

Acer Aspire 4810T

Average looks and plodding performance are elevated by absolutely stunning battery life

As part of Acer's new Timeline range, the 4810T makes a good initial impression. Slim and clad in sombre grey plastic, it promises to be a good-looking machine for the money. But while stylish from the outside, it's a little disappointing to open it up and find the interior is standard Acer fare. The bezel around the screen is dark, matte grey, and the base is an inoffensive gunmetal shade that doesn't provoke the response the system does when it's closed.

The 14in, 16:9 screen has a native resolution of 1,366 x 768, which is fine for office work and web browsing. It's also compatible with 720p HD sources, although there's no Blu-ray drive. The screen itself is reasonable; you won't notice its foibles while looking at photos or watching films, but DisplayMate revealed a limited contrast range that will stop particularly bright or dark areas of an image being clear. It's also irritatingly reflective, so using it in a brightly lit office will soon grow tiresome.

The keyboard resembles the Scrabble-tile arrangement of recent Sony and Apple laptops. The keys are laid out flat against the base of the system, and we had no problem getting up to speed when touch-typing. The wide channel between each key is a concern, however. With nearly 3mm between each, it's possible that those prone to dropping crumbs will spend a lot of time cleaning it. The keys are also a bit wide for our liking, and have a shiny finish, which can be tiring to type on for long periods.

The trackpad has had a little attention paid to it, and it supports multitouch gestures. You can, for instance, scroll down by tracing a circle starting from the right-hand edge, or zoom in or out by pinching. But pinching in Vista is clunky, and there's nothing like the smoothness that you'll find from the similar feature in Apple's latest

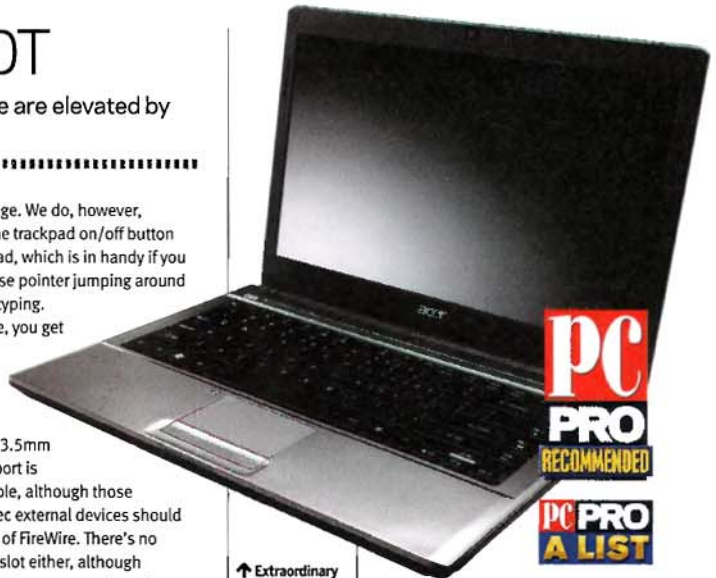
MacBook range. We do, however, appreciate the trackpad on/off button next to the pad, which is in handy if you find the mouse pointer jumping around while you're typing.

Elsewhere, you get three USB ports, plus HDMI and D-SUB outputs. The 3.5mm headphone port is S/PDIF-capable, although those with high-spec external devices should note the lack of FireWire. There's no ExpressCard slot either, although there is a 5-in-1 memory card reader squeezed into the tapered front of the machine. And, despite the slimness of the chassis – just 29mm at its highest point – the 4810T manages to include a DVD drive, the eject button for which is at the far right-hand side of the base above the keyboard.

But if the 4810T looks a little drab, or we're unconvinced by the keyboard, we are willing to forgive it for one reason. In our light-use battery test, it ran for a staggering 8hrs 52mins – the equivalent of a full working day with a short commute on top. Even our intensive test, which pushes a system as hard as possible, ran for nearly three and a quarter hours before the battery was



The 4810T's battery lasts for nearly nine hours, the equivalent of a full working day.



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↑ Extraordinary battery life lurks beneath the 4810T's inoffensive exterior.

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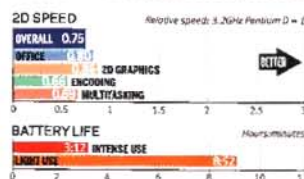
SPECIFICATIONS

1.4GHz Intel Mobile Core 2 Duo SU8400 • 3GB DDR2 RAM • 320GB hard disk • DVD writer • Intel GMA 4500MHD graphics • 14in, 1,366 x 768 TFT • HDMI • D-SUB • 3 x USB • Gigabit Ethernet • 802.11a/b/g draft-n wireless • Windows Vista Home Premium • 1yr international RTB warranty • 338 x 240 x 29mm (W/D/H) • 1.95kg

exhausted. This kind of battery life is ordinarily the preserve of ultraportables, and is extremely impressive on a laptop that's comfortable to use all day. It even beats Acer's claimed eight-hour mark by nearly an hour.

Naturally, this comes at the expense of performance, with the Acer returning an overall score in our benchmarks of 0.75. It's a little behind the times, but you'll have no problem running most applications. The reason for the slowdown is the low-voltage processor: the Intel SU9400 runs at just 1.4GHz, but on the upside merely sips power with its TDP (thermal design power) of only 10W. It also requires minimal cooling, which means the 4810T is comfortable to use on your lap and quiet when being pushed. Performance is aided by 3GB of RAM, and storage is provided by a 320GB hard disk.

It's worth comparing the 4810T with this month's Ultimate Laptops labs winner, the gorgeous Sony VAIO VGN-Z31VN/X (see p68). The Sony offers far more power and even more battery life, as well as better looks and an HSDPA modem for mobile internet access. It's also more practical for stuffing into a crowded shoulder-bag, and for the fashion-conscious it's better looking. But all that costs money – nearly £1,800 in the Sony's case. The Acer may lack the power and polish of a top-end VAIO, and is certainly larger and heavier at 1.95kg, but it provides its staggering battery life for a vastly more palatable £652. For sheer value for money, that makes this a portable deal that's hard to beat. **DAVE STEVENSON**



PERFORMANCE

FEATURES & DESIGN

VALUE FOR MONEY

OVERALL



An explanation of our benchmarks can be found on the cover disc