

PCs & LAPTOPS REVIEWS

GIGABYTE U2442V

★★★★☆

£720 inc VAT • From www.lambda-tek.com

tweak the settings.

VERDICT

A powerful Ultrabook with dedicated graphics, but the screen lets it down

ULTRABOOKS THAT CAN handle games are still few and far between, but the Gigabyte U2442V shows you don't have to sacrifice portability to get a powerful laptop. It looks very similar to its more expensive cousin, the Gigabyte U2442F (see *Reviews, Shopper* 305). Its 18mm chassis is a fraction thinner, and instead of a two-tone interior, silver plastic now extends all the way round the bezel and the keyboard tray. The U2442V's black Chiclet-style keys hint at personality, but it's far from the prettiest Ultrabook we've seen.

INNER STRENGTH

Look at the U2442V's components, though, and there's plenty to get excited about. Unlike many Ultrabooks, the U2442V has a dedicated 2GB Nvidia GeForce GT 640M graphics chip as well as the integrated graphics built into its processor. The GeForce GT 640M helped the U2442V sail through our Dirt Showdown graphics benchmark, producing a smooth 51.9fps with graphics set to High quality at a 1,280x720 resolution. This is very impressive for a light laptop, and only a few frames shy of the more powerful U2442F.

Disabling anti-aliasing raises the frame rate further, but you'll have to reduce the graphics settings if you want to take advantage of the screen's 1,600x900 resolution. We managed a smooth 40.8fps with graphics set to High quality at 1,600x900, while reducing the settings to Medium produced an average frame rate of 54.7fps at 1,600x900.

The laptop struggled with our more demanding *Crysis 2* test, producing an average frame rate of 15.3fps at 1,600x900 with graphics quality set to Ultra. Lowering this to High produced a much more promising 39.3fps, so it should handle many 3D games if you

HOT CHIP

The U2442V is no slouch when it comes to raw power, either, with a 1.9GHz Intel Core i7-3517U processor that can Turbo Boost to 3GHz when cool enough. We were a little disappointed that it didn't have a more recent Core i7-3537U processor or one of Intel's newer Haswell chips, but it scored a respectable 50 overall in our multimedia benchmarks. This is one of the fastest scores we've seen for this type of processor and is only a couple of points behind newer Core i7 Ultrabook processors.

Typing on the U2442V was pleasant, if a little noisy. Its backlit Chiclet-style keys are well spaced but we'd have liked more travel. This didn't affect typing accuracy much, though, and we were up to full speed within minutes.

We were less keen on the touchpad. Its textured surface makes it feel very responsive and its button bar has plenty of travel when pressed, but we kept catching it with a wrist while typing, which was frustrating.

The U2442V's battery is also below par and managed just four hours and 16 minutes in our light-usage test with the screen set to half brightness. We expect at least five hours from an Ultrabook, and it certainly can't match the near six-hour battery life of

the U2442F.

We were pleased to see a good selection of ports, though. As well as its two USB3 and two further USB ports, you'll find VGA and HDMI outputs, an SD card reader, a Gigabit Ethernet port and separate headphone and microphone jacks.

As with the U2442F, though, the screen is the weakest part of this laptop. Its 1,600x900 resolution looks

very sharp, but its image quality leaves a lot to be desired. Reds, greens and blues all looked very dull in our solid colour image tests, and blacks and whites were positively grey. This also affected our high-contrast test image, where colours really lacked depth and vibrancy. This is partly due to the screen's matt finish, which helps to reduce glare and reflections, but its contrast levels were also quite poor as it struggled to reveal detail in areas of dark shadow. With all this, plus some very narrow viewing angles, there's plenty of room for improvement.

This is a shame, as we quite like the rest of the Gigabyte's U2442V. It may not have the best battery life, but if you're looking for a slim laptop that can run 3D games and you're not too bothered about the quality of its display, the U2442V is a good choice. Otherwise, we recommend the Best Buy-winning MSI CX61 instead (see *Group Tests, Shopper* 305).

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