

MSI Wind U115 Hybrid notebook

Next-gen netbook for next-gen users?

by Richard Knight published on 29 May 2009

MSI's latest netbook comes along boasting a long battery life and large storage with a quirky exclusive edge over the competition. Do all the specifications on paper match up with real life use, or do the claims of the manufacturer fall short in delivering what's promised?

First of all, the overall look and build of the new Wind U115 Hybrid does appear to be very similar to HP's attempt at the netbook, which was first seen around the middle of last year and wasn't as popular as some would have hoped. Hewlett-Packard's offering in the market also came along with a silver chassis, plus a long black keyboard that took up the entire width of the base.

Although many of the similarities stopped there, none more so than seen in the weight, with the HP machine almost feeling as if it were nearly double mass of others around at the time. In contrast, MSI's U115 weighs in at a very light 1kg, very much under the average netbook offering by most vendors today.

The battery life is most definitely a clear winner in the Wind U115 Hybrid device, all thanks to the dual operating mode of the netbook itself. All rather ingeniously, MSI has bundled in a SSD and a HDD where the latter can be disabled in its "ECO mode", all to save power and prolong the battery life of the U115 - if and when needed.

MSI are aiming the 160GB HDD as the device's main storage place, where the 8GB SSD is the primary hard drive for the system where all the applications are run from. This setup is designed to operate much like your computer's partitions, with the SSD being the one where the OS is based and the HDD where all your large files are housed all due to its much larger capacity.

Aside from the dual hard drives, the U115 is reasonably standard, with an Intel Atom Z530



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processor running at 1.6GHz, with 1GB RAM. Graphics are handled by the Intel US15W chipset, starting to make an appearance in the latest generation of netbooks.

The U115 boasts a decent 10-inch LCD low-powered backlit display, capable of a 1024 x 600 resolution, all of which suits the device. Others have tried to fit in a larger screen, on their smaller systems and have failed. After some time in use you realise MSI has manage to get the formula right.

MSI claims the Wind U115 Hybrid can handle playback of HD video. We discovered HD video in YouTube was displayed effortless, although the portable computer struggled immensely running BBC iPlayer's HD content. The picture was very jerky indeed, as the U115 had trouble handling the video streams even when they were cached to a very high degree. Normal content from the on demand service was fine, with a display very much suited to the screen size anyway so there's no major loss there.

Its long black keyboard is very comfortable to use, with an almost standard computer keyboard feel to its return whilst typing. Even after some hours of use, there was no awkwardness in the layout or a vast initial learning curve to adapt to the different format. This is always a good sign, as no one wants to make a huge effort in trying to adapt to something new: you've invested your hard earned money in a product that should work well straight out of the box. It's the same style of keyboard used in MSI's smaller notebooks, which shows a great deal of continuity in their range.

Around the body of the netbook you'll find the normal array of connections, including Ethernet for wired networking, 3x USB2.0, VGA and 3.5mm headphone and mic jacks. There is also a multi-card reader. Wireless connectivity comes in the form of b/g/n Wi-Fi and Bluetooth. A webcam sits in the screen bezel.

At a glance

What is it?

10.1-inch netbook with dual hard drives

Good

Both an SSD and HDD based netbook, 10-inch screen, good keyboard

Bad

Loses power saving settings easily, not a unique looking device: too close to the HP netbook for comfort, price

Verdict

MSI Wind devices firmly take on the Asus Eee family of products, there's no two ways about it. With the Wind U115, the dual approach of an SSD and an HDD could be the decider if capacity to cost ratio is a deciding factor

Price £449

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10

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hours of use whilst in Eco mode, where the U115 relies solely on the SSD. In reality, we managed to get a good 8 hours of life out of the latest Wind netbook, with Wi-Fi on and many applications running at once. As a direct comparison, battery life with the SSD, hard drive and Wi-Fi all powered on lasted around the 6 hour mark. All of which was not as good as MSI claims, but it's still a worthy operational duration for a computer of this nature.

We like the concept behind the Eco mode with its dual hard drives, only it wasn't as easy to invoke. The only way of enabling this feature was from a Function Key, where as soon as the computer was rebooted all the settings were lost. Seeing as Windows does like a reboot every now and then, this could be bothersome in the long run. A better idea would be to use or run all this from a profile, which is sadly missing here and very much needed we feel.