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SL & SXL Notebook PCs

The notebooks that met the requirements for the PC/Computing 200 ship with Intel's 386SL chip or AMD's SXL chip running at either 20MHz or 25MHz. They are no larger than 12.5-by-10-by-2.6 inches and weigh no more than 8 pounds with battery. All the notebooks have an internal floppy and accept at least 8MB of RAM, and all include serial and parallel ports. The machines we tested were equipped with 4MB of RAM and either a 60MB or 80MB hard drive.

Product

Compaq LTE/Lite
Compaq Computer Corp.
P.O. Box 692000
Houston, TX 77269-2000
(800) 345-1518
Price: \$3,699

Epson NB-SL/25
Epson America
20770 Madrona Ave.
Torrance, CA 90509-2842
(800) 922-8911
(310) 782-0770
Price: \$3,699

DataWorld NB325SXL
DataWorld
3733 San Gabriel River Pkwy.
Pico Rivera, CA 90660
(310) 695-3777
Price: \$2,090

Toshiba T3300SL
Toshiba America Information Systems
Computer Systems Division
9740 Irvine Blvd.
Irvine, CA 92718
(714) 583-3000
Price: \$4,434

AST Premium Exec 386SX/25
AST Research
16215 Alton Pkwy.
Irvine, CA 92718
(800) 876-4278
(714) 727-4141
Price: \$2,995

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Sceptre 386SXL/25
Sceptre Technologies
560 S. Melrose St.
Placentia, CA 92670
(800) 788-2878
(714) 579-4153
Price: \$2,795

Jetbook 386SL
Jetta International
45 Stouts Lane, Suite 5
Monmouth Junction, NJ 08852
(908) 329-9651
Price: \$2,695

Evaluation	Score
<p>The Compaq LTE/Lite is the finest notebook you can buy today. A complete redesign of Compaq's fabled LTE series, it offers seemingly unlimited expansion options and impressive power in the smallest, lightest package we've seen yet, and its display is unsurpassed. Compaq has not only answered criticisms about keyboard layout and other awkward ergonomics but has gone one better in terms of overall design. And, of course, there's Compaq's customary craftsmanship and attention to detail, all at a very uncustomary price.</p>	87.90
<p>All-around excellence characterizes Epson's NB-SL/25, which emerged from our durability tests unscathed. That's not the only area in which it stood out: The machine turned in some of the fastest hard disk and CPU times we saw. Other advantages include fast video, a removable hard disk, and an excellent keyboard, not to mention roadside service for downed machines.</p>	82.80
<p>With its astonishingly low price, DataWorld's NB325SXL competes head-to-head with hot-selling notebooks from Epson and AST, among others. Our tests proved it to be extremely durable (the right display hinge cracked in our tests, but no other damage resulted), and it boasts long battery life and excellent support.</p>	82
<p>There's plenty to like about Toshiba's T3300SL, including its small size, its broad expandability, and the longest battery life among the notebooks we tested (owing in part to nickelmetal hydride batteries all the other machines used NiCads). The T3300SL was unfazed by our durability tests, and we've always loved Toshiba's keyboards. It's not the cheapest machine around, but the T3300SL still delivers a lot for the money.</p>	79.30
<p>AST's Premium Exec 386SX/25, the latest in the company's ever-successful Premium Exec line, withstood our durability tests without so much as a scratch and suffered no permanent damage. With the additional benefits of a long battery life and first-rate support, the 386SX/25 makes an excellent traveling companion.</p>	79.10

Among the attractive features of the Sceptre 386SXL/25 are its durability (it suffered no damage in our endurance tests), long battery life, and reasonable price. Its keyboard offers the best touch among all the notebooks we tested. Although we'd like to see a faster video refresh rate, the Sceptre is a great deal.

76.50

When you pay only \$2,695 for an SL-based notebook, you hardly expect such extras as a fax/modem, a full complement of ports (including bus mouse and game ports), 2MB of memory on the graphics card, and the ability to upgrade system memory (standard SIMMs, no less). But the Jetbook 386SL offers this and more. Its video performance was among the best.

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