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## Review: Venom Blackbook 17

by John Gillooly | Wednesday 15 January 2014 | [Comment Now](#)

### Rating

Overall:

★★★★★

A high bar for gaming laptops!

Performance:

★★★★★

Features &amp; Design:

★★★★★

Value for Money:

★★★★★

### Price

\$3999 AUD

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### Specs

Intel Core i7-4900MQ • 4GB  
 GeForce GTX 780M • 32GB DDR3  
 • 2 x 512GB SSD • dual band  
 802.11n • 1920x1080 matt LCD •  
 Blu-ray Writer

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### A monster laptop returns with a new generation of hardware under the hood.

Our first encounter with the Venom brand was with its Ivy Bridge-powered Blackbook 17, a beastly gaming/workstation machine that went straight to the top of the A-List. This model has now been updated to the latest in mobile hardware, along with some small changes to the chassis design, so we were eager to get it into the Labs and see what had changed.

This isn't the first time we have seen this design of laptop. The Blackbook 17 is based on the same chassis as Pioneer's Dreambook Power P17HW, but there have been some noticeable changes. Central to this is the removal of the somewhat pointless and aesthetically dubious 'ball with wings' lighting motif that seems to be a standard feature on the chassis. This has involved the replacement of the touchpad, and the model used on the Blackbook 17 not only looks but feels better under thumb than the stock one.

Small touches like these are what has impressed about the Venom lineup, especially considering that several manufacturers offer quite similar competing products. While corner cutting and shaving off dollars work at the low end of the market, our review model of Blackbook 17 goes for a retail price of \$3999, and when you are making that kind of commitment to a high-end performance laptop then you want this kind of attention to detail behind its build.

It isn't just the tweaked chassis that makes this a compelling product. Under the hood sits an impressive lineup of hardware, with an Intel Core i7-4700MQ CPU, 4GB GeForce GTX 780M GPU, 32GB of DDR3 and two 512GB Samsung SSDs running in striped RAID. It also has a Blu-ray burner, Dual Band 802.11n Wi-Fi and a gorgeous 1920x1080 screen.

As one would expect from this heady specification list, the Blackbook 17 is very much a laptop that one carries between power outlets. Not only is it a chunky slab of rubberised soft touch plastic, but it weighs a touch over 4KG and comes with a hefty power brick. But, unlike the Gigabyte P35K (page 45), it makes no pretence of being a product to be used on the go, and we are okay with that.

This heft and power means that it sucks down the battery, however. We didn't even bother running our heavy-use battery test, after our light-use one saw the battery running dry after only two hours and six minutes. The

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trade-off for this lack of mobility is some serious power, however, with our real world benchmarks returning a result of 1.07, virtually the same as the Pioneer Dreambook P17HW. This is understandable, given the same base hardware, but the Blackbook 17 stands out in other areas – most noticeably in that intangible feel that comes from having dual SSDs for storage. While a total of 1TB of solid state memory may seem indulgent, we were surprised to see that this specification of Blackbook costs under \$200 more than the Dreambook, which had a 120GB SSD and 1TB 5400rpm HDD.

As one would expect from the GTX 780M, currently the fastest laptop GPU out there, gaming was excellent, with the Blackbook 17 delivering playable framerates at native resolution, with detail set to high. This is also where the screen comes into its own, delivering picture quality that makes a lot of standalone monitors look underwhelming. It is when gaming that all the pieces of the puzzle come together, and after a short while with the machine we wished we had \$4000 to drop on such a beast.

Ultimately it will be the pricetag that determines whether this is the right laptop for you. Make no bones about it, this is very much at the expensive end of the market, but at the same time you just can't get this level of performance and quality for less. Given that there aren't a massive number of options at this end of the market, choosing a standout product comes down to the little touches, especially when looking at a base chassis that is employed by several local system builders.

Once again Venom has gone that extra mile – from the SSDs to getting rid of the horrid glowy touchpad (seriously, when spending this much on a laptop we want it to avoid the tendency for gaming products to be garishly lit), it has taken a base design that was already impressive and brought it close to perfect, knocking its predecessor off the A-List and setting a new high bar for gaming laptops.

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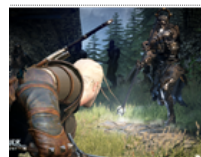
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