Road warriors looking to unite their SmartMedia-based digital cameras and PowerBooks have had a few options, based on the type of camera: direct cable connections via serial or USB ports, or external SmartMedia card readers. A third option is now available: the SmartMedia to PC Card Adapter, from Delkin Devices. This adapter card is a boon for any PowerBook G3-series user. Older PowerBooks, however, are a toss-up.

The SmartMedia to PC Card Adapter is part of Delkin Devices ePicture product line, which also includes a Compact Flash to PC Card Adapter, USB-based single and dual readers, a floppy drive adapter, and various sized SmartMedia and Compact Flash memory cards. The SmartMedia to PC Card Adapter accepts both 3.3 volt and 5 volt SmartMedia cards, which look identical to each other.

The card comes with a tough, impact resistant jewel case, and fairly detailed instructions -- for Windows. No Macintosh instructions are included. However, since it doesn't require any specific drivers, the lack of Macintosh documentation is less of an issue than it could be. Users experienced with PC cards should be able figure everything out. Still, Delkin should consider including some Mac-specific notes at some point, particularly since the external packaging notes compatibility with Apple's QuickTake cameras.

Using the card is simple enough: push the SmartMedia card into the adapter enough to make the eject button pop out, then slide the adapter into a free PC Card slot. It shouldn't matter if the PowerBook is on or off, but inserting the card when the PowerBook is in sleep mode will cause the PowerBook to freeze. Also, as with all PC cards, using one while running off of a
battery will consume a fair amount of power.

The device was tested on four PowerBooks: a Wallstreet G3/300 running Mac OS 9, a Lombard G3/333 running Mac OS 8.6, a 1400cs running Mac OS 8.6, and a 2400c running Mac OS 8.1. On the two PowerBook G3's and the 1400, the device mounted approximately three seconds after the card was inserted, and was displayed as a generic PC disk. Buried a couple folders deep were all the images from the camera, which were ready for viewing or transferring.

On the PowerBook 2400c, however, the device failed to mount at all. Instead, an error message came up stating that the volume was unrecognizable. Whether this can be attributed to a difference in operating systems or hardware is unknown. Both PC card slots on the 2400c were tested with other cards, ethernet and modem, and worked fine with those. Again, since the documentation didn't include any Macintosh-specific information, it was difficult to determine what the minimum system requirements might be and, as a result, what the problem was. Buyer beware with older operating systems or PowerBooks.

One thing to note is that you can't eject or insert SmartMedia cards into the adapter while it is in the PC Card slot. Doing so will lock-up the PowerBook. This, too, isn't mentioned in the documentation. Regardless, it's not a huge problem. When you need to change SmartMedia cards, simply put away both the SmartMedia's volume and the PC card, eject the PC card, then remove and insert your other SmartMedia card.

If you have a SmartMedia-based digital camera and a PowerBook G3, Delkin's SmartMedia to PC Card Adapter is a no-brainer. Although it costs nearly as much as some external, USB-based card readers that handle both SmartMedia and Compact Flash, the extreme portability and convenience of the device more than make up for the cost. Users of older PowerBooks should proceed with caution, as the adapter may not work with your PowerBook.