

Review: Acer's Iconia W700 convertible tablet an awkward compromise

December 12 2012, by Troy Wolverton



The recent release of Microsoft's Windows 8 has sparked a revolution in PC design. Computer manufacturers are developing "convertible" computers, which typically include touch-screen displays that can be used with or separate from a keyboard and pointing device. These

convertibles - or hybrids, as they're sometimes called - can imitate both tablets and traditional PCs. Ideally, these convertible computers could replace both laptops and tablets, because they can serve both functions. From what I've seen so far, though, the new gadgets are far from the ideal. By trying to fulfill two functions, they do neither well.

One of the first of this new wave of hybrid machines is [Acer's](#) Iconia W700. Acer calls it a tablet, but unlike Microsoft's new Surface tablet, the W700 comes with the full edition of Windows 8, which can run older Windows [desktop programs](#). Acer also includes with the tablet a [wireless keyboard](#) and a "cradle" that serve as a dock and stand; with the accessories, the W700 morphs into something like a portable desktop.

This versatility has its appeal. I'm writing this column on the W700, something I've never wanted to do on an [iPad](#). The W700 has a larger screen than the iPad - which makes it easier for composing documents - and unlike Apple's tablet, you can use a mouse with it and run [Microsoft Office](#).

But unlike a traditional laptop or desktop, the W700 can act like a touch-centric device also. With the gadget separated from its cradle, I played "Cut the Rope" and read a book in its [Amazon Kindle](#) app much as I would have on an iPad.

If you are concerned with specifications, those of the W700 are more or less in line with other top-of-the-line tablets. For example, it has a solid-feeling aluminum case. It has a 720p front camera and a 5-megapixel rear one. The model I tested has a dual-core Intel i5 processor, which felt plenty speedy in my tests. And it includes 128 gigabytes of flash storage, which is twice as much as what comes with the top-of-the-line iPad. Some of that additional space, though, is used up by the Windows operating system and traditional Windows programs, which tend to consume more storage space than Apple's iOS software and apps.

Perhaps most impressive is the device's battery life. Acer says you can get up to 9 hours on a charge. I didn't test that precisely, but had no complaints. Without having to recharge it, I was able to play games, surf the Web, check email and write articles over the course of a day and a half. That's far more usage than I get out of my new Lenovo laptop and is in line with what I've seen with both the iPad and long-lasting ultrabook notebooks.

But for all its versatility and features, the W700 still left me cold.

It works OK as a portable PC. But it's no laptop replacement. In fact, it's almost impossible to literally use it on your lap because there's no easy way to prop up the cradle and detached Bluetooth keyboard there. If you want to use the W700 as a PC, you have to put it on a desk.

And with its accessories, the W700 is bulkier and much more awkward to tote around than a typical laptop; this is no slim clamshell notebook. And unlike a laptop, the cradle's stand doesn't allow for a range of different screen angles. You can have it propped up at a 70-degree angle or a 20-degree one, but nothing in between. What's more, the cradle is plastic and feels cheap.

And I wish Acer had included a mouse or trackpad with the W700, because without a pointing device, you have to depend on the gadget's touch screen to navigate Windows or place your cursor in a document. Using the touch screen is appropriate when the W700 acts like a tablet, but it's not easy when you are using it as a PC.

The device also leaves much to be desired as a tablet. It's a half-pound heavier than the latest iPad and 2 millimeters thicker, and you can feel the difference. This is not a device you'd want to hold for several hours while watching a movie or reading a book.

One reason for the extra weight and thickness is that, unlike the iPad and most other tablets, the W700 uses an Intel processor that require fans to keep cool. Another downside of the fans is that if you're in a quiet room, you can hear them whirring, which can be annoying if you're used to using ultraquiet iPads or Android tablets.

The W700 is also much more rectangular than the iPad. It's about the same width as Apple's device, but 2 inches longer, which makes it awkward to hold, particularly in a vertical position. That's unfortunate because it feels more natural to read Web pages, e-books or magazines when the device is vertical.

Then there's the price. The base model of the W700 costs \$800, while the model I tested, which has a faster processor and more storage space, has a suggested price of \$1,000. That's more expensive than most tablets and most Windows-based notebooks. But unlike the iPad and some other tablets, you can't get a cellular data radio in the W700. And unlike the iPad and many recent Android tablets, the W700 doesn't come with an ultra-high resolution screen.

So, while the W700 offers more versatility than the typical tablet or laptop, it's a compromised device that isn't ideal when trying to imitate either one.

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ACER ICONIA W700 CONVERTIBLE TABLET:

-Likes: Long battery life; capacious [storage space](#); impressive specs; powerful processor; versatility

-Dislikes: Heavy and relatively thick; fan noise; desktop accessories are bulky to port and awkward to use outside a desk; pricey; lacks cellular

radio option and "retina" display

-Specs: Intel dual-core 1.7 GHz i5 processor; 128 gigabytes flash storage; 720p front and 5-megapixel rear cameras

-Price: \$1,000

-Web: acer.com

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