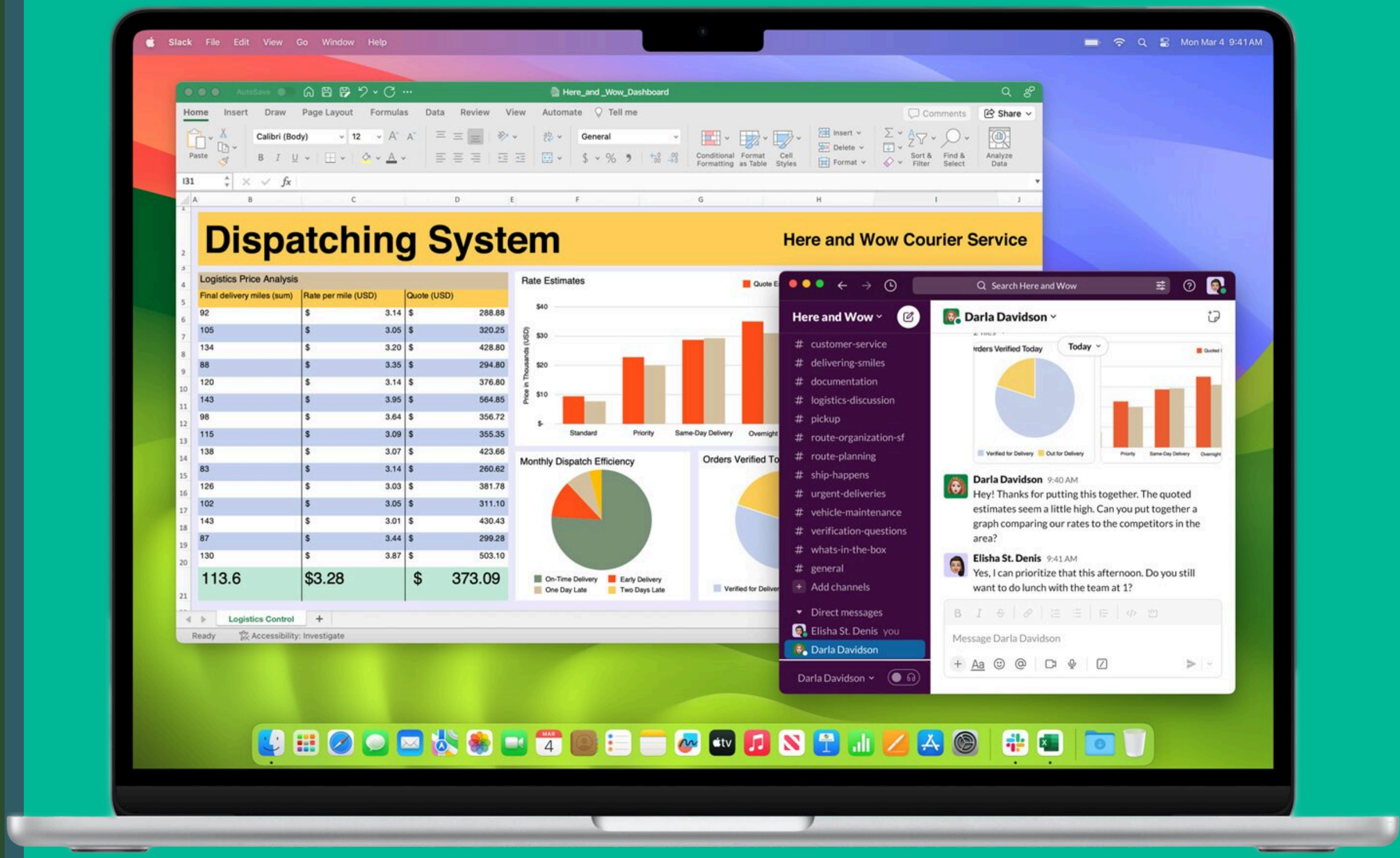
This is a time of year where we start to see things filtering out from Apple, and whilst there has been nothing big so far, other than the US launch of Vision Pro, they have just updated the MacBook Air line of laptops.

The couple of older M2 equipped MacBook Air's still remain in the range as a cheaper alternative, but Apple have introduced new models equipped with the M3 chips. The new Mac with M3 is going to be 1.3x faster than the M1 equipped models and 13x more than previous Intel-based models, according to Apple. A recap on the M3; it features an 8-core CPU, and 10-core GPU with this offering a 60% improvement in games over the M1 models, and supports ray-tracing. M3 also features a 16-core Neural Engine. Models can still be configured with up to 24GB of unified memory.

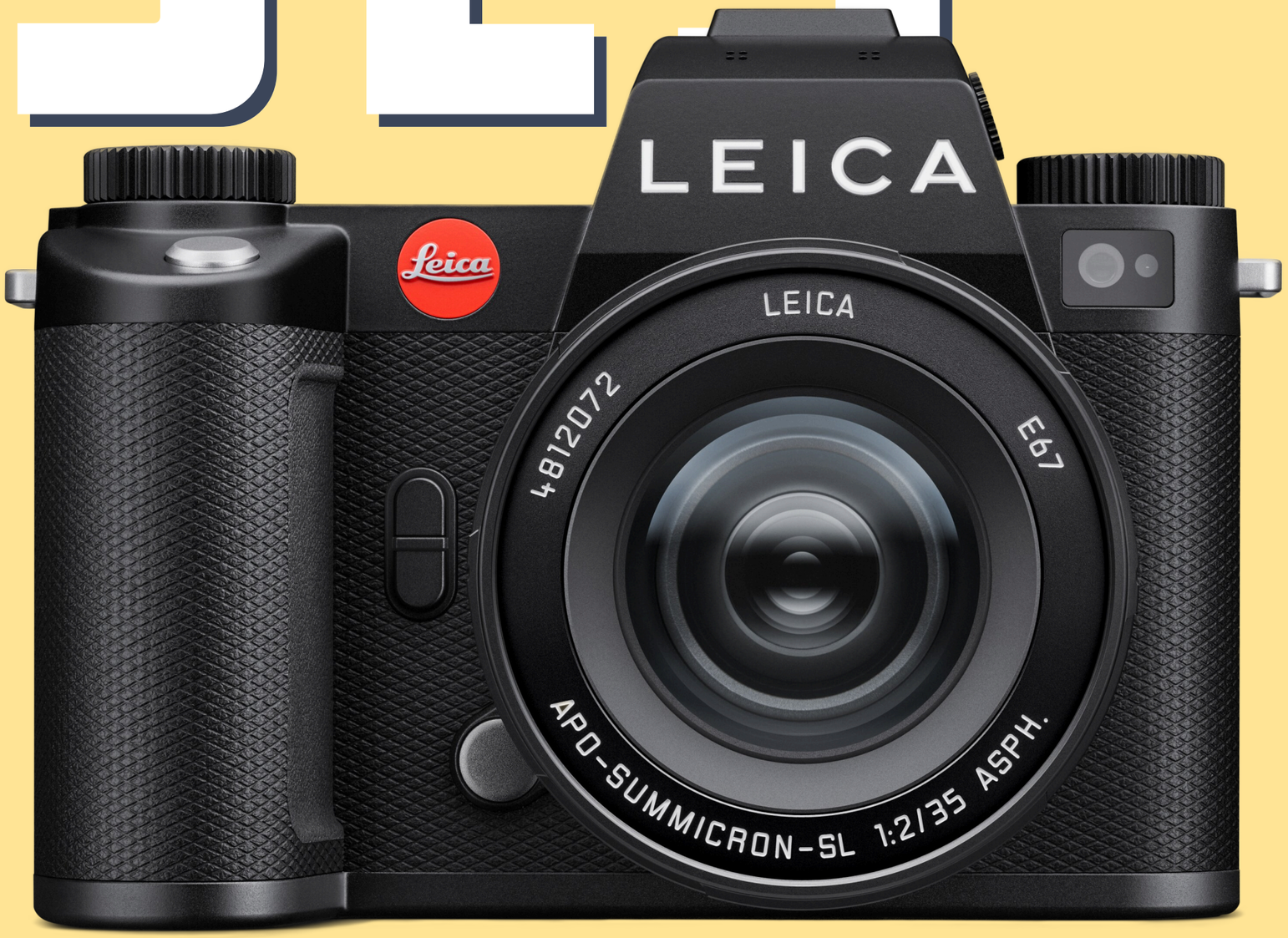
The two models available feature 13.6-inch or 15.3-inch Liquid Retina Displays with 500nits of brightness, support for 1 billion colours and 2x the resolution of the average PC laptop. With M3, MacBook Air can now support two external displays when the lid is closed. The new model features Voice Isolation and Wide spectrum modes microphone modes for increased clarity during voice and video calls.

Connectivity has been slightly upgraded with the M3 Air coming with WiFi 6E, but the Bluetooth 5.3 and two Thunderbolt/USB 4 ports are the same as the previous.

The new MacBook Air's can be ordered now starting at £1,099.00/AU$1,799.00 for the 13-inch and £1,299.00/AU$2,199.00 for the 15-inch.



SL3



Leica's latest full frame camera is here; the Leica SL3 and with it some upgrades but more importantly, refinements. I say this as digital cameras are reaching a peak in terms of technical features. On the high end are 60-100 megapixel sensors with huge amounts of dynamic range, super fast auto-focus utilising AI now to recognise subjects whether they be people, animal or vehicle. Whilst Leica have added improved technical features, they have also spent time improving the ergonomics of the camera, as well as its user interface; something Leica were already ahead of the competition with. Sony cameras are great, but most users report that you need a degree in its UI, with features buried in page after page of menus (although they have improved it over the years).

One of the most obvious changes is a new control dial on the camera which by default controls the ISO, but like all the dials on the camera, it can be customised to whatever the user wants. The camera is also a little smaller and lighter than the previous model shaving 3mm off the height, and 76g although its a little thicker on the narrow part of the body, and features a deeper grip for easier one-handed holding. Another big physical change is a tilting touch display like the one on last year's Q3, which is equally as robust. It is also IP54 rated for shooting in any weather conditions. There is also a new style of power switch around the back. Gone is a toggle switch which is replaced by a touch button that has a ring light around it. In normal use it turns white, but turns off when the camera is brought to the eye. It turns green when the camera is charging. Perhaps with future firmware updates Leica will add some more functionality like turning red if the battery is low, or other colours and warnings.

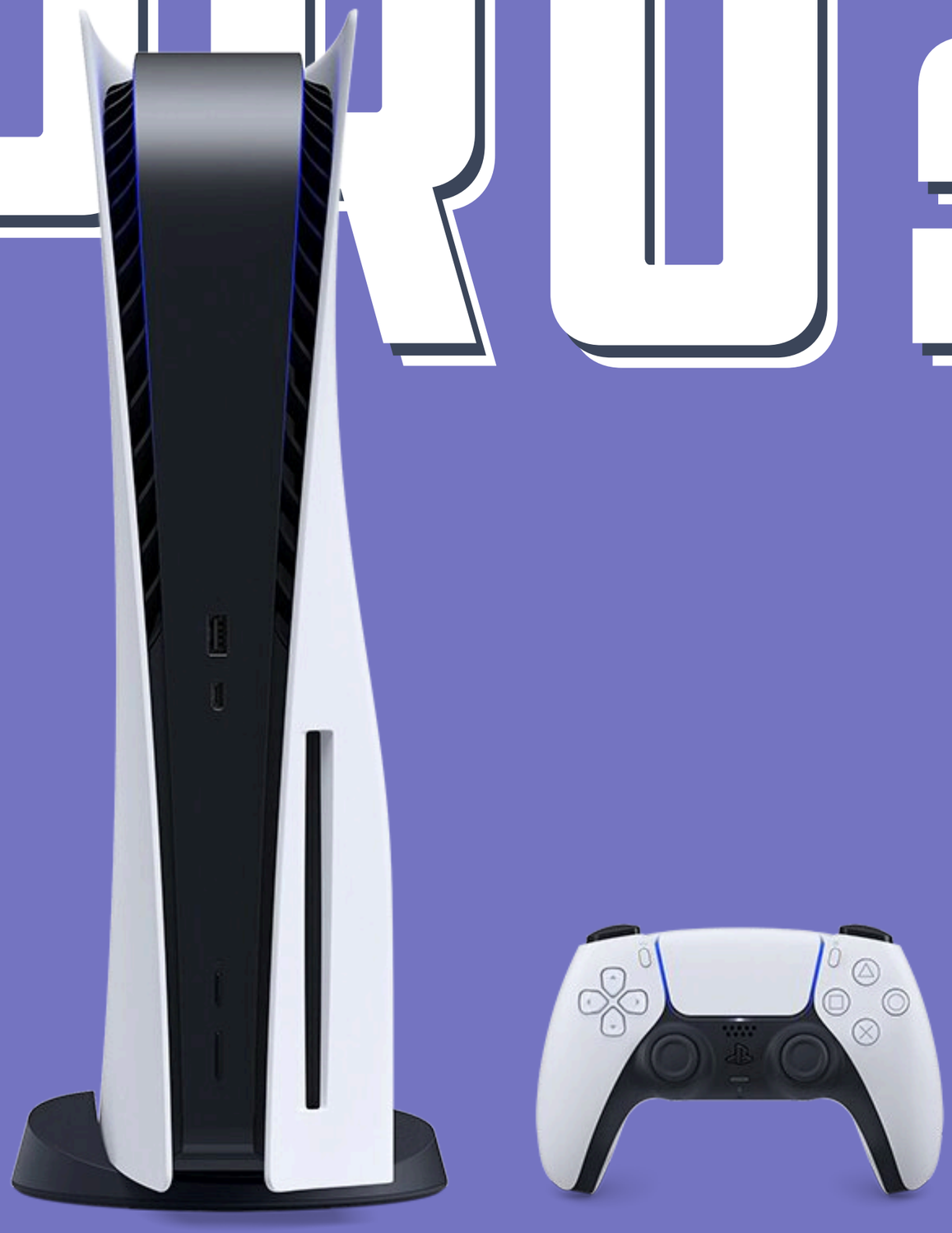
The SL3 features a 60MP triple resolution BSI CMOS sensor, so it's capable of shooting at 36MP or 18MP, without cropping in on the sensor. The camera also feature's Leica's latest Maestro IV processor. Dynamic range has been improved to 15 f-stops and an expanded ISO range of 50-100,000 which is reported to still be quite usable at 25,000-50,000, with manageable colour banding. The EyeRes viewfinder is still a 120Hz 5.76million dot and is made up of glass lenses so the quality is incredibly high. Autofocus is vastly improved with the SL3 being upgraded with both Phase Detect AF in addition to Contrast Detect AF and Object Detection AF. Its still not as fast as the Sony's out there but is a welcome improvement on what came before which really lagged behind the competition.

As mentioned before, Leica's already market leading user-friendly menu system has been refined further with a new top-down scrolling layout in menus, new icon designs and new font as well as colour coding that differentiates between photo and video modes, the latter colour coded with the brands range of cine lenses. Video capabilities have also been improved with videos being shot in up to 8K in H.265 or Apple ProRes codecs.

Unlike more recent Leica releases, Leica decided not to include internal storage, but instead offer a CF express Type B slot as well as UHS II SD cards. Transfer speeds to the Leica Fotos app have been improved with 60MP files in just 2 seconds. The SL3 also has the same higher capacity battery as the Q3.

The Leica SL3 is available to order now for £5,920.00/AU$11,690.00.

PRO?



Sony, it has been reported, sent out specs for the PlayStation 5 Pro which is heavily expected to launch later this year. The specifications have come from Sony's own 'Devnet' portal, making them known to third-party developers so they can prepare their titles to take advantage of the new hardware. The leak details improvements in ray tracing which have been improved by 2 to 4x depending on the workload. They also detail a new technology which Sony call PlayStation Spectral Super Resolution (PSSR). A new rendering technique that utilises custom machine learning silicon to improve rendering resolution, which sounds similar to techniques used in the PS4 Pro, or even DLSS or FSR from the major graphics card vendors. This feature could be a real killer for PS5 Pro. Only having to target a native resolution of 1080P, then letting PSSR deal with upscaling, should leave developers with a lot of head room for improving frame rates in their titles. It could also be great for games that currently suffer from image quality problems owing to lower internal resolutions and current FSR2 upscaling.

The Zen 2 CPU from the original remains, but the new version has the option for a 3.8GHz boost, but with power limits in place, like on the standard PS5, if the 10% increase is utilised, then GPU clocks will be dropped by up to 1.5%. This should provide a benefit to those games that are capped at 30fps, but have inconsistent frame rates. However, users should not expect a huge transformation to CPU limited games. There will be an improvement, but they won't be magically fixed.

The GPU looks to be a pretty big upgrade moving from RDNA 2 to RDNA 3 and increasing the number of compute units to 60, up from 33. Sony state that this should provide a realistic performance uplift of up to 45%. Aiding this is faster memory; 16Gbps GDDR6 up from 14Gbps, for an increased memory bandwidth of 576GB/s up from 448GB/s. Sony has also managed to claw back 1.2GB of the 16GB of memory for developer use making the total amount available to them 13.7GB. Sony's new PSSR feature apparently utilises up to 250MB of memory so this should leave them with plenty left over for perhaps implementing the improved RT.

Fingers crossed we should know more soon, especially if they are looking for a 2024 release.

6 AND 10

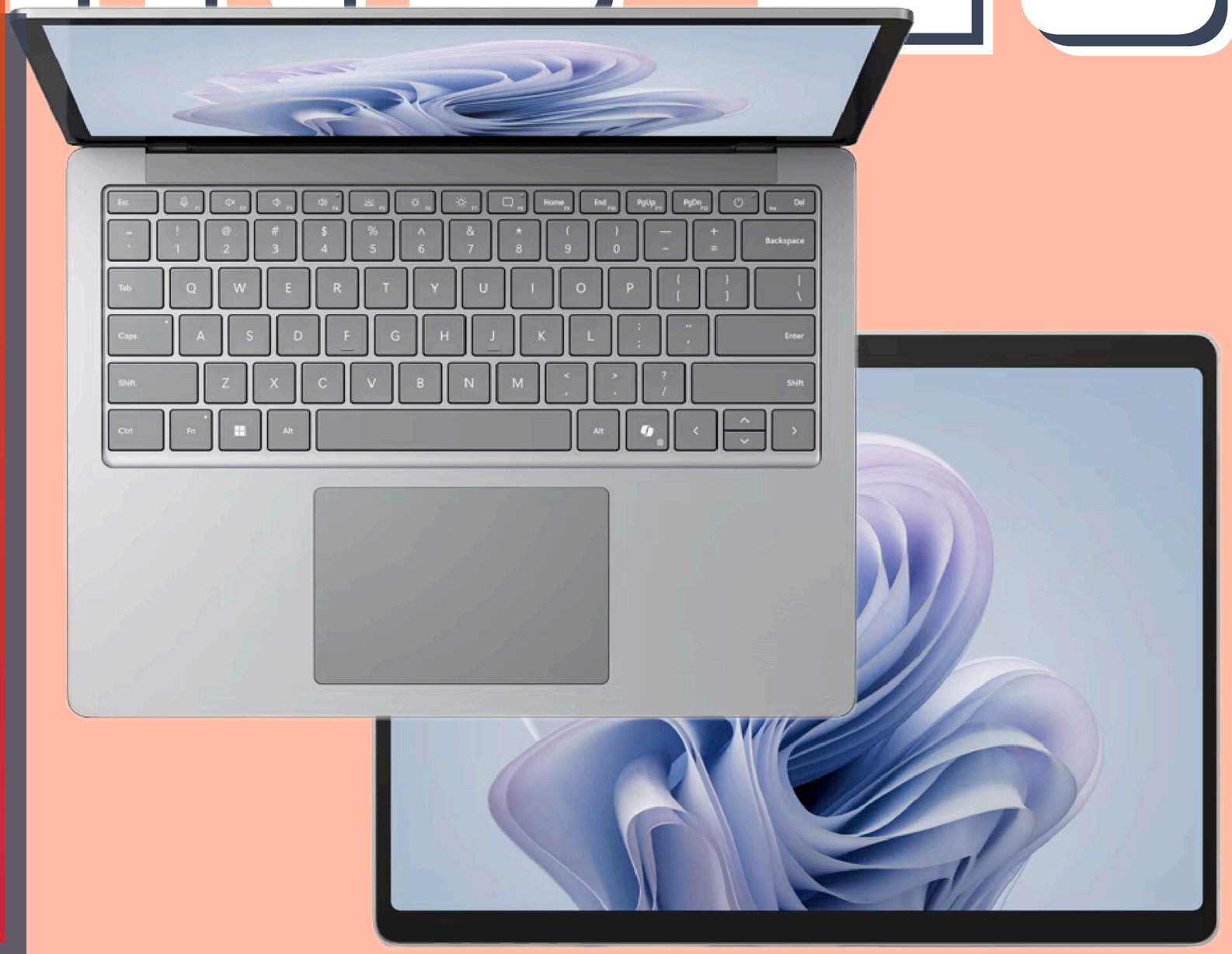
Microsoft just announced two new laptop lines; The Surface Pro 10 and the Surface Laptop 6, but there is a catch. These models are going to be aimed at business only but during the show, the star was Co-Pilot, rather than the laptops. These new systems do feature a new Co-Pilot key (select models).

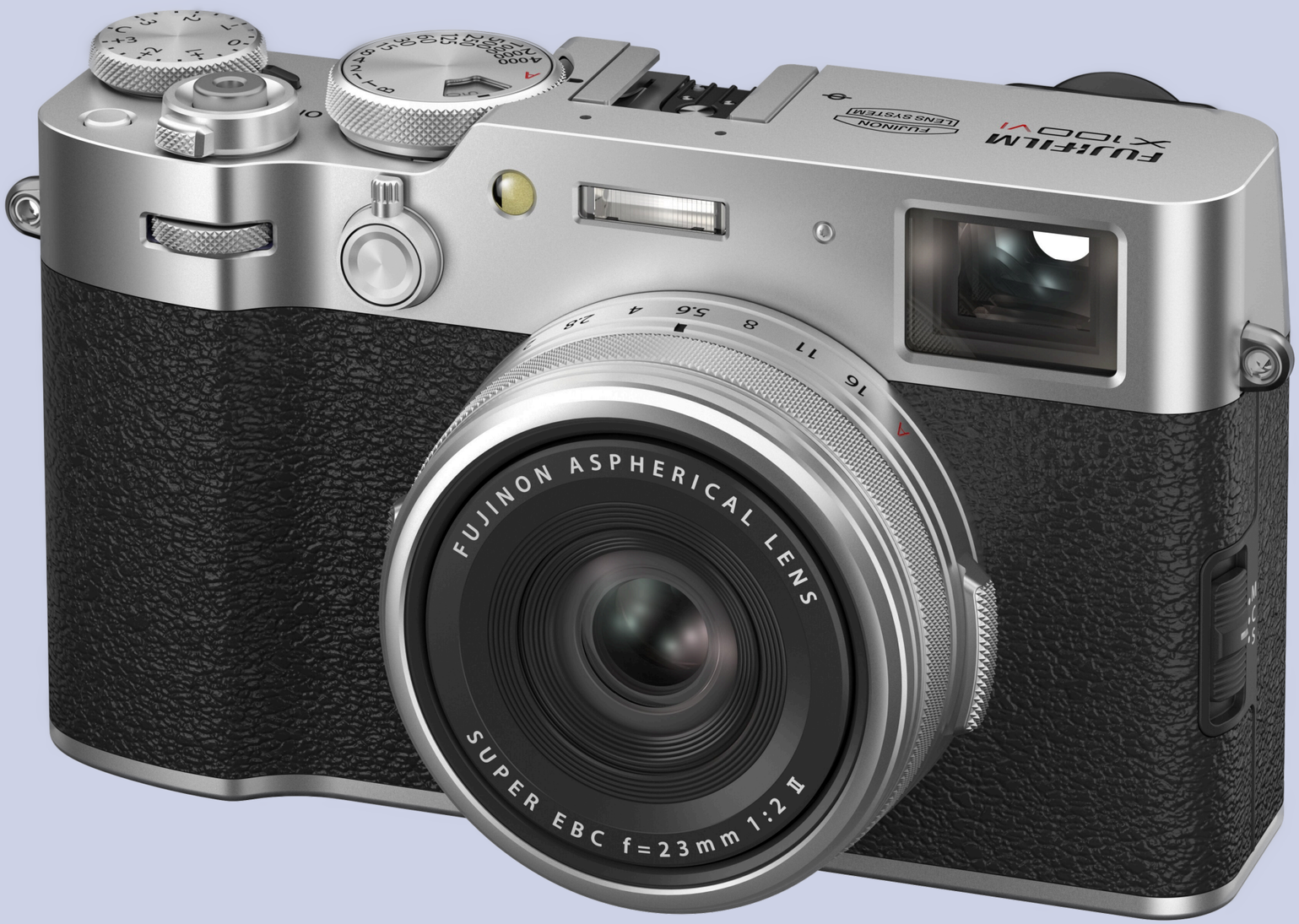
They did not talk about any major new features in the AI assistant, but instead focused on its growing abilities to quickly deal with Windows systems tasks when asked to do so. The Surface Laptop 6 retains the same design, and screen sizes but displays feature an anti-reflective coating which they say reduce reflections by 50%. Connectivity is also the same with a Thunderbolt/USB 4 port, a USB-A 3.1 port, a 3.5mm headphone jack, and a Surface Connect port. The 15-inch model features an additional Thunderbolt 4/USB 4 port. The 15-inch model can also be ordered with a smart card reader for enhanced security. Two processor variants are available to order; either an Intel Core Ultra 5 135H or an Intel Core Ultra 7 165H. These are Intel's latest chips and feature a dedicated Neural Processing unit. For conference calls, there is a newly designed Surface cam which is capable of 1080p and features Windows Hello for sign-in.

Alongside the Surface Laptop 6 was the announcement of the Surface Pro 10. Design remains identical to previous models. There are two Thunderbolt 4/ USB 4 ports, a Surface Connect port, and a Surface Keyboard port. Like the Surface Laptop 6, there is a Co-Pilot key on the keyboard although it looks as if one model comes with, and another comes without. The 13-inch display has a resolution of 2880 x 1920, 120Hz refresh rate and an anti-reflective coating for reducing reflections. They will come equipped with the same Intel Meteor Lake CPU's as the Laptop 6.

Both these laptops are being marketed by Microsoft as "their first AI PCs. According to Windows Central, Microsoft are in the process of developing a new AI focused experience for Windows 11. Internally the project is called "AI Explorer" and is an enhanced Co-Pilot that will catalogue everything that is done on the PC, allowing users to be able to search a timeline using natural language.

Both the new laptops launch for business on the 9th April. Surface Laptop 6 will start at £1,199.00/AU$2,199.00. Surface Pro 10 starts at £1,199.00/ AU$2,199.00.





VI

Another long awaited camera update was announced by Fujifilm recently. The previous X100V was an incredibly popular camera, which in recent years has been constantly on back-order and even selling for more on secondhand markets than its RRP due to Fuji's difficulties in keeping up with demand.

The X100 VI features a few major upgrades on the previous model. The first is the upgraded 40.2MP X-Trans CMOS 5 HR sensor, and X-Processor 5 previously seen on the X-H2 and X-T5.

Design wise, the X100 VI looks identical to the previous model with analogue controls familiar to any photographer; aperture controls on the lens, shutters speed and ISO. There is even a dial for exposure compensation. Size has increased a fraction enabling for the next feature that has been one of the most sought after by the community. Having listened to feedback, they and have managed to include a 5-axis IBIS mechanism that can offer up to 6.0 stops of stabilisation. Around the back is a 1.62 million dot tilting display making framing low or high viewpoint shots easier.

One disappointment on the new camera is that the lens has not been updated to complement the new 40MP sensor. The lens whichis a 2nd gen 23mm f/2 lens has been a decent performer, but a 3rd generation of lens would have been a welcome change. The autofocus improvements that have been made to recent gen cameras also feature, which Fuji continue to improve upon with firmware updates. Like all Fuji digital cameras there are plenty of film simulation modes that replicate the looks of Fuji's film stocks over the years.

The new X100 VI is available to order now for £1,599.00/ AU$2,899.00.