

PERFORMANCE LAPTOP

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Gigabyte P34W v3

Gigabyte takes another stab at building a compact laptop that's also a powerhouse.

Gigabyte's built up a reputation over the last couple of years for pushing the boundaries of laptop design, squeezing high-end components into a slim and (comparatively) light chassis. The P34W v3 is the successor to last year's P34W v2, and like the latter it offers sedate, workplace-friendly looks in a slightly unconventional 14-inch size. Packing a 1080p display with a near-top Core i7-4720HQ processor, 16GB of RAM, Nvidia GeForce GTX 970M graphics chip and combo storage of 128GB SSD and 2TB hard drive. (Locally, paying an extra \$100 will net you a 256GB SSD – something we'd definitely recommend.)

And in terms of physical design, this is a classy job – with a smooth and curvy aluminium-and-plastic chassis (keyboard deck and lid are aluminium, while the screen surround and underside are plastic), a backlit chiclet keyboard

that's a step above last years (with keys that are raised higher and a bit more resistant) plus four USB 3.0 ports, HDMI out, Gigabit Ethernet and more. The v3 is a little heavier to pick up than it looks, but still portable at 1.82kg. Taking the rather mammoth charger along too, however, will add another 650g.

You might not need the that charger though, the battery life was better than we expected from a machine with these specs. While it's still a lowish 2:33hr when pushed, with less-demanding workloads that can stretch an extra 2 hours, giving you half a day's work.

When stressed though, despite its small size the P34W v3 can deliver a heap of power for basically any task – be that re-encoding videos, playing the latest AAA games, or chatting via video across the web.

As we saw with the Aorus X7 Pro last month, the other caveat for sandwiching such powerful hardware into such

a slim body is fan noise. Unlike bigger laptops, which can use more metal heatpipes and grills to help spread out and dissipate heat, the only option for a thin machine like this is to ramp up the exhaust fans.

While sitting idle and doing light desktop work, those internal fans are usually quite discrete. But fire up a demanding recent-release game and that GPU can warm up to a balmy 87°C – and in compensation, the fans will kick up to a very high speed. While this isn't quite the hair-dryer that the SLI-equipped Aorus X7 Pro was, it does still get loud. You – and everyone within five or six metres – will know when the graphics chip is being stressed.

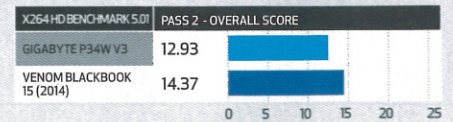
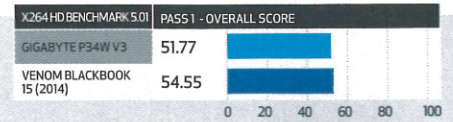
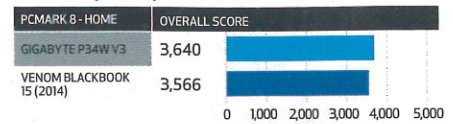
That heat issue also has an impact on performance. Compare the frame rates here to the Venom BlackBook 15 we reviewed last month (which also uses a GTX 970M) and you'll see a drop, often by over 15%, that's caused by heat-based

GPU throttling. Thankfully, the GPU is powerful enough that it can afford to throw that performance away and still produce smooth frame rates.

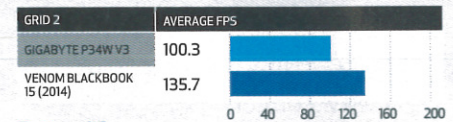
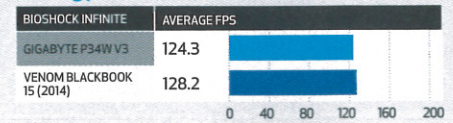
Overall then, while the P34W v3 does a better job of squeezing high-end parts into a small chassis than many others, it's important to realise there are still drawbacks to this approach. We're not quite at the point where you can have your cake, so to speak – but we are inching closer. We're looking forward to seeing next year's v4, but in the meantime, the v3 gets the job done. ■ Dan Gardiner

LABS BENCHMARK RESULTS

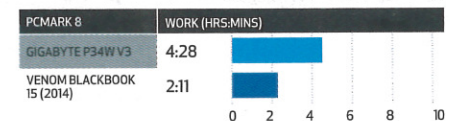
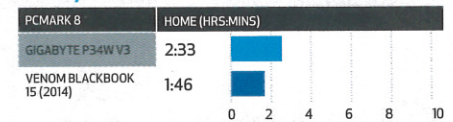
General system performance



Gaming performance



Battery life



* ALL GAMES TESTED AT 1080P/ MEDIUM DETAILS.

Verdict

Features ★★★★★
Performance ★★★★★
Value ★★★★★

High gaming temps and a large charger mean this one's not perfect, but it's still a compellingly fast and compact laptop.

