

Reviews & Rankings



THE ACER Aspire One (left) and the Lenovo IdeaPad S10 (right) top our chart of the best mini-notebooks.

Mini-Notebooks Gain Power

PCW Test Center IT DOESN'T MATTER if you have already shed an optical drive from your ultraportable—you still need to lose weight. When you're on the go, you normally perform only a handful of tasks, and you shouldn't have to lug an armful of extra gear.

Cue the mini-notebook. This new breed of pint-size portable continues to gain momentum and acceptance. Superslim, lightweight (2 to 3 pounds), and affordable (starting at under \$400), these units go by a few other names: netbooks, mobile Internet devices, and—my

New sub-\$500 mini-notebooks hit the scene—and, thanks to Intel's Atom processor, they all run Windows XP reasonably well.

new favorite—"laptops." But their goal, to provide serious mobile computing to the masses, remains the same.

These micro machines aren't designed to compete with more-powerful ultraportables. Mini-notebooks are good for Web browsing, e-mail, and document creation, but little else (editing a 10GB image file on one will try your patience). Consider a mini-notebook as a complement to your primary PC and a modest road com-

panion. Asus released its first Eee PC in late 2007; today the choices are numerous, with bigger players, including Acer, Dell, and Lenovo, on the field.

Similar Configurations

The latest contenders to pass through the PC World Test Center—Acer's Aspire One (\$349), Asus's Eee PC 1000H 80G XP (\$449), Dell's Inspiron Mini 9 (\$474), Lenovo's IdeaPad S10 (\$449), and MSI's Wind NB U100

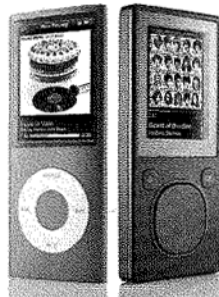
(\$499)—also represent the best that the fledgling category has to offer. All five carry Intel's 1.6-GHz Atom CPU and 1GB of RAM, the magic configuration that has become the baseline for such petite portables to run Linux or Windows XP smoothly.

In addition to seeing similar designs for these systems, we're seeing comparable specs and port layouts (an ethernet jack, 802.11 b/g Wi-Fi, VGA-out, a Webcam, one ExpressCard slot, headphone and microphone jacks, and two or three USB ports). These similarities also mean a fairly consistent

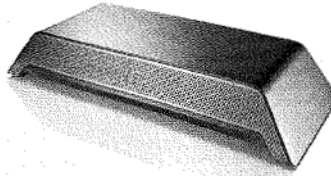
INSIDE



60 T-MOBILE G1



66 APPLE IPOD Nano,
Microsoft Zune



72 SLINGBOX PRO-HD



85 IHOME AUDIO
IH70SRC

experience performance-wise, all the way around.

In fact, the mini-notebook category is so young that only in recent months have we received a quorum of models that can accommodate our WorldBench 6 test suite on their tiny hard drives. And even then, we still couldn't run all of the contenders through our test suite—which is why we've chosen not to include performance as part of our rating. But let's put it this way: The performance is such that you won't want to use any of these computers for CAD or Photoshop projects.

Subtle Differences

Even without gauging performance, we found enough ways to distinguish the five models, though their differences were subtle. Lenovo's IdeaPad S10 manages to pack a good deal of power and hard-drive capacity into its 9.8-by-7.3-by-0.9-inch frame. You get a crisp, 10.2-

PC WORLD TOP 5 MINI-NOTEBOOKS

MODEL	PCW Rating	Performance	Features and specifications
1 BEST BUY Acer Aspire One \$349 find.pcworld.com/61821	85 VERY GOOD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WorldBench 6 score: 34 Very Good Overall design: Very Good Tested battery life: 2:16 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.6-GHz Intel Atom N270 8.9-inch wide screen 2.9 pounds
BOTTOM LINE: Considering its bargain price, the Aspire One is a steal—until you realize that you want the \$100 six-cell battery.			
2 Lenovo IdeaPad S10 \$449 find.pcworld.com/61818	82 VERY GOOD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WorldBench 6 score: 41 Superior Overall design: Very Good Tested battery life: 2:35 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.6-GHz Intel Atom N270 10.2-inch wide screen 3.4 pounds
BOTTOM LINE: Faster than its mini-notebook brethren, the S10 offers enough perks to make it a top pick for serious mobility.			
3 Asus Eee PC 1000H 80G XP \$449 find.pcworld.com/61822	82 VERY GOOD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WorldBench 6 score: 37 Superior Overall design: Very Good Tested battery life: 4:32 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.6-GHz Intel Atom N270 10.0-inch wide screen 3.7 pounds
BOTTOM LINE: Asus addresses most of the Eee family's shortcomings with its newest—and biggest—mini-notebook.			
4 Dell Inspiron Mini 9 \$474 find.pcworld.com/61823	74 VERY GOOD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WorldBench 6 score: 25 Fair Overall design: Good Tested battery life: 3:34 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.6-GHz Intel Atom N270 8.9-inch screen 2.7 pounds
BOTTOM LINE: Dell's first mini-notebook is a solid deal, but a couple of minor design choices hold it back.			
5 MSI Wind NB U100 \$499 find.pcworld.com/61824	74 VERY GOOD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WorldBench 6 score: 36 Very Good Overall design: Good Tested battery life: 2:24 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.6-GHz Intel Atom N270 10.0-inch wide screen 3.3 pounds
BOTTOM LINE: MSI's Wind is a hardy, if vanilla, mini-notebook; for the Windows XP faithful, it offers enough oomph for the job.			

CHART NOTES: Prices and ratings are as of 10/6/08. Weight includes adapter.

inch, 1024-by-600-resolution display in a device roughly the size of Acer's Aspire One (which has only an 8.9-inch screen). That extra bit of space allows Lenovo to provide a good-size keyboard. Though using the S10 won't match the luxurious tactile response of working with a ThinkPad, it remains one of the better experiences

among mini-notebooks. On the other hand, if you put the S10 side by side with the MSI Wind and Asus Eee PC 1000H, its keys seem a little scrunched by comparison. And regrettably, the touchpad's mouse buttons feel clacky and a bit on the cheap side for my tastes.

At 3.4 pounds (with charger), the S10 is one of the

heavier mini-notebooks on the market (Asus's Eee PC 1000H similarly tips the scale). But the S10 stands out for its relatively beefy specs, such as its 160GB hard disk. More notably, this unit logged a score of 41 in our WorldBench 6 tests, a result that easily makes it the performance leader of this pack, edging out the Eee PC >>

MORE ONLINE

For more news and reviews covering mini-notebooks—and full-size laptops—go to find.pcworld.com/61819.

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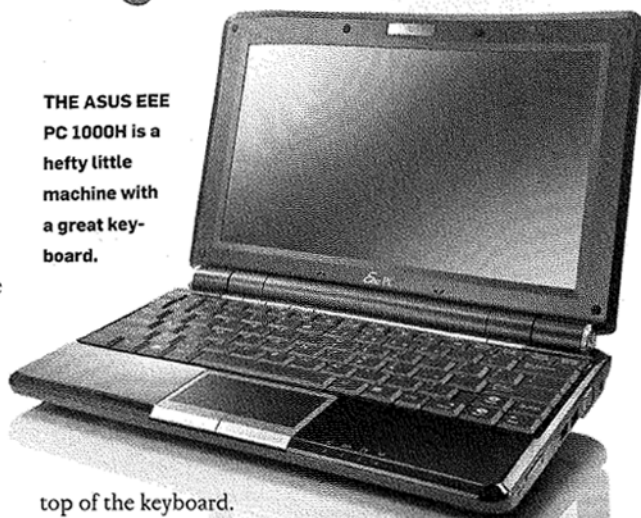
1000H, which scored a 37.

The three-cell battery that shipped with our review machine lasted only about 2.5 hours in our tests.

Though the S10 scored better than the Acer Aspire One (which held out for just 2 hours, 16 minutes), Lenovo would be wise to offer an optional six-cell battery.

Lenovo's tradition of thoughtful software bundling continues here with the inclusion of a handy recovery application, Cyberlink OneKey Recovery 6.0. This app lets you create backups, as well as set partitions and restore points—the latter a more flexible backup option than simply restoring the PC to factory-fresh condition. Lenovo even goes so far as to place a OneKey panic button at the

THE ASUS EEE PC 1000H is a hefty little machine with a great keyboard.



top of the keyboard.

In comparison with the IdeaPad S10, whose size and weight border on that of a full-fledged ultraportable, Dell's dainty Inspiron Mini 9 looks as if someone had left a standard laptop in the dryer too long. Our test configuration included an 8GB solid-state drive stuffed with Windows XP Home and preinstalled software

such as Microsoft Works; about 1GB remained free. You should pay the extra \$40 for a 16GB drive.

Despite the Dell's tiny drive, we were able to fit our WorldBench 6 and battery tests on it. First, the good news: The Mini 9 lasted about 3 hours, 34 minutes with its four-cell battery—

far better the three-cell battery of the MSI Wind, which struggled to hit 2 hours, 24 minutes. The bad news: The Dell system mustered an abysmal score of 25 on our WorldBench 6 suite.

The Mini 9 weighs just 2.7 pounds and measures 9.1 by 6.7 by 1.1 inches. In spite of its diminutive size, the Mini 9 accommodates a rich, colorful 8.9-inch screen. Unfortunately, a glossy coating makes the screen slightly difficult to see in some lighting conditions. If big keys are all you care about, however, this little laptop has incredibly oversized keys that make typing a breeze.

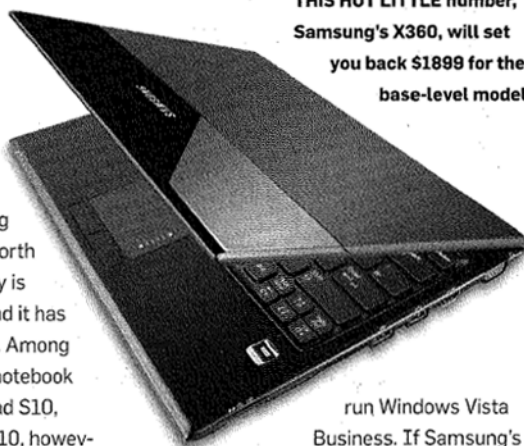
An added bonus: The Mini 9 includes a convenient built-in Support Center (with online links) and a free, base-level account (good for 2GB of storage) with Box.net's online file storage service.

ULTRAPORTABLE

Samsung Battles Apple's Air, Asus's Eee

PRIOR TO INTRODUCING quirky pseudo nano-notebooks such as its Q1 UMPC (ultramobile PC), Samsung struggled to make headway in the North American market. Now, the company is back in play in the United States—and it has announced several new laptop lines. Among them is the Samsung NC10, a mini-notebook equipped much like Lenovo's IdeaPad S10, albeit with a six-cell battery (the NC10, however, didn't arrive in time for our story).

Samsung is also entering the ultraportable arena with its X360. Technically a competitor to Apple's MacBook Air, the X360 measures 12.2 by 8.9 by 0.6 inches. It's the flip side of a mini-notebook, offering a reasonably big, bright 13.3-inch display capable of 1280-by-800-pixel resolution; a big cut-out keyboard; 3GB of RAM; and an Intel Core 2 Duo U9400 CPU that can



THIS HOT LITTLE number, Samsung's X360, will set you back \$1899 for the base-level model.

run Windows Vista Business. If Samsung's spokespeople can be believed, the X360 will last 10 hours on its included six-cell battery. And of all the ports packed into this compact model, I'm happy to see HDMI.

Of course, all of those perks come with a hefty price tag. The version of the X360 that ships with a 120GB, 5400-rpm hard drive sells for \$1899 while a model containing a 128GB solid-state drive goes for \$2499.

Small but Substantial
Asus, the mini-notebook pioneer, decided to go big with its newest entry. The Eee PC 1000H 80G XP is so beefy, in fact, that (like the MSI Wind) it approaches an ultraportable laptop in size and weight—but with half the power. This relatively hefty unit has a 10-inch display, measures 10.5 by 7.5 by 1.5 inches, and weighs 3.7 pounds (the added weight coming in part from the system's 80GB hard disk and six-cell battery).

The 1000H also has a great keyboard, probably the best offering in the entire mini-notebook category; it's certainly a refreshing change from previous Eee PC >>

