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Sony VAIO VGN-AR61E notebook

Could this replace your desktop?

by Stephen Patrick published on 4 August 2008

At one time the VAIO VGN-AR61E was the flagship model of the Sony range. The basic design has now been around for well over 18 months and this latest version is merely an upgrade.

The black box is made from plastic but the build quality is high and the overall feel is solid. This is a big machine that weighs in at 4kg but the sheer size of the case makes it feel bulkier. It packs in a 17-inch Super-TFT screen, which Sony calls X-black, and colour contrast is sharp and the panel bright.

For such a big screen we were hoping for a higher resolution than the 1440 x 900-pixel resolution rated, so whilst not full HD, we found standard definition movies looked good.

Graphics are provided by the Nvidia GeForce 8400M GT, which is a satisfactory card for the price. It's a fairly standard and mainstream card, so while you won't be able to play anything too taxing, it'll handle most online games with a decent frame rate.

The keyboard is a good size and the keys have a reasonable feel to them as you type. We found on our sample that the keys tended to rattle as we typed, which isn't something we were expecting from a VAIO. What's more, there is plenty of space to fit a numeric keypad but Sony hasn't seen fit to add one, which we feel is an oversight.

Sony has constantly emphasised the multimedia aspects of its notebooks. So much so, the company bundles a whole host of software with its machines and the VAIO VGN-AR61E is no exception.

The tools included cover everything from audio tools, such as SonicStage Mastering Studio 2.4 to VAIO Music Box, to video and image editing



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tools, including Adobe Premiere Elements 4, WinDVD 8.0 for VAIO and DivX Player & Converter. Every day tools include Microsoft Works 8.5 and CD-DVD Burning Easy Media creator 9.

So, Sony hasn't skimped on the extra features, however, in order to take advantage of the more high-end tools, you need a high-end processing machine but sadly on the level, the Sony fails to delivers.

Sure, it's got a dual-core processor the Intel 1.66GHz Core 2 Duo T5450 and it's backed by 2048MB of memory and for daily use it's fine. However, we were hoping this machine would be a portable powerhouse but it simply lacks the power. The 200GB hard drive is a decent amount of space for the asking price. There is also a DVD rewriter fitted as standard.

Ports on the side of the machine consist of an HDMI port, and there's also S-Video and VGA-out ports for older displays. However, there are just three USB ports, which limits the number of devices you can hook up to this big machine.

VERDICT

The Sony VAIO VGN-AR61E proves that there is more to making a good multimedia machine than simply matching a big screen with plenty of software. While the build quality is good, the keyboard is something of a mixed blessing. However, we were disappointed with the specification - it is fine if you're looking for a budget option but it won't meet the needs of anyone looking to run high-end tasks.

At a glance

What is it?

Desktop replacement

Good

Good screen, solid build

Bad

Heavy, average specification

Verdict

A big and solid machine that lacks the power to be a real desktop alternative

Price £610

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10