

Acer Aspire One 751 notebook

Down and dirty with the 11.6-incher

by Chris Hall published on 6 May 2009

We've already fallen into the trap of calling this "the 11.6", a name that has something of an ethereal quality, and certainly rolls off the tongue better than Aspire One 751: after all, there is a whole family of "Ones".

Previous Aspire One models haven't exactly been exciting in the design department, but now perhaps companies are starting to see the real benefits of a compelling netbook offering, we are seeing more adventurous designs. The 751, we think, is a perfect example of this.

Rather than taking a straight-up rectangular footprint, we find daring angles and the sort of attention to detail that you find on much higher-end devices. The angled back corners on which you'll find the Ethernet and VGA ports aren't common, but certainly look good. The way the standard 3-cell battery has been designed to slot-in under and between the screen hinges is a nice touch and perhaps a necessary one.

Changing the shape of the battery allows maximum use of the space inside the chassis for the rest of the hardware: space that is badly needed, because the 751 is skinny in all dimensions. At the back, at the fattest point, it only manages to be 25mm thick. It tapers down towards the front edge with a bit of neat styling which holds up the illusion of a very slim device - and also makes it easy to grab off the desk as you can get your fingers under it.

The screen only manages to make up 8mm of the thickness but it is also obvious that this isn't a premium product: the lid feels distinctly flexible - so much so that you can easily distort the screen by bending the lid around. The skin on the lid also feels a little too light, so a protective case might need to be your first accessory.

But those 11.6-inches of screen give you a



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beautifully bright, crisp 1366 x 768 pixel, 16:9 aspect, display. It's LED backlit too, which is rapidly becoming the norm, drawing on the battery much more efficiently. It has a glossy finish, so reflections are a problem in bright conditions.

We're definitely sold on the dimensions however - 11.6 inches, at this resolution, means you can fit an awful lot on the screen, really bringing internet video to life, giving enough space to view images, or create a document without having to scroll around too much.

But this isn't a multimedia PC or gamer, despite sporting the larger screen. Sitting at the core of this netbook is the Intel Atom Z520, running at 1.33GHz and backed by 1GB of RAM. Graphics are handled by the US15W chipset. The result, unfortunately, isn't fantastic, with the 751 feeling a little underpowered if you ask it to do any serious work.

Despite that high definition screen, it stumbled and refused to play 720p content from a pocket camcorder and didn't want to play HD content on YouTube either. It was perfectly happy with SD content however, including that from BBC iPlayer, so it's not all bad, but you need to be aware of its limits.

Photo viewing, however, is much better, so you can at least look at the images captured on your digital camera, just by throwing the memory card into the reader on the right-hand side (SD, xD, MS, MMC). The 751 is well appointed with other connections too: you get 3x USB 2.0 ports scattered around the chassis for your peripherals, the mic and headphone jacks lie on the left-hand side within easy reach, and inside you get b/g Wi-Fi and Bluetooth.

Hiding around the back, under the battery, you'll find the slot for the 3G card, should you happen to have a version with a 3G modem installed. Unfortunately our test model didn't, so we can't

At a glance

What is it?

11.6-inch netbook

Good

Screen resolution, design, lightweight

Bad

Keyboard, lacks power, construction a little too flimsy

Verdict

We want to love it: it looks great out and about, but has so many issues, it is a nightmare to live with

Price £379.99

Our score

6/10

Your score

?/10

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comment on performance or the software that would manage this.

So on to the keyboard. Acer have opted for a flat keyboard, rather than one that uses tapered keys. The result leaves a lot to be desired, because it is like typing on the back of a sponge, with the whole keyboard bending and flexing under the fall of your fingers. The keys are a reasonable size though, so easy enough to hit, but it lacks the positive experience that you'll need if you want to do a fair amount of typing, which you typically do with a netbook.

There are the usual array of shortcuts dotted around the keyboard, however, operated by hitting the Fn key. On the leading edge you'll find toggle keys for Bluetooth and Wi-Fi.

The touchpad is too small to allow you to navigate the entire screen without several touches, and the single bar across the bottom (which does give you both left and right clicks) is pretty small too, but works well enough. There is "multi-gesture" on the trackpad, but it didn't seem easy to use or offer any great functions - we're a dab hand at multi-touch on Apple's MacBook and Acer don't come close to that experience.

You get 160GB of hard drive to store all your content and you'll find the normal webcam and mic included in the bezel so you can video conference to your heart's content. We tested the Windows XP version.

Overall, the design is rather nice, sitting together well, with the black of the inside, complementing the skin on the outside. The interesting angles and quirks make it an attractive, edgy, netbook - it certainly stands out. The all-plastic construction does make it extremely light, about 1.25kg light, but that's with the 3-cell, 2200mAh battery.

Battery life is a killer point in netbooks and it is a shame that you'll only achieve the cited 8 hours of life if you buy the additional 6-cell, 5200mAh

battery. From the standard battery we squeezed just over 3 hours. Once you add in Wi-Fi or 3G, perhaps Bluetooth too, then it will come in well below this figure, making it rather average in this sector.

The onboard speakers are reasonable, beating many smaller rivals, and the headphone offering is boosted by Dolby, so it sounds great too.

VERDICT

When we come to summing-up our feelings about the 751 it is difficult. We want to love it: it looks great out and about, but has so many issues, it is a nightmare to live with.

Yes, the increased screen size is welcomed, but there isn't the performance boost to support it, so it still stumbles through HD content. Sure there could be the opportunity to boost the RAM, but it needs to be remembered that this is still a humble netbook.

And then there is the keyboard. The last thing you want when you are travelling light is a keyboard that isn't nice to type on. If this is a netbook that is only going to sit in a bedroom and browse the Internet then this might not be a problem, however, if this is a business travelling companion, then bashing out wordy reports will be no fun at all.

Overall it's slightly disappointing then, as we had high hopes for the 751. It looks stunning, but the performance isn't compelling enough to make us part with our cash. The crown for the king of the 11.6-inchers is still available.