

MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS

HP iPAQ hw6515 Mobile Messenger

PRICE £370 (£434 inc VAT)

DELIVERY £9.50 (£11 inc VAT)

SUPPLIER www.wstore.co.uk

INTERNET www.hp.co.uk

VERDICT HP is out to beat BlackBerry at its own game, and succeeds. This PDA/phone slips easily into a pocket yet offers all the features we've come to expect from a powerful Pocket PC.

The hw6515 is far more than just a potential BlackBerry killer. This miniature marvel isn't merely here to send and receive emails – it can play music, synchronise your calendar with your office from across the country, and it can take photos and record videos. Oh, and it also includes a GPS satellite-navigation receiver.

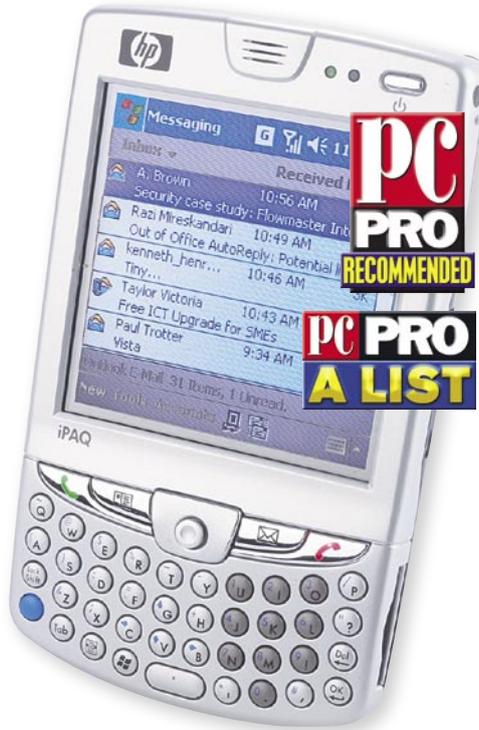
In fact, the hw6515 is crammed with receivers; it's a truly global device, with quad-band GSM and EDGE support. The only notable omissions are Wi-Fi and 3G. This means GPRS is the most likely way you'll keep in touch with the office when on the move, and part of the power of the hw6515 is that, for some jobs, it can replace a notebook. You can receive an email with a Word file attachment, open it up in Pocket Word, make your changes and send it back.

The keyboard isn't the answer to every prayer, though. The chassis is only 71mm wide and, although HP makes a good stab at squeezing in all the vital keys, we never felt comfortable typing. However, it's far easier than handwriting recognition and we made few mistakes: you could write a detailed email on the device, but not a ten-page report.

Despite the impressive-sounding 1.3-megapixel resolution, we're less convinced by the merits of the integrated camera. See www.pcpro.co.uk/messenger/photos.zip for an idea of what to expect, but the trademark characteristics are a lack of focus and, in bright light, a tendency to awful overexposure. The video feature could come in handy though, with a respectable resolution of 352 x 288.

The GPS navigation is more than token too. The software is powered by TomTom, renowned for its accurate maps, turn-by-turn voice directions and intuitive interface. This doesn't even suffer from being squeezed down to the screen's 320 x 320 resolution, as opposed to the 320 x 480 most Pocket PCs use. You get one free region map to download but to make full use you'll need the complete set of Western Europe maps. These normally cost €199 (£138), but you get a 35 per cent discount as standard.

There's one more feature offered by the hw6515: it's also a phone. Sound quality is only average, and we occasionally wanted to boost the volume higher than it could go – we wouldn't



The Mobile Messenger could easily replace your PDA, mobile phone and MP3 player.

recommend this for someone on the phone all the time, every day. And that's quite aside from the fact that you'll look slightly foolish with a PDA clamped to your ear. Fortunately, HP bundles a respectable hands-free stereo headset; if you're listening to music when a call comes through, the music is paused and you press a button on the microphone piece to accept the call.

However, you'll need to buy an SD card or a mini SD card to slip into the two available slots if you want to store more than a couple of different tracks. There's 12MB of flash ROM available, but that's best for backups as it won't lose its data if the battery runs flat. We advise you leave the 64MB of RAM alone to keep the iPAQ responsive.

With a 312MHz processor inside, we weren't expecting spectacular speed anyway, but in fact we found the hw6515 quite nippy – there are occasional pauses, but nothing frustrating. Even when playing video, it managed to cope with barely a stutter. Just note that this is one time you'll miss a 3:2 ratio screen.

Aside from that, the screen is certainly up to scratch. Based on transfective technology, it makes use of ambient light and so remains readable both inside and out, and also manages to tick all the right boxes: vibrant, bright and with

good viewing angles. The major benefit it holds over BlackBerry devices (and smartphones) is that it's also a touchscreen, which makes navigation and web browsing so much more pleasant.

The only trouble is that you'll want to play with the hw6515 a lot, and the combination of a GPRS connection and a bright screen inevitably have a hit on battery life: ten minutes of web browsing consumed 5 per cent of the battery, while ten minutes on the phone stole another 4 per cent. By the end of a weekend away, you'll be looking nervously at the life left. Fortunately, you can buy a replacement battery for £50 (exc VAT) or an extended-life battery for £79.

So how good is this device at handling email? The first hurdle is getting email onto the hw6515, and you have many options at your disposal. For individuals, you can follow the usual trials of accessing POP3 and IMAP over the Internet for free, or you could sign up to Pocket MSN for a one-off fee of £10.99 inc VAT.

For anyone in a business, there are two main options. If you're running Exchange Server 2003, you can wirelessly synchronise your email, calendar and contacts over air when out of the office – but note the lack of push email support – and for everyone else there's the option of using a package like GoodLink (www.good.com).

So does this all add up to a BlackBerry killer? In almost every way, yes; the only areas where the BlackBerry still wins are industry support (HP has announced a deal with Vodafone to sell the phone, but we must wait for the rest), push email out-of-the-box and, arguably, cost of ownership. The iPAQ is a more complicated device, so will almost certainly lead to more support calls.

Despite this, we can see the hw6515 becoming an incredibly popular tool, particularly if it follows RIM into partnerships with other network operators. Most crucially, it's surprisingly compact: there's no aerial to ruin its streamlined shape, unlike the palmOne Treo 650 (see *issue 129, p69*), and the simple but effective transparent grey visor means you don't need to worry about buying a case to protect the screen – just slip it into your pocket. Once there, it doesn't feel much different to the bulk of a normal phone. What's more, HP has got the price just about right. If your job relies on keeping in touch at all times, and you need the extra flexibility the Mobile Messenger brings over its opposition, this is £370 incredibly well spent.

TIM DANTON

PC PRO RATINGS

PERFORMANCE	★★★★★
FEATURES & DESIGN	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★

SPECIFICATIONS 312MHz Intel PXA270 processor; 64MB RAM (58MB available); 64MB ROM (12MB available); 320 x 320 transfective TFT; SD card slot; mini SD card slot; 1.3-megapixel camera; infrared; Bluetooth; GSM/GPRS/EDGE quad-band phone; GPS receiver; Pocket PC 2003 SE for Phone. Dimensions: 71 x 21 x 118mm (WDH). Weight: 165g. Part code: FA385T.



The iPAQ comes with a protective screen visor, yet it's slim enough to fit unobtrusively in a pocket.