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HP Compaq Mini 703EA notebook

A netbook to keep you connected on the move?

by Stephen Patrick published on 6 April 2009

We thought HP's original Mini-note 2133 netbook was a great machine, offering one of the best keyboards available on a netbook. The Compaq Mini 703EA looks to continue the trend, also bringing more up-to-date internals and a change of colours.

The 10.2-inch screen features the now-standard 1024 x 600 pixel netbook resolution - a shame considering the higher 1280 x 768 pixel panel found on the Mini-note's display. We didn't really miss the extra pixels during daily use - it can be a bit more work when viewing web pages, with the need to scroll more often, but that aside we never found it an issue.

Colour reproduction is excellent, helped by LED backlighting, making it a great choice for watching films or viewing your photographs on.

Unfortunately, it's also one of the most reflective panels we've seen on a netbook, limiting use when on the road. It's more than viewable in bright conditions if you whack up the brightness settings to full, but this obviously impacts on battery life.

Along with the lower-res screen, one of the biggest changes between this netbook and its predecessor is swap from a Via chipset to an Intel solution. Incorporating an Intel GMA 950 graphics sub-system and the more standard Intel Atom processor found in most other netbooks, battery life jumps to around 3 hours - a vast improvement on HP's original 3-cell netbook, and close to the 4 hours we managed from a 6-cell Mini-note 2133.

Performance has also improved over the Mini-note 2133, with the Mini 703EA featuring Windows XP in place of Windows Vista. With 1024MB of memory - as with its Intel-based rivals - and 60GB hard drive you'll be able to load and run applications in a reasonable amount of time,



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although it remains a machine better suited to consuming, rather than creating, media.

A dark chequered pattern adorns the rear of the 703EA's lid, with a glossy finish that proves to be a magnet for grubby fingerprints. It doesn't feel quite as robust as the original Mini-note, but it's still a lot sturdier than most of its rivals. The black finish inside the chassis is classy yet conservative.

As with the Mini-note 2133, the best part of the Compaq Mini is the keyboard, and it's difficult to believe you'll find larger keys on any other netbook. The keys are actually bigger than most ultraportable laptops, and a responsive and firmly attached typing action makes this one of the few netbooks that you can comfortably type on for hours.

Not so the touchpad, which loses height due to the large size of the keyboard. The touchpad buttons are also located on each side of the touchpad, which takes some getting used to, and it's not the most intuitive set-up we've seen.

One area this machine falls short of its rivals is ports, with a USB port on either side of the chassis, a 10/100 Ethernet port and a 2-in-1 memory card reader. Unusually there's no VGA-out port, so you won't be able to hook-up a display.

That's not to say it's completely devoid of features, however, as wireless connectivity is better than average. You'll find HSDPA technology built-in, offering broadband on the move, and Bluetooth lets you connect peripherals wirelessly. Wi-Fi is limited to 802.11b/g - rather than 802.11n - although it still offers reasonable performance.

VERDICT

As with its predecessor, the HP Compaq Mini 703EA is the default choice for those who place typing comfort above all else in a netbook. It's still

At a glance

What is it?

10.2-inch netbook

Good

Huge keys, style, small size

Bad

Average battery life, compromised touchpad

Verdict

With an astoundingly good keyboard, the Compaq Mini 703EA is one of the most comfortable netbooks you can buy. Other features are less out of the ordinary, however.

Price £399

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10

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not the perfect all-rounder - lacking the all-day battery life of the Asus Eee PC 1000HE, or the great connectivity of the Samsung NC10, but the quality finish, great screen and integrated HSDPA make it an appealing proposition for those with a little more money to spend on a netbook.