



VENOM BLACKBOOK 13 ZERO
 From \$1,399; \$1,599 as tested
www.mln.com.au

CRITICAL SPECS
 Windows 10 Pro (64-bit),
 13.3-inch IPS display @
 1080p, Intel Core i5-6200U
 CPU, Intel HD Graphics 520
 GPU, 8GB RAM, 256GB SSD,
 500GB hard drive, 1.4kg.

[BELIEVE IT OR NOT, I'M WALKING ON AIR]

Aussie Air slayer

BEEN HUNTING FOR A WINDOWS ANSWER TO THE MACBOOK AIR? TURNS OUT YOU NEEDN'T LOOK FURTHER THAN MELBOURNE...

[DAN GARDINER]

Venom BlackBook 13 Zero

WE DON'T NEED ANOTHER HERO; WE'VE GOT THE ZERO.

MONSTER CORPORATIONS LIKE Google, Microsoft and Apple are so dominant in today's tech scene that it's not unfair to wonder if the time when small companies could really make an impact is passed. The tech world certainly sees its fair share of upsets, comebacks and mini revolutions, so it wouldn't be without precedent, but you'd be forgiven for being dubious if an Aussie PC vendor said it wanted to take on Apple's MacBook Air — still the best ultrabook-style laptop some eight years after it was first released.

And yet, Melbourne-based Venom Computers has done just that — or very nearly so — with its new BlackBook 13 Zero, a 13.3-inch ultraportable Windows laptop that matches or beats the Air on most fronts, not least of which is value.

Like the Air, the 13 Zero comes in a number of different configurations, starting at \$1,399 and stretching up to \$2,799 locally. We tested a model one step up from that entry-level option, priced at \$1,599, which outclasses basically anything else at this price point. For that comparatively meek sum, you get one

of Intel's latest 6th-generation (AKA Skylake) Core i5 processors, Windows 10 Pro (64-bit), 8GB memory, both an SSD and hard drive and a 1080p IPS display.

And the external build quality is top notch, too, with an all metal-alloy chassis, first-rate backlit chiclet keyboard, large and responsive trackpad and a good range of ports, including a full-size HDMI output and a USB Type-C socket for a bit of peripheral future-proofing. Windows 10 likewise runs like a dream on this little laptop, screaming along thanks to its fast SSD and 8GB of RAM.

The Zero isn't perfect, mind you. Its black finish is a bit of a fingerprint magnet, and the chassis isn't quite as slim and svelte as the best ultrabooks. About the only thing we can seriously complain about, though, is the battery life — and even then, the 13 Zero isn't actually bad, per se, just behind the leaders in

the field. Managing about 3.5 hours in the very-tough PCMark 8 Home test (which mixes web browsing, gaming and video with office tasks and design work), it's about average for a 13-inch portable, but significantly behind the MacBook Air (which scores around 7 hours) or the latest Core i5 Dell XPS 13, which lasted

6:39hr in the same test.

That only slightly dents the appeal, though, and what's undeniable is how astonishingly good value the 13 Zero is. With 8GB of RAM and both a 256GB SSD and a 500GB

mechanical hard drive, this \$1,599 model blows away every other ultraportable at this price point. Dell's similar entry-level XPS 13, for example, is \$1,799 with only 4GB of RAM and a 128GB SSD.

If you've been looking for a Windows alternative to Apple's Air, then this is one little black book that should definitely be on your short list. ■

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**A 13.3-INCH ULTRAPORTABLE
 WINDOWS LAPTOP
 THAT MATCHES OR BEATS
 THE AIR ON MOST FRONTS,
 NOT LEAST OF WHICH
 IS VALUE.**