

Re: Anyone used Dell's Inspiron Mini 9 for light CAD stuff?

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On Fri, 21 Nov 2008 13:25:03 -0800, Joerg
<notthisjoergsch@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

From reviews it looks like the Mini 9 should be able to do minor CAD on the road, writing modules specs or reports, etc. Battery life still isn't stellar but better than laptops. Main reason I ask is the (to me) unusual screen format of 1024*600. Not sure if the typical CAD programs can handle that without disappearing and thus inaccessible task bars. I've had that happen in Ubuntu when running 800*600, until I got it to full screen.

<http://www.dell.com/content/products/productdetails.aspx/laptop-inspiron-9?cs=19&s=dhs&ref=homepg>

Anyone care to share their experience?

The main things I do on the road are the usual: Pull datasheets and order numbers off Digikey, email, booking a flight on the web, some PDF viewing, schematic viewing and (minor) editing which most likely will become KiCad, and lots of Gerber file viewing. I'd use the one with XP on there.

This could be a sweet little tool, much easier to schlepp along than the usual machine.

I cancelled an order for that one when Dell could not deliver in time, so my comments are based on the similar MSI Wind, but the specs are not that different.

I have had no problems doing "light" CAD and Gerber viewing under XP, and the usual communication tasks with the 1024x600 screen. It's not bad. Perhaps surprisingly, you can plug it into a 1920x1200 monitor and it drives it to full resolution (though it's a bit pokey). I use a Logitech Bluetooth laser mouse (disposable AA cells so no worries about charging it) for all but the simplest tasks. There's the odd web page that requires you to scroll horizontally, but it's not that bad (and a tilt-wheel mouse helps with that).

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The three cell battery the Wind comes with is great for light weight, but the life is pretty short. I have ordered a 9 cell 3rd party battery which should extend the life to pretty much "whole day" computing, and which adds about 1 pound to the weight. I also ordered a somewhat smaller travel charger (it's already way better than the bulky Dell lapop units) with integral foreign plug adapters that doesn't suffer from having those annoying lumps in the cord (the ferrite common mode filters) nor that bulky line cord. ;-)

Bottom line is that a 10" 1024 x 600 LED-backlit screen is pretty nice, as is the Intel Atom, and under XP with 1G of RAM and a decent HDD you can get a lot done with a machine that weighs not much over a kg.

Oh, and I tested an inexpensive USB-serial cable with a couple of older (2002 ca.) x51 emulator and programmer modules, and it worked flawlessly. Most more modern stuff comes with a USB port anyway. The Bluetooth mouse is nice because it frees up a USB port so you can have an external keyboard and still have a couple ports free.

For more intensive stuff, I really like displays like the WUXGA display on the notebook I'm typing this on at the moment... and a decent processor.. but that weighs a fair bit more (and costs more).

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