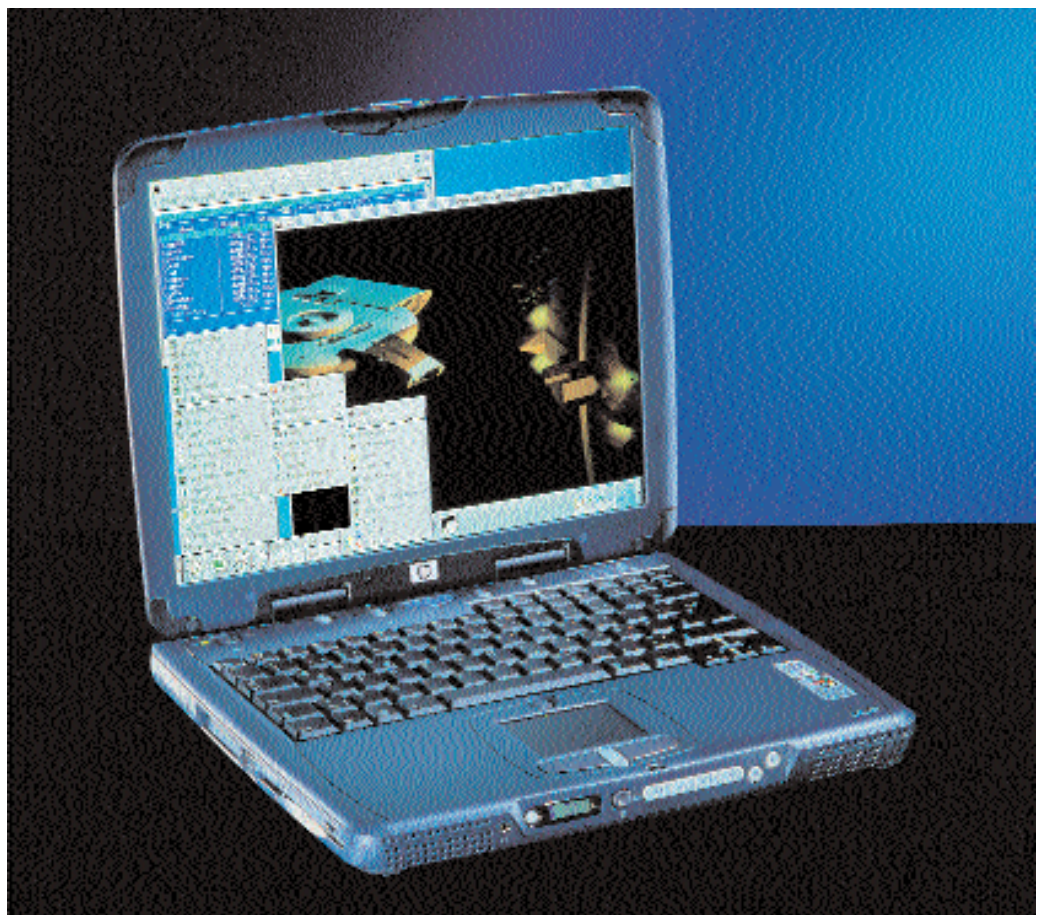


HEWLETT PACKARD OMNIBOOK XE3



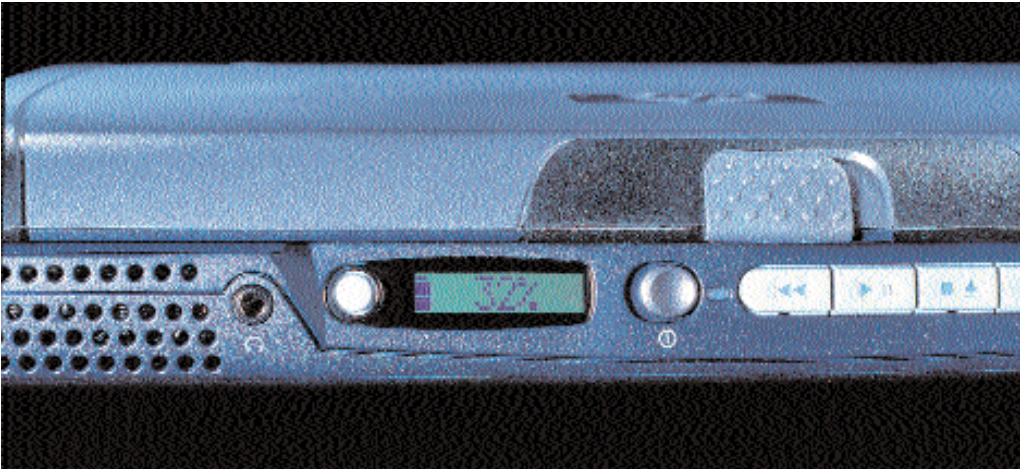
The truly huge HP OmniBook XE3 comes in a striking suitcase design with offset and rounded corners made of a softer plastic material than the rest of the housing. This enables them to work very effectively as corner protectors.

Self-sufficient CD Player

The CD player in the HP OmniBook can be operated when the device is switched off, courtesy of the round slider. In the multifunction display you can then view the track number and playing time, along with the date, time and the remaining capacity of the battery expressed as a percentage.

Keyboard and touchpad are generously designed with both the cursor functions and the cursor block protruding from the otherwise flat plane of the keys. The Internet keys arranged around the central sleep button cannot be detected under Linux as they do not supply a scan code. The keyboard has a number of other vices too. The key repetition rate, at some 5 characters per second, is much too low, and the keyboard feel is too soft which makes for a lot of typing errors.

The internal microphone lies in the middle above the keyboard while the powerful loudspeakers are recessed on both sides of the CD panel in the front. Acoustic feedback is rarely going to be a problem here.



Even without Windows by no means superfluous: Behind this display and the operating keys lies a self-sufficient CD player.

The fan is a bit intrusive with its cooling phases lasting only a few seconds and causing a howling noise. On the other hand it does keep the device comfortably cool with a maximum of 43 degrees at the CardBus slots. The CardBus controller is the Texas Instruments PCI 1420 which, as in the 1450 in the Compaq Armada, took 20 seconds to initialise our PCMCIA hard disk. Disk drive and DVD-ROM are built-in.

Unfortunately Linux compatibility is not ideal. The ESS 56CMV-PI modem and the Accton EN2242 Ethernet card are on the same expansion card. While we were unable to find any driver for the winmodem right after we had sent back the HP OmniBook a patched Tulip driver was released. As the description on the Linux laptop page says it should support the Accton Ethernet card of the OmniBook XE3. To get the proof HP will send us the notebook again, we will report in one of the next issues about our experiences, together with the latecomers from Dell, Apple & Co. We also had to pass on the TV output. But on the other hand the infrared port worked because a serial emulation is offered and the port is thus recognised as a normal serial port.

Sound problems

The Allegro-1 sound card would only work with the Maestro-3 sound driver from Zab Brown which is still in the Alpha stage (and can be found at <http://www.zabbo.net/maestro3>).

Like the two Toshibas and the Wortmann notebook, the OmniBook also has an S3 Savage MX graphics chip. Unfortunately there is no hardware-accelerated server for the OmniBook so the packages designed for the Satellite Pro and Tecra by Xi Graphics do not function.

Conclusion

Assuming the Ethernet driver is working well the HP OmniBook XE3 is a good choice. Especially the low price makes this notebook interesting to low budget buyers who are normally forced to do with no name products. Compared with the rarely cheaper IBM ThinkPad i1200 the HP is the better choice. But even if it turns out that Ethernet is not working with the new driver, anyone owning this device should not immediately shy away from Linux as the most important functions can still be used. ■

Infos:

Linux on Laptops, comprehensive collection of links by Ken Harker with hundreds of referenced laptop sites and many useful hints, tips and tricks: <http://www.cs.utexas.edu/users/kharker/linux-laptop/>

From the Linux-Mobile-Guide via individual experience reports and a hardware compatibility list to PDAs or activation of mobile telephones – on the Web pages of Werner Heuser you can find lots of useful information on using Unix on portable devices: <http://www.mobilix.org/>

The sites of the Linux Irda Project and the URL of the FTP server, on which you will find the Irda-Utilities: <http://irda.sourceforge.net/ftp://irda.sourceforge.net/pub/irda/irda-utils/>

Linux-WinModems-Support, where the Lucent-LT-WinModem driver as used in the test is available for download: <http://www.linmodems.org/><http://www.linmodems.org/linx565a.zip>

Linux PCMCIA Information Page with lists of supported PCMCIA- and CardBus-add-ons: <http://pcmcia-cs.sourceforge.net/>

linux-laptop@vger.kernel.org is the Linux Laptop Mailing list, forum for all questions about Linux on laptops. To register, just send a message to majordomo@vger.kernel.org with the content subscribe linux-laptop.

HP OmniBook XE3

(+)	self-sufficient CD player
(+)	"suspend to disk" functions
(+)	low price
(-)	Ethernet and modem not usable