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## Venom BlackBook 15 (2014) review



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From the outset, Venom's new 15.6-inch BlackBook has one clear advantage over its 2013 predecessor: it's a lot more physically attractive, with a slimmer build (43mm to 29mm) and lighter weight (3.1kg down to 2.6kg) making it at least a little bit more portable. Although that said, this is still undeniably a large laptop — it's not something you'll want to be carting in a shoulder-bag to far-flung daily meetings. This is a powerful laptop that's designed to live on a desk.

To that end it's full of high-end components and it's even managed a couple of firsts too, being the first laptop through APC Labs to pack a 3K (aka 2,880 x 1,620-pixel) IPS display and also run Nvidia's brand-new GeForce GTX 970M GPU.

The rest of the core components are top drawer too: a Core i7-4710HQ processor, an unreasonably fast 256GB Samsung XP941 M.2 solid-state drive, 16GB of low-latency DDR3-1866 memory and a 7200rpm 1TB hard drive for general storage. That's rounded out by three USB 3.0 ports, dual DisplayPorts and an Intel Wireless-AC 7265 Wi-Fi chip.

What you don't get is superfluous extras, like a touchscreen.

All that, as you'd expect, leads to a laptop that absolutely flies in both day-to-day use and demanding tasks. This is the speediest portable we've tested when it comes to gaming, media encoding and image rendering — and it does all that without really breaking a sweat, with the GPU never topping 70°C. By way of comparison, other laptop GPUs routinely hit 80°C when pushed.

That said, all that power comes at a price — or two prices really. First, the power brick is a big beast, weighing nearly a kilo, and second, the battery life isn't great, only lasting between 1:46hr to 2:11hr in PCMark 8's (admittedly-demanding) battery tests. There are some nice little touches though.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150214181100/http://media.apcmag.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2015/02/Venom-BlackBook-15-left-side-45-open.png>) Rather than chewing up precious drive space with a recovery partition, there's a



dedicated USB stick for re-imaging the machine. Also neat is that Venom has customised Windows' image scaling settings (which control font and icon size) to work better with the 3K screen res.

And lastly, there's a one-year subscription to Norton Internet Security pre-installed — more generous than the usual 90-day trial on most laptops.

The main downside is price. We tested the midrange build, which will set you back a not-inconsequential \$3,399. That puts it in the upper ranges for a laptop (even with these specs), and it'd be remiss of us not to point out that Metabox — another Australian laptop retailer — offers machines based on the same template as this BlackBook at lower prices. (Although not, perhaps, with quite

as premium components — there's no M.2 SSD, for example, just a SATA 6Gbps one.)

Venom's previously told us that its policy is to use premium parts wherever it can because it wants to avoid returns and repairs — which, after all, cost the business time and money. But better components ultimately means a steeper upfront price.

Still, it's hard to deny the charms of the BlackBook 15 as a high-quality, high-performance laptop. If you're willing to pay that top-shelf price, you'll find few better performance laptops than this one.

Verdict: Offers top-drawer features and performance which, of course, demands a top-drawer price.

Price: \$3,399

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Rating: 4.5 stars out of 5

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