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HP EliteBook 6930p

HP's flagship business notebook offers an elegant, business-rugged design, fast perfornmce, and smart software.

by Dana Wollman on August 27, 2008

HP's aptly named new business line, EliteBook, leaves no doubt as to what caliber notebooks it offers. The 14.1-inch 6930p, the line's flagship model, has an elegant, durable design, new security features, and thanks to Intel's new Centrino 2 platform and available discrete graphics, some of the best performance in its class. It's our top pick among business notebooks.

Built to Last (and Turn Heads)

HP bills the 6930p as a business-rugged notebook, and with its brushed metal design, it looks both tough and elegant. It includes a brushed, anodized aluminum lid combined with a magnesium alloy chassis. Indeed, this 5.2-pound notebook is sturdy, but at 13.0 x 9.6 x 1.2

inches it's a bit wider and thicker than the Dell Latitude E6400 (13.2 x 9.4 x 1.0 inches). To lessen the weight, you can opt for HP's Illumi-Lite LED-backlit display for an additional $50.

Inside, the matte-black, spill-resistant keyboard is offset by a brushed metal deck and upper panel, both of which match the lid. HP's new DuraKeys feature a fingerprint resistant UV coating that claims to be six times more scratch-resistant than HP's previous business notebooks. The only design element we found off-putting were the two holes to the left and right of the touchpad, which is where the metal posts for the lid go when the system is closed.

Above the keyboard are touch-sensitive controls for HP Info Center, which contains ProtectTools Security Manager and Connection Manager, Wi-Fi, Presentation Options, mute, and volume settings. The touch controls responded immediately and didn't require much pressure; all we had to do was tap. However, some may prefer traditional buttons.

The keyboard, which has a comfortable textured finish, was easy to type on and made little noise. Although the touchpad is well sized and has the right amount of friction, the touch buttons are far too narrow and aren't very tactile; often we had to press them deliberately to make the computer respond.

Display and Sound

The 14.1-inch, 1280 x 800-pixel display indeed looked bright when we watched an episode of Mad Men. The matte screen offered versatile viewing angles; we

could comfortably watch when we pushed the screen forward, which is good for presenters and frequent flyers, and even at a near 180-degree angle from the sides. The speakers, located on the front underbelly of the notebook, delivered surprisingly loud sound.

Security Features

As the crown jewel of HP's well-endowed business line, the EliteBook series offers plenty of security features for mobile professionals. For starters, there's a 3D accelerometer, which shifts the hard drive into a safe position whenever it detects sudden movement. There's also a fingerprint reader located on the right side of the deck and TPM circuitry.

On the software side, the 6930p has HP's QuickLook 2, which lets you press a button to get your e-mail, calendar, tasks, and contact information before the system boots. HP SpareKey makes forgetting your password less stressful by letting you configure three predetermined questions as an alternate form of authentication. HP Privacy Manager protects against identity theft by using digital signatures and encryption in e-mail and IM. Finally, HP File Sanitizer permanently deletes files and personally identifiable information.

Built-in Business Card Reader

One of the neatest software additions is Presto! BizCard 5, which enables the built-in webcam to read and process business cards. First, you insert a business card, face up, with the writing upside down, into the tiny slot on the front side of the notebook. You can select an on-screen box for Multiple Snapshots so that you can keep taking cards in and out of the slot. Then launch the software, press the icon for scan and recognize, and tilt the lid down so that the webcam is poised over the business card.

It took us several tries to get this feature to work. The small LED light on the lid glows solid blue to indicate when the lid is in the right place. A few seconds later, you'll hear a snapshot sound. The 6930p processed almost all the information on our sample card correctly, except for the job title, which was written in a pale font and appeared garbled on-screen.

Ports and Webcam

In addition to the fingerprint reader and 2-megapixel webcam, the 6930p has three USB ports, a FireWire port, Ethernet and modem jacks, VGA, an ExpressCard/54 card slot, an SD/MMC reader, and headphone and microphone ports. The webcam doesn't reproduce fine detail well, but the brightness and colors, especially skin tones, looked accurate. Our video captures showed smooth movement, but the volume was weak.

Performance

Our 6930p had a 2.4-GHz Intel Core 2 Duo P8600 CPU and 2GB of RAM (upgradable to 4GB). In PCMark Vantage (which measures application performance in Vista), the notebook notched a score of 3,749, which is almost 1,200 points above the average for thin-and-lights. That even beats the Lenovo ThinkPad R500, which notched 3,666.

Unfortunately, booting out of the box took a sluggish minute and 34 seconds; that's surprising, since it comes with a virtually blank image. Users have to install everything else—including HP Webcam software, InterVideo DVD, and a trial of McAfee Total Protection—manually, by pressing the HP Info Center launch button and then clicking HP Software Setup. After we installed both the recommended and optional software, the boot time dropped to 52 seconds.

The 6930p felt sufficiently zippy. For instance, programs consistently launched quickly. Internet Explorer launched in one second, as did Windows Media Player. As for multitasking, we were able to watch a movie while running Disk Defragmenter in the background without lag. Then, with the scan and movie both running, Internet Explorer still took just a few seconds to launch. The 160GB hard drive also performed adequately; it wrote 5GB of files in 3:22 (25.2 MBps) and copied those same files in 6:40 (or 12.7 MBps). The Dell Latitude E6400, by comparison, was able to transfer those same files in roughly the same amount of time (3 minutes and 18 seconds, a rate of 25.7 MBps) but copied them at a much faster rate of 4 minutes and 35 seconds, or 18.5 MBps. HP says a solid state drive option will be available for the 6930p in the near future.

Good Graphics Performance, So-So Wireless

The ATI Mobility Radeon HD 3450 discrete graphics card will come in handy for workers who demand top performance. The 6930p scored 4,597 on 3DMark03,

almost double the category average of 2,403; its 3DMark06 score of 1,792 is 500 points above average. Moreover, on our F.E.A.R. frame-rate test, the 6930p notched an average of 29 frames per second with settings on autodetect (1024 x 768-pixel resolution), which is low but playable.

Our machine came equipped with an 802.11a/b/g/draft-n radio, which delivered strong throughput of 19.2 Mbps at 15 feet, but dropped to a mediocre 12.3 Mbps at 50 feet. Although it wasn't on our review unit, mobile broadband will be available from AT&T or Verizon Wireless as an add on.

Battery Life and Warranty

The six-cell battery lasted 3 hours and 32 minutes on our battery life test (in which we unplug the computer, leave Wi-Fi on, and run a script that surfs the Web until the battery dies). That's a bit shy of the category average, which hovers around four hours. We recommend springing for the eight-cell travel battery ($139), which adds another pound of heft to the system and should double battery life.

The 6930p comes with a generous three-year parts-and-labor warranty, upgradable to a three-year on-site warranty through HP Care Packs.

HP EliteBook 6930p Verdict

With its smooth metal styling, the HP EliteBook 6930p looks the part of a premium business notebook, and it's extra durable, too. In addition to its design, we like its blazing performance, powerful discrete graphics, security features, and bright, versatile display. We also appreciate the generous assortment of software, especially QuickLook 2. This is the best bang-for-your-buck business notebook we've tested.