The leader in speed, quality, and manageability is the Xerox Phaser 4500DT. Rated at only 36 ppm, this printer blew away the competition for speed and was among the best for quality. And it's the second-cheapest printer in this roundup, at only $1,800, compared with others reaching beyond $4,000.

Xerox Phaser 4500DT.

Xerox Phaser 4500DT

36 ppm, 1,200 by 1,200 dpi, 8.5- by 14-inch maximum, $1,800 street. Xerox Corp., www.xerox.com/office. ●●●●○

The ideal network printer offers top speed and print quality, good management tools, easy installation, and a low price. And you might even want it to look good, too. The impressive Xerox Phaser 4500DT combines all of that in a beige box with some handsome blue highlights. It's rated at 36 ppm but managed to turn in the fastest timings of the entire group on our tests. And at just $1,800, it's the second-least-expensive printer in our roundup and a real bargain.

This little printer has a 17- by 16-inch footprint and weighs in at around 45 pounds. Setup is simple, and most users won't have to look at the documentation. The single cartridge holds the toner and the drum, making maintenance easy. The only nuisance is a removable lid that fits on the paper drawer: The lid protects the printer from dust because when the printer has legal paper in it, the drawer doesn't close all the way, leaving part of it exposed.

Network configuration is almost too easy to believe. One mouse click is practically all you need to install the printer on the server or for direct printing on a workstation: drivers, queues, share settings, the works. And setup is just about as easy on a client; use the standard Add Printer feature on Windows and it will find the printer on the network, download the driver, and configure everything for you. The print driver communicates with the printer and automatically enumerates the installed features.

The management software, CentreWare, is full-featured and among the easiest to use. You can reconfigure the printer, though the software doesn't have a front-panel emulation feature. And you can cancel only the current print job using the printer; you'll need to use Windows to control jobs in the queue. The printer stores records on print jobs for accounting purposes and can export this information in a comma-delimited text file from its built-in Web page, but the data is lost when the power is turned off, so this may be less robust than some installations require.

The Phaser 4500DT took first-place honors in speed, with a blazing 3:17 total output time and a good overall score of 6.8 for print quality, with only a little streaking and banding on large gray areas. Nearly all fonts were easily readable at 4 points, even in 600-dpi mode.

You get a lot for a little with the 4500DT. Full-featured and swift yet easy on the budget, this is the best of the breed among the latest network laser printers.—*AP* ≡