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HP HDX16-1010EA notebook

Can this smaller desktop replacement perform?

by Stephen Patrick published on 30 December 2008

HP's HDX range is the company's flagship multimedia brand, going head-to-head with established rivals such as Toshiba's Qosmio and Sony's new VAIO AW series. Up until recently, the only machine available was the 20.1-inch HDX Dragon, a desktop replacement "laptop" so huge you could replace your actual desk, let alone desktop PC, with it.

The HDX16 is a far more portable affair, yet still packed with features that make it an ideal family media centre. As the name suggests, you'll find a 16-inch display, with the whole laptop weighing in at a semi-portable 3.4kg. Definitely more mobile than the Dragon, then, but still not a laptop we'd want to cart round everywhere.

The display is excellent for watching films on, helped by its widescreen 16:9 aspect ratio. The full 1080p resolution is a nice touch, rendering images in perfect crispness and allowing high-definition playback. It does result in text and icons that are incredibly small in the native resolution, however.

If you do decide to take the HDX on the road with you, the screen isn't quite so good. It's covered in an acrylic coating that stretches right to the very edge of the bezel - similar in style to the display on HP's MiniNote Netbook - and the result is highly reflective, also revealing dust and prints.

We found the HDX16 on par with its rivals when it came to gaming and media use, aided by the same mainstream Nvidia GeForce 9600M GT graphics card found in Toshiba's Qosmio G50 and Sony's VAIO AW. As such, you'll be able to play all the latest games, but will need to turn down detail settings in demanding titles such as Crysis. When carrying out video and photo editing work, we didn't encounter any trouble at all, thanks to 512MB of dedicated graphics memory



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and 4096MB of system memory.

When it comes to features, this is every bit the multimedia machine. There's a DVB-T digital TV tuner built-in, along with an integrated Blu-ray drive for watching high-definition movies.

Although it's read-only, you will be able to burn data to regular blank CDs and DVDs. It also features LightScribe technology. Other features include Bluetooth and an integrated fingerprint reader. There are four USB ports for adding peripherals, along with a 5-in-1 memory card reader, ExpressCard 54 slot, VGA and HDMI ports, Gigabit Ethernet and 802.11n Wi-Fi.

As with most media centre laptops, you'll find a bank of hotkeys on the chassis itself, letting you control DVDs at the touch of a button. HP has also packed an ExpressCard-sized remote into the chassis, and a full media centre remote for use in the home.

Speakers are provided by Altec Lansing, and include a subwoofer. We found sound quality surprisingly good, with enough volume and bass for watching TV programmes. As always, we'd still rather hook up some external speakers when watching films though, which add a more impressive atmospheric effect.

This laptop makes giant strides over the HDX Dragon when it comes to style, replacing the bulbous chassis of the original HDX with a much slimmer and tidy design. You'll still find HP's Imprint finish, with glossy, patterned plastics in place, but the use of darker colours contrasts a lot better with the chrome highlights, with a high-quality feel running throughout the machine.

The large keyboard features a soft finish, offering excellent comfort. Responding with a shallow typing action, the big keys are great for touch-typing. There's a full numeric keypad alongside. As with the palm rests and most other areas of the HDX16, the touchpad has a high-gloss surface, but we found a surprising amount of

At a glance

What is it?

Semi-portable widescreen media centre laptop

Good

Stylish, great screen, feature-packed, semi-portable media centre

Bad

Expensive, reflective display, battery life

Verdict

Oodles of style and packed with features, but this comfortable media centre isn't cheap

Price £978

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10

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friction, making a USB or Bluetooth mouse a more attractive option.

Processing power turned out to be excellent, handling all our daily tasks with ease. This wasn't entirely expected, as the 2.26GHz Intel Core 2 Duo P8400 is a little run of the mill at this price. The major disappointment performance-wise is the battery life, and we struggled to get over 2hrs 30mins between charges. The 320GB hard drive is large by regular standards, but lags behind the storage space offered by bigger rivals featuring dual-drives.

VERDICT

If you're after a multimedia laptop but want something a little smaller than Toshiba's Qosmio or the Sony VAIO AW, then the HDX16 is well worth a look, not least because of the style, comfort and features on offer. We were also deeply impressed by the pin-sharp screen and useful everyday performance.

Sure, it's not cheap, but it's a good all-round package from a premium manufacturer, and one we'd be happy to have in our living room. Just beware if you're seeking a powerful machine for use on the road, as the poor battery life and reflective display limit mobility somewhat.