

Review: \$500 Samsung netbook sports new processor

July 15 2009, By PETER SVENSSON , AP Technology Writer



In this product image provided by Samsung, the Samsung NC20, the first netbook on the U.S. market with the Via Nano processor, is shown. (AP Photo/Samsung)

(AP) -- Intel Corp. has had a near lock on supplying processors for netbooks - the cheap, tiny laptops that are the biggest hit in the computer market these days. Now there's an alternative from a Taiwanese competitor, Via Technologies Inc. It might be time to leave your Intel-powered comfort zone.

I took the [Samsung](#) NC20, the first netbook on the U.S. market with the Via Nano processor, for a spin. I found it to be a capable unit,

comparable to the netbooks that use Intel's Atom chip, though there are some notable differences. If you're in the market for a netbook, perhaps for the fall semester, it's definitely worth considering.

First of all, the NC20 has a 12-inch screen. Netbooks have so far topped out at 10 inches, so the NC20 gives us a lot more space to work with. Intel has discouraged manufacturers from using Atoms with larger screens, saying the processor isn't powerful enough. (A few manufacturers, like Dell, have just started making 12-inch Atom-powered netbooks anyway.)

The size of the screen brings the NC20 closer to a full-size laptop, but the price and weight are still netbook-ish: \$500 and 3.5 pounds. Like other netbooks, Samsung's lacks a DVD drive and runs the Windows XP operating system, rather than the more recent Vista. The keyboard is smaller than full size, but by no means cramped.

When it comes to performance, the NC20 is also clearly a [netbook](#) rather than a full-powered laptop. It's fine for Web browsing and e-mail, but not for the latest games or for video editing. The processor can't keep up with high-action scenes from shows like "Prison Break" on Hulu.com, resulting in stuttering video.

However, it did better at video playback than an Asus EeePC 1000HE, a good Atom-powered unit, indicating that the Nano has a bit more oomph. The NC20 can even play a modest 3-D game like "World of Warcraft" if you can put up with some sluggishness.

The Nano's extra muscle seems to come at the price of shorter battery life. The NC20 lasted just beyond three hours when set to play a video while accessing the Internet intermittently over Wi-Fi. That is decent but not great for this category. In normal use, it would probably last six hours. The 1000HE lasts more than 50 percent longer, despite a smaller

battery. The Asus model's smaller screen accounts for some of the difference, but it's likely the processor plays a part in sapping the NC20's battery.

Microsoft Corp.'s new operating system, Windows 7, will be out in October. The previews are positive so far, so anyone buying a computer now should be thinking about upgrading this fall. Yet the NC20 isn't quite ready for Windows 7. Because the graphics chip eats up part of the NC20's 1 gigabyte of memory, it would need a memory upgrade first, according to Microsoft's Upgrade Advisor software.

That's a minor issue. The NC20 is a light and cheap machine with a generous screen that proves that the Nano can hold its own. Laptops in this size range are also starting to show up with chips from another [Intel](#) competitor, Advanced Micro Devices Inc., giving us even more choices. Netbooks have all been pretty much cast in the same mold, but that's about to change.

On the Net:

Samsung's NC20 page: <http://tinyurl.com/nnazqe>

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Citation: Review: \$500 Samsung netbook sports new processor (2009, July 15) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-07-samsung-netbook-sports-processor.html>

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