



STEVE TILLEY

Gadgets

Of mice and germs

Manufacturers provide a clean take on multiple-user computers

No matter how much you might like Disney mascot Mickey, *An American Tail's* Fievel or the talking mice from *Babe*, chances are you get creeped out by rodents scuttling around in garbage piles or (heaven forbid) behind the walls of your house.

But as nasty as they may be, the mice pooping in your cereal cupboard are likely a heck of a lot cleaner than the mice attached to most computers. Especially computers that are used by more than one person.

You know that guy in your office who never washes his hands after he goes to the bathroom? I saw him using your PC right before you sat down. I think he was Googling "hepatitis A," too.

Special germ-resistant computer mice are becoming more common in places such as hospitals and libraries, but some manufacturers are starting to target everyday users as well. Like Japanese company Elecom, which has developed the style-conscious, bacteria-resistant M-ABUR Clean Mouse.

Though we don't often see Elecom products on this side of the world (and

the \$40 Clean Mouse is only available through mail order), the company is known for its eye-catching and ergonomic designs, and this wee beastie is no different.

Appropriately shaped like a bar of soap and available in four colours, the Clean Mouse has a special antibacterial coating that inhibits the growth of microscopic nasties. It doesn't sanitize your hands, though, so you'll still need to wash them regularly. Which you ought to be doing anyway, Grosser McGrossout.

If a germ-resistant surface just doesn't cut it and you want to go all Howard Hughes on your mouse, the Belkin Washable Mouse (\$30) should be right up your alley.

The eye-catching two-tone mouse has a rubberized surface that actually feels quite comfortable in the hand, and it works exactly as you'd expect. It's watertight, so you can run it under a tap and clean it with mild soap, but it's not meant to be fully submersed or put in a dish-

washer.

The Washable Mouse's main downside is that it doesn't have a scroll wheel (the opening for a wheel would be an entry point for moisture), but instead features a hi-tech touch-sensitive scroll strip that takes some getting used to.

And if you're accustomed to clicking a scroll wheel to use it as a third button, you might be out of luck. The instruction manual says clicking both the left and right buttons simultaneously duplicates a scroll wheel click, but we simply couldn't get it to work.

At the end of the day, keeping your hands clean — and, by extension, the things you touch on a regular basis — definitely helps

stave off viruses and other nastiness, and it never hurts to err on the side of sanitation.

But germ-resistant mice might be going a bit overboard. Sure, we've seen the TV news reports about how filthy and bacteria-encrusted things such as telephones and computer peripherals can get, but think about it ... if these germs were really that bad, we'd *all* be sick, *all* the time.

Were that the case, the rodents might just take over completely ... and the squeak would inherit the Earth.

steve.tilley@sunmedia.ca



Belkin Washable Mouse

► **Verdict:** Stylish, responsive and easy to clean under running water, but the lack of a standard scroll wheel might vex those used to flicking and clicking. Windows PC and Mac compatible.

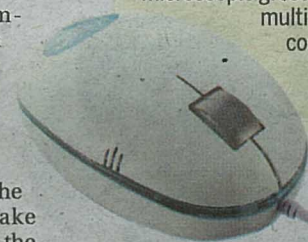
► **Price:** \$30 US plus shipping at www.belkin.com, coming soon to major Canadian electronics retailers.



Elecom M-ABUR Clean Mouse

► **Verdict:** Looks cute, feels great and has a bacteria-resistant surface that helps keep microscopic grossness from taking root and multiplying. Windows PC and Mac compatible.

► **Price:** \$40 US plus shipping at www.jbox.com/product/m-aburpk



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