



Venom BlackBook 13 Zero

HOME-GROWN GOODNESS

MSI, Apple, HP, Dell, Asus – when it comes to laptop manufacturers, there are certain big brands that stick out. Which makes the new BlackBook 13 Zero all the more remarkable. Built by Victorian-based designer Venom Computers, it's a no-compromise approach to an Ultra-portable laptop, and we're proud to see something so nice coming out of our sunburnt country. It doesn't aim to be the cheapest laptop around, or double as a tablet, or even promise unrealistic gaming performance. Instead it delivers 1.4kg of superior performance wrapped up in stunning exterior.

The svelte black unibody chassis is constructed from aluminium, giving this a premium look and feel worthy of the price tag, though plastic is used on the inner surfaces. Not only is it light, it's also razor thin, with the screen in particular just a few millimetres deep. Close the clamshell design and the entire package is a mere 1.8cm deep; not quite best in class, but near enough. The overall size is dictated by the 13.3-inch display, which uses a gorgeous IPS panel tucked away behind a matte screen to maximise

clarity even under bright conditions. 1920 x 1080 pixels might not sound like much, yet it looks ludicrously sharp, easily on par with the better panels we've seen in this price range. The fact it's not a touch screen might deter some, but thankfully the accurate touchpad makes negotiating the included copy of Windows 10 Pro a delight. Despite the small overall size, the chiclet keyboard feels large enough to sustain serious typing sessions, even when factoring in the small amount of travel behind each key.

A healthy range of connection options adorn the exterior edges. Full-sized HDMI means you won't need to buy a mini-HDMI adaptor, while three USB 3.0 ports deliver plenty of high speed options, including one of the new Type-C flavour. An external full-sized SD slot makes upgrading the internal storage a breeze, though we're not sure you'll need to once you see the generous inclusions that come with this version.

Powering this version of the BlackBook 13 Zero (there are several configurations currently available) is Intel's new 6th Gen Core i5 CPU, the 6200U. This twin-core CPU has only been on the market for about four months, and comes packing HyperThreading to help with multithreaded applications, with a top Turbo frequency of 2.8GHz. At this price point it's a rather tasty inclusion, easily overpowering other Ultrabooks. Having

said that, the slim dimensions of the BlackBook obviously make cooling this chip a little challenging, as we noticed fan noise under load, but nowhere near the scale of howlers like gaming laptops. Let's just say it's audible, but not annoying. This CPU has been paired with 8GB of DDR3L memory, the minimum amount in the entire BlackBook range, which is ample given the Windows 10 Operating System.

We're not surprised to see the lack of a dedicated GPU in such a small machine, though gamers might like to take this into consideration; the Intel HD Graphics 520 integrated into the CPU isn't up to the task of anything more demanding than Solitaire. This hardware combination powered the BlackBook to an impressive 3091 in the PCMark 8 Home Accelerated benchmark, a solid 25% faster than we've seen in competing Ultrabooks.

At this price, the generous storage is most welcome. Along with a super-speedy PCIe SSD measuring 256GB in capacity (237GB usable according to Windows), there's another 500GB mechanical hard drive. Both are apparently easily removable, making it easier to restore lost data if you happen to have a failure. In fact, that's one of the things Venom wanted to emphasise about this product – most of the components such as the battery, memory and drives are all removable, allowing for simpler maintenance.

If there's one concern we have with this unit, it's that the powerful hardware within will take a heavier toll on the battery than less desirable Ultrabooks, clocking in at 205 minutes in the PCMark Home battery test. Still, there's got to be some price to pay for so many high-end features in such a well-priced machine, and if it has to be slightly worse battery life, then so be it.

Bennett Ring

KEY SPECS

\$1,599 · www.venomcomputers.com.au
13.3-inch 1920 x 1080 IPS screen · Intel i5-6200U · 8GB
DDR3L 1600MHz · 256GB PCIe SSD · 500GB HDD

OVERALL

