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Dell Studio 1555 notebook

Still one of the best mid-range laptops?

by Stephen Patrick published on 25 May 2009

Dell's Studio 15 has been around for a little while now, impressing on a number of levels. The widespread adoption of 16:9 widescreen displays meant it was only a matter of time before a major update appeared, and the latest Studio 1555 has a lot to live up to.

The 15.4-inch screen featured on the original Studio 15 has been replaced by a 15.6-inch item, boasting a 1366 x 768 pixel resolution. Having seen this resolution on a number of smaller machines, it looks overly large on a screen of this size, and images could be sharper. That said, there's still plenty of space to open a couple of applications side by side.

Colour reproduction is excellent, aided by LED backlighting and a glossy Super-TFT coating, and as with many laptops we've seen recently the wider aspect ratio is perfect for watching films on. Business users may lament the lack of standard TFT option, however, with reflections proving typically intrusive in sunny conditions.

The wider screen offers more space for the keyboard, but Dell has decided to stick with the same interface as the previous Studio 15. This is no bad thing, as it's one of the most comfortable keyboards we've seen on a mainstream laptop. The keys offer a decent amount of travel, yet also prove responsive and firmly attached. Backlighting is provided, which is still an unusual feature outside of high-end laptops, making it possible to work in poor lighting conditions.

There's no sign of the touch-sensitive media buttons above the keyboard - a strange choice considering the suitability of the new widescreen display when it comes to playing DVDs. In their place, you'll find several of the function keys dedicated to controlling your media files. It works, but it's not as neat a solution as the hotkeys found on previous Studio models.



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Despite the change in screen size and shape, the Studio 1555 looks near identical to the Studio 1525. You'll find the same wedge-shaped profile, hardwearing rubber lid, and tough plastics used for the chassis itself. The lid is available in a range of colours, including black, blue and red. You can also opt for some less subtle hues, including lime green, purple and "flamingo pink".

You'll find the latest components within the chassis, and 3D performance is better than average thanks to an ATi Mobility Radeon HD 4570 graphics card with 512MB of dedicated video memory. We found ourselves able to play the latest games, even including notoriously demanding titles such as Crysis, although detail settings had to be turned down to get the best out of it.

Office performance is also excellent, helped by a high-end 2.4GHz Intel Core 2 Duo P8600 processor and 4096MB of memory. We found Windows Vista ran smoothly at all times, and it's possible to run a host of applications before there's any sign of lag. A battery life of around 4 hours from a 6-cell unit is better than its predecessor, and helps to provide usability for the daily commute. Rounding off the specification is a generous 500GB hard drive.

The Studio 1555 boasts comprehensive networking features, with 802.11n Wi-Fi and Gigabit Ethernet both in place. Bluetooth is also included, along with three USB ports, an ExpressCard slot and a 1394 Firewire port for adding peripherals. There's also an eSATA port for backing up your files to external hard drives. An external display can be added by either VGA or HDMI.

As with other Dell Studio models, on the right-hand side of the chassis sits a slot-loading DVD drive, which can be upgraded to a read-only Blu-ray drive for £100, or a rewritable Blu-ray drive for £280.

VERDICT

Subtle revisions to Dell's Studio 15 means it's not Pocket-lint.com, the premier gadget news and reviews website in the UK

At a glance

What is it?

15.6-inch notebook

Good

Good value for money, excellent quality and usability

Bad

Still not the cheapest machine, lowish screen resolution

Verdict

A great all-rounder, the Dell Studio 1555 offers excellent performance, quality and usability, making it a machine that's well worth a second look

Price £734

Our score

8/10

Your score

5/10

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that different to its predecessor, which isn't a problem: it already offered better styling than most and excellent value for money. A great keyboard and impressive quality means it remains one of the best mainstream laptops you can buy.