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Sony VAIO VGN-NR21Z/T notebook

Does the latest Vaio impress?

by Stephen Patrick published on 2 June 2008

Sony has been making notebooks since 1999 and until recently only played in the high-end market. Increasingly, the company is launching lower priced portables that meet the needs of the more mainstream audience.

The Sony VAIO VGN-NR21Z/T is a great example. It's not the most stylish of notebooks, being rather understated but the plastic chassis feels more than robust enough for carrying around. The palm rests and lid have a textured finish to them that give it a unique look.

Fitted with a 15.4-inch screen that comes with an X-black finish - this is Sony's name for a Super-TFT coating to make images look sharper and colours brighter. It certainly works, as we found our test DVD looked stunning on this machine. An Intel X3100 card supports the panel, which is integrated, so won't necessarily handle anything more than daily tasks.

The size of the screen limits the portability of the machine and with an overall weight of 2.9kg; you won't really want to carry this machine around all day. With a battery life of well over 3 hours, we were impressed at how well this machine coped with being away from mains power.

However, what really impresses with this machine is the keyboard. Large and well spaced, the keys have plenty of travel to them as you type and they feel reassuringly firm. Each key has a raised centre, so even if you are not the most confident of typists, you'll find it hard not to strike the right key.

It is not just the build that makes this Sony notebook a winner because when it comes to performance, this system really delivers. Powered by an Intel Core 2 Duo T8100, which runs at 2.1GHz, and fitted with 3072MB of memory, we found that applications loaded quickly and even



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running multiple tasks ran smoothly. The 250GB hard drive means you can store plenty of media files and is great value for the price.

Shipping with Windows Vista Home Premium Edition, we found the OS was a little slow to load but the overall performance of the system was acceptable.

If there is one area that disappoints it is in the connections Sony has opted to include. You won't find a webcam, which is rather commonplace these days and Bluetooth is lacking, so you won't be able to synchronise your mobile phone. More alarming is the choice of VGA-out port for connecting to external devices, as we were hoping for a digital port, either DVI-out or HDMI.

Sony has included support for the latest wireless LAN, as the Wi-Fi card supports 802.11n, while the fixed Ethernet is the standard 10/100 Base-T connection.

VERDICT

The Sony VAIO VGN-NR21Z/T is a great machine for anyone looking for a powerful notebook to replace your desktop PC. Sure, it lacks decent graphics and digital connections but for the asking price you get a great keyboard, screen and specification in return.

At a glance

What is it?

Mid-range notebook

Good

Good battery price, value for money, decent specification

Bad

Lacks digital connections, poor graphics

Verdict

An understated design with a great keyboard and good screen that delivers all-round value for money

Price £699

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10