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Dell Studio 15 notebook

Does the funky new line deliver?

by Stephen Patrick published on 8 October 2008

Dell took the world by storm when it introduced its portable XPS range last year. The portables gathered so many plaudits it was inevitable the line would be broadened. The Studio line takes the same styling as the XPS machines but uses cheaper components and a pure plastic finish to offer the looks but not the attention to detail of the XPS.

That's not to say the Dell Studio 15 isn't a good machine in its own right, it's simply a more budget-orientated notebook. It still has the same wedged design as the XPS and you'll even find a slot-loading DVD rewriter in place. However, the grey plastic finish, while tough, is less inspiring.

The keyboard is a good size, with the keys having plenty of space around them. However, corners have been cut, as we found the keys rattled as we typed and being a membrane board, it means the middle keys are higher than the keys around the edges.

The 15.4-inch Super-TFT screen is the most popular choice of panel, as it offers a great compromise between size and portability. This is an LED screen, so is thinner but brighter than conventional fluorescent tube screens and delivers a great colour contrast. We found this screen was bright enough for office documents, delivering crisp whites, but still offered a broad enough colour range for movies.

Graphics are handled by the ATI Mobility Radeon HD 3450 graphics card, which delivers reasonable performance for a budget machine. You won't be able to play games or run serious movie editing software but as long as your needs are basic, it'll handle day-to-day duties with ease.

The Dell Studio 15 weighs 2.8kg, making it a reasonably portable machine for the size of



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screen. We were less than impressed with the battery life of this machine, as it didn't even manage to last 3 hours. Better suited to being used around the house rather than on the move, this also became apparent in terms of performance.

At this price, performance is on the light side. Sure, there is a dual-core processor, in this instance the Intel Core 2 Duo T8100 (2.1GHz), that is supported by 2048MB of memory and 160GB hard drive. Performance is adequate for basic tasks but we found that running anything too taxing slowed the machine down to a crawl.

Extras include the already mentioned slot-loading DVD rewriter, but there is also Gigabit Ethernet, 802.11n wireless LAN, four USB ports. For hooking up to digital screens or TVs you'll find an HDMI port, while for older devices the VGA-out port is fitted as standard. It ships with Windows Vista Home Premium as standard, which we found loaded quickly and smoothly.

VERDICT

The Dell Studio 15 is a reasonable compromise between portability and price. The screen is great and the keyboard highly usable. However, battery life is poor and performance, at this price, is satisfactory rather than outstanding.

At a glance

What is it?

Mid-range notebook

Good

Great screen, decent performance

Bad

Poor battery life

Verdict

It looks like an expensive XPS but this is the budget offering and is reflected in price and performance

Price £650

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10