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PowerBook: Jumpy or Erratic Trackpad Operation (2/97)

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TOPIC -----

The cursor on my PowerBook keeps jumping or moving where I do not want it to without my touching it. It also acts strangely when I do touch it. I have tried cleaning both the Trackpad itself and my finger, using a tissue between my finger and the Trackpad.

I am not wearing any jewelry, using any hand lotion, or sweating a lot from my hands. Also, the Trackpad reacts the same way with any one of the many different people who use this computer. What else could be wrong?

Is there something wrong with the Trackpad or am I doing something wrong?

DISCUSSION -----

The trackpad on the PowerBook 190, 500, 2300, 1400, 3400*, and 5300 series computers works on a principal called coupling capacitance. As your finger moves over the surface, the trackpad evaluates the change in capacitance between two layers of measurement electrodes built into the surface of the trackpad.

Make sure only one part of your finger is touching the pad. You will not be able to use a pen or other object, it is designed to work with your finger. Also make sure that you are not resting your wrist on or very close to the pad. The trackpad may interpret this as your wrist touching it and make the cursor move in that direction. If you suspect either of these is causing the cursor's behavior, try raising your wrist in the air and only touch the pad with the tip of your finger. If the symptom goes away then you know that one of the above is the cause and you should adjust the position of your wrist and or finger.

If you have sweaty hands or if moisture collects on the pad, this may also confuse the trackpad. Wiping off the trackpad with a cloth or tissue will usually fix this problem. If the problem goes away when a piece of paper is put in between the finger and trackpad you may want to consider purchasing a Teflon applique to fit over the pad to prevent the moisture from having direct contact with the trackpad. Before installing the Teflon applique, make sure the trackpad is clean and dry. You can use a mild glass cleaner sprayed onto the cloth, not onto the trackpad itself to clean the trackpad. If the problem is still happening with a piece of paper in between the finger and trackpad try removing the trackpad preferences from the Preferences folder in the System folder.

Oil or lotion can also cause the same problem. Either do not use hand lotion, or consider purchasing a Teflon pad to protect the trackpad. Before installing the Teflon pad, make sure the trackpad is clean and dry.

Jewelry may also cause interference. Try removing rings or bracelets and see if the jumping or erratic behavior disappears.

Apple has had some reports of the strange behavior you describe about power supplies made by a company called Battery Technology, Inc. (BTI)**. If you are using one of these power supplies, unplug it and try running from just the Apple NiMH battery to see how the Trackpad behaves. Also try using the Apple AC Adapter instead of the third-party AC Adapter. If the Trackpad behaves normally running from just the Apple battery or with the Apple AC Adapter, there is most likely a problem with your third-party power supply.

* Note: The trackpad used in the PowerBook 3400 series computers was designed to be much more tolerant than previous models of moisture and other environmental factors. The issues mentioned in this article should have little or no impact on this redesigned and improved trackpad.

** This article provides some information about a non-Apple product. Apple Computer, Inc. is not responsible for its content. Please contact the third-party vendor for more information.

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