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Acer TravelMate 4285WLMi

With 3G built-in, this should be a must have for business users, but is it?

by Stephen Patrick published on 29 January 2007

Acer has a worthy reputation for delivering machines before the rest of the market has even considered it, so the arrival of a built-in 3G SIM card is something others have mooted but are still to fully put into production. It also comes as no surprise that Acer has decided to put the card into one of its business machines, the TravelMate 4285WLMi. The curious thing is, weighing in at 3kg; this isn't exactly the lightest machine in the range. The notebook ships with a Vodafone SIM card, and depending on your needs there are a variety of tariffs available with the standard data rate starting at £25 a month.

When we were forced to carry it around, we managed to get over 3 hours of life from the battery, so the TravelMate is ideal if you need to write reports on the go and then email them into the office. We were a little disappointed with the build quality of the machine as it didn't feel as sturdy as other TravelMates in the range. Being aimed at the traveller, we'd have liked more protection behind the screen and a more robust feel to the plastic casing.

The 15.4-inch TFT screen is a standard panel, so you won't find a glossy coating causing reflections but it's bright enough and the screen had an even tone across it. It proved bright and clear and good value for the price. Graphics come courtesy of the Nvidia GeForce Go 7600 adapter, which is in keeping with the price range of the machine and is a mainstream card, so you'll be able to use it for average games as well as work tasks and watching DVDs.

The keyboard isn't the standard shape you'd find on a laptop, as Acer ship its business machines with a keyboard layout that is curved by 5 degrees. For the average user, this means the keys are in a slightly more ergonomic position for typing. It takes a little growing accustomed too but



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as the keys are well fixed and have a solid feel as you type it's a welcome touch. The touchpad mirrors the widescreen shape of the screen, which makes navigation a little easier.

Where the strength of this notebook lies is in its performance. Powered by an Intel Core 2 Duo T5500 (1.66GHz), which is a mid-range chip, it's fast enough for most tasks and is a compromise between price and performance. Backed by 1024MB of memory and a 120GB hard drive, you won't need to upgrade for some time.

VERDICT

The Acer TravelMate 4285WLMi is a very much a mixed bag in terms of performance and usability. While it's certainly worth the asking price for its performance and battery life alone, we felt that it doesn't really live up to its potential. A notebook with built-in 3G should offer true mobile freedom, which means portability as well as battery life and the TravelMate only half delivers.

At a glance

What is it?

3G notebook

Good

Great battery life, 3G built-in

Bad

Heavy, flimsy finish

Verdict

Acer's first 3G notebook is something of a mixed bag: it's great value for money but it's too heavy and not solidly built enough to carry around every day

Price £1000

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10