Epson AcuLaser 2600N

Some ideas are good, some ideas are genius.
Mark Webster seriously lasers some paper

Epson's new laser printer is quite something. It ships as a mono laser printer, but it has four toner slots – this means you can put four black toner cartridges in for four times the black output (about 20,000 pages!) before changing toner or – and this is the 'genius' bit – you can put a cyan, magenta and yellow toner into the additional slots and voila! you have a full-colour laser printer.

Like most laser printers, it's a heavy beast and takes two people to get out of the box and into place.

Once set up, I followed the pictographic guide, which does take close attention. I persevered and made the grade, as the User Guide PDF takes up after you've set the printer up using the pictograms.
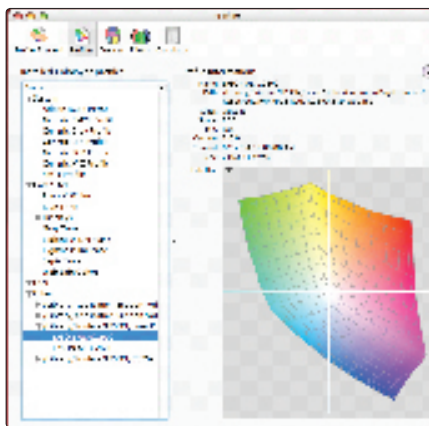
I turned the 2600N on and it prompted me, via the built-in LCD, for a toner cartridge. One after the other, cartridges were inserted. Remember; shut the cover each time so the printer can 'charge' it, then the built-in LCD prompts for the next (the toner slots are colour-coded and rotate to present themselves in the correct sequence). In about 12 minutes I had a fully operational colour laser printer.

Being connected to my G5 tower by a USB cable (not supplied) meant I could dispense with any of Epson's networking software or ethernet cables, as OS X allows you to share any connected printer (sure enough, all four Macs on my local network could use the AcuLaser effortlessly).

Of course, you have to load Epson's driver, which comes on a CD. With that done, I was a little mystified that I couldn't print in colour from a Adobe CS2 applications, although the built in OS X apps had no qualms.

So take note and do this immediately if you install one of these printers: open OS X's Printer Setup Utility (Applications> Utilities), choose Add Printer, allow a few seconds for the utility to find the AcuLaser driver (AL-2600), select it then click the ColorSync (sic) icon. This will boot OS X's ColorSync Utility.

Under Devices>Printers you should see the AcuLaser driver. Select it, then click the Profiles icon at the top, open Other in the left-hand pane, select the Epson AL-C2600 profile there and voila! Close the utility and you're in business.

And what business!

This laser is something else – it must be a long time since I looked at a laser printer because this thing prints in incredible detail, in black and white or colour. I was staggered by the fine tonal gradients and minutiae replicated on even plain A4. The 2600N can print on stiffer photo paper too, but make sure you load it into the side 'MP' tray as the lower tray only handles standard copy paper.

Printing a photograph on the finer settings throws your computer into some extended cogitation while it and the printer do the maths, but once that process is complete, the print spits out in one go. Confusingly, the bottom tray prints on the tops of the sheets and the side-tray on the underside …

Colour – because it's fused toner – is never going to be as intense as the colours on good glossy photo stock. That's a given, but crikey, it's very impressive all the same. The 2600N prints at 600dpi, but using Epson's RIT (resolution improvement technology) it achieves more like 2400dpi. Combined with Epson's proprietary PGI (Photo and Graphics Improvement) screen, grey scale and colour gradations are smooth as silk.

Verdict

An excellent, small laser with amazing capabilities at an outstanding price. You have to get paper loading right, and it really didn't like getting sent a job set to US Letter, for example, when the paper stock loaded was A4. This resulted in a paper jam necessitating paper removal and a panel being opened and closed before everything would work properly again (I suspect this issue may be ironed out in later software).

But with a fast 30ppm throughput in black and white, the ability to load two trays full of paper and with its very useful colour (7ppm)upgradeability, not to mention the 2600N prints in exquisite detail, this is a breakthrough product.

If I was running a small business, I sure would want one of these.

🟠 EPSON ACULASER 2600N

RRP (MONOCHROME UPGRADABLE TO COLOUR) $1575 OR (COLOUR) $1800. TONER $124 (BLACK, 5000 PAGES), COLOUR $281 EACH (5000 PAGE YIELD) OR $163 EACH (2000 PAGE YIELD)

DESCRIPTION Small footprint, colour-upgradeable, high capacity and fast black and white laser printer

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS Mac with a USB connector and/or ethernet, running Mac OS 9.x or OSX 10.1.2+ (Windows 98/Me/XP/2000/Server 2003, NT 4.0).

➕ Very useful capabilities
 Small, fast, powerful
 Amazing definition

➖ Particular about paper size
 in print jobs
 Noisy (like most lasers)

Aesthetics	7/10
New features	10/10
Stability	9/10
Value for money	9/10
Overall	**9/10**

Available from all good computer outlets/ Apple resellers. For more information and specifications, contact www.epson.co.nz