

GIGABYTE U2442F

AN EXCELLENT ULTRABOOK OPTION FOR POWER USERS, FROM A VERY UNLIKELY SOURCE.

PRICE \$1500
SUPPLIER www.gigabyte.com.au

When it comes to laptop manufacturers, Gigabyte has never really managed to shine. We have had concerns in the past with build quality, and most of the time its products compared poorly to similarly priced competition. With this in mind, we have been pleasantly surprised by its latest Ultrabook, which pairs an excellent featureset with decent build quality.

Inside this Windows 8 Ultrabook sits a Core i7-3517U processor, 8GB of RAM, 128GB SSD and 750GB HDD. It also has packs an Nvidia GeForce GT 650M GPU with 2GB of VRAM, which is still a rarity in the Ultrabook space. The lid is made from brushed Aluminium, and houses a 14in 1600 x 900 resolution screen. It has a respectable amount of expandability thanks to an SD-card reader, Gigabit Ethernet, D-Sub, HDMI, audio jacks, two USB 2 and two USB 3 ports

The U2442F is constructed from a rigid plastic, much like some of Sony's Vaio Ultrabooks, but don't let that dissuade you. It feels surprisingly solid, and we didn't have any issues with cooling, thanks to two vents located at the rear of the chassis. The backlit scabble tile keyboard is pleasant to type on, and the slightly textured touchpad is comfortable and responsive. Unlike some models we've seen in the past, this chassis is pleasant on the eye and doesn't feel in the least bit flimsy. The Aluminium lid also keeps the screen from having too much flex, and the hinges are reassuringly solid.

Despite the sheer grunt packed into the U2442F, it still manages to fit into Intel's Ultrabook definition. At its thickest point it measures 21mm,

▼ The U2442F has a solid number of expansion ports available



and even with the 750GB hard disk it weighs a mere 1.69kg. It isn't the thinnest or the slickest Ultrabook chassis out there, but it is quite a pleasant-looking design (something that hasn't really applied to Gigabyte's previous laptops) and the computing power and extensibility more than make up for any shortcomings in style.

Thankfully, the U2442F didn't just impress on paper, it delivered some very solid benchmark results as well. In our real world tests the Core i7-3517U drove it to an overall score of 0.66, and this was played out in the subscores as well. This puts it on par with other laptops using the same CPU, such as Dell's XPS 14 and ASUS' Zenbook UX32A.

Where it really pulls ahead of the competition is in the gaming stakes, with the GT 650M leading to crisis results of 42fps at medium detail and 26fps at high detail. With some minor tweaks to high detail this would be perfectly playable, and overall this is a truly excellent little gaming machine, with a portability that belies its power. It is also refreshing to see a reasonably priced gaming laptop that is actually portable, rather than the hefty, angular plastic wedges that we see from companies like MSI and ASUS.

One area where the U2442F did fall down was battery life. While we saw it deliver just over two hours in our heavy use tests, its light use test of four hours and 54 minutes was well below other Ultrabooks. That said, it was still noticeably higher than what we expect from gaming laptops, which was a pleasant surprise. We also noted that, when unplugged, the U2442F had the kind of aggressive power management that wanted to turn down the screen backlight regardless of what we did with Window's power settings – we've seen this before and while it does help with battery endurance, it can get annoying.



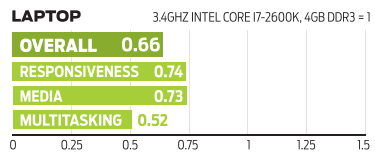
KEY SPECS

Core i7 3715U · 2GB
GeForce GT650M · 8GB DDR3 · 1600 x 900 14in LED screen · 128GB SSD · 750GB 5400rpm HDD · 802.11b/g/n · Bluetooth 4 · 2 x USB 2 · 2 x USB 3 · D-Sub · HDMI · SD Card reader · 339 x 233 x 21mm (WDH) · 1.69kg

Call us surprised, but the U2442F is hands-down the best laptop we have seen Gigabyte produce. Not only does it have remarkably solid build quality, but it has one of the best all-round feature sets that we have seen on an Ultrabook. It runs Windows 8, but your money goes towards things traditional PC users want, like storage and memory capacity as well as GPU grunt, rather than transformable touchscreens and other 'Windows 8' fanciness.

Not only is the U2442F a great performer for the pricetag, but it feels like it could be the start of the company becoming a serious player in an area in which it has always been second rate, and focused on gimmicks over functionality and performance.

John Gillooly



PERFORMANCE ★★★★★☆
 FEATURES&DESIGN ★★★★★☆
 VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★☆
OVERALL ★★★★★☆