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Dell XPS 13 (Late-2015)

Dell's premium ultrabook is small but rather smashing.

Dell's XPS 13 is the most-compact 13-inch laptop we've tested; a very neat little package with a mixed aluminium-and-carbon-fibre chassis and a display with super-narrow bezels — they're 5mm on the top and sides, meaning the screen basically fills the lid casing.

It's been updated with Intel's 6th-gen Core i parts. In Australia, you've got the choice of either a 1080p non-touch model (with matte finish screen) or a 3,200 x 1,800-pixel model with a glossy touchscreen.

The keyboard and trackpad are both superb and make using the XPS 13 a real joy. It'll go the distance, too, with the Core i5 model lasting 6:39 hours in the challenging PCMark 8 Home battery test — that's the best result in this feature, by quite a wide margin. Also neat is the fact that the unit's completely silent.

However, the placement of the webcam (down the bottom right of the display)

is odd, and means you're shot from an unflattering angle when used for video-chat. And unless you have a compelling need for a touchscreen, you don't need that 3,200 x 1,800 display at this 13.3-inch screen size — you have to squint to see pixels on the non-touch, 1080p model and opting for the latter'll save you \$500.

Starting at \$1,799 with a 128GB SSD and 4GB of RAM, the XPS 13's main problem is that it isn't nearly as good value as the Venom BlackBook we've reviewed on page 50. But for those that want the most portable Windows 13-incher around, and are willing to pay for it, there's little to complain about here, with first-rate build quality, a stylish design and stunning battery life.

Verdict

An incredibly compact and well-built 13-inch ultrabook; gets almost everything right.



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Venom BlackBook 13 Zero

This zero is a genuine hero.

Melbourne-based Venom Computers' is known for its premium laptops that use high-quality parts and a variety of little tweaks to deliver an exceptionally reliable and enjoyable computing experience. So when Venom said that the 13 Zero was "the best computer we've ever made", we sat up and took notice.

The build quality here is fantastic: a sturdy MacBook-like unibody aluminium-composite chassis, stable and backlit chiclet keyboard and large matte-finish. Venom has multiple configs of the 13 Zero available, with this \$1,599 unit being the mid-range model, one step up from the \$1,399 basic unit.

It's incredibly well-specced for that price. We honestly say it's the best-value Windows ultrabook we've ever tested, with a Core i5-6200U mid-range processor, 8GB of RAM, heaps of storage thanks to a 256GB SSD and 500GB hard drive, and a balanced

13.3-inch 1080p IPS display that's driven by integrated Intel HD 520 graphics. There's two full-sized USB ports, a smaller USB Type-C, a full-sized HDMI out, and microSD port. The charger's compact, too. In short, it has everything you need to get stuff done on the go.

It's been genuinely tweaked and tuned for the pro/enthusiast. There's no bloatware. The only software extras are Firefox and Chrome and a full year's subscription to Norton Internet Security.

It's a passable 3:16 hours in the tough PCMark 8 Home test, but other similarly specced competitors can manage 5–6 hours. That shortcoming aside, this is an ultrabook we could happily use all day, every day.

Verdict

The best-value ultrabook we've ever tested. It has everything you need for getting sh*t done.

