

Sony VAIO VGN-NR31J/S notebook

Can Sony keep pace in the budget stakes?

by Stephen Patrick published on 11 August 2008

Sony is best known for its ultraportable notebooks, which are among the best on the market. It hasn't fared so well with its more cost-effective machines, largely due to their specification never matching the rest of the crowd.

Take the Sony VAIO VGN-NR31J/S, it's a great looking machine that looks like it would make a great desktop replacement. This is a big machine made from plastic but Sony has given it a woven pattern that adds to the style of it. It has a 15.4-inch X-black screen that looks great whether running movies or simply surfing the web. We found it bright in most conditions but it does cast a great deal of reflection in bright conditions. It is best used for watching movies on, as the colour reproduction is first rate.

It is backed by the Nvidia GeForce 8400M graphics card, which is more than capable of handling mainstream games. We used it for an impromptu online gaming session and found it handled Rainbow Six with a fair degree of success.

So far so good, but when you look at the main processing power, this machine doesn't really stack-up. At £560, we were expecting more than the Intel Pentium Dual Core T2390 chip. Sure, it's dual-core but it's a budget chip and even the addition of 2048MB of memory won't help the multimedia aspects of this machine.

Weighing in at 2.9kg, it's not intended to be used as a portable machine, which is lucky as we only managed to get 2 hours from the battery pack. Considering it fills the back of the machine we were hoping for something a little more productive.

The keyboard is a great size and the keys are



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almost full size. The square keys have a raised mounting, making miss-strikes less likely to happen. However, the keys have a good deal of travel, so you need to really press them to get the most out of the keyboard. If you're a touch-typist you won't like this keyboard at all.

Sony has kept the cost of the machine down by only adding the most basic of feature. So, you'll find a DVD rewriter is built-in, as is an ExpressCard port and there are four USB ports and a single mini-FireWire slot. Ethernet and wireless LAN use the current base standards, which is fine but doesn't allow room for future upgrades to your home network.

VERDICT

The Sony VAIO VGN-NR31J/S is a good-looking notebook that certainly makes an impression. We were hoping that it would make a cost-effective desktop alternative. Sadly, we found it too under-powered for most needs but what was worse was the sluggish and poorly responding keyboard.

At a glance

What is it?

Budget notebook

Good

Great, solid design, nice screen, good graphics

Bad

Sluggish keyboard, slow performance

Verdict

This is an attractive notebook with a good screen but it lacks power to make it a true multimedia machine

Price £549

Our score

6/10

Your score

?/10