

● MID-RANGE NOTEBOOK



Gateway MX6635b

PRICE £595 (£699 inc VAT)

DELIVERY N/A

SUPPLIER Staples (high-street shops only)

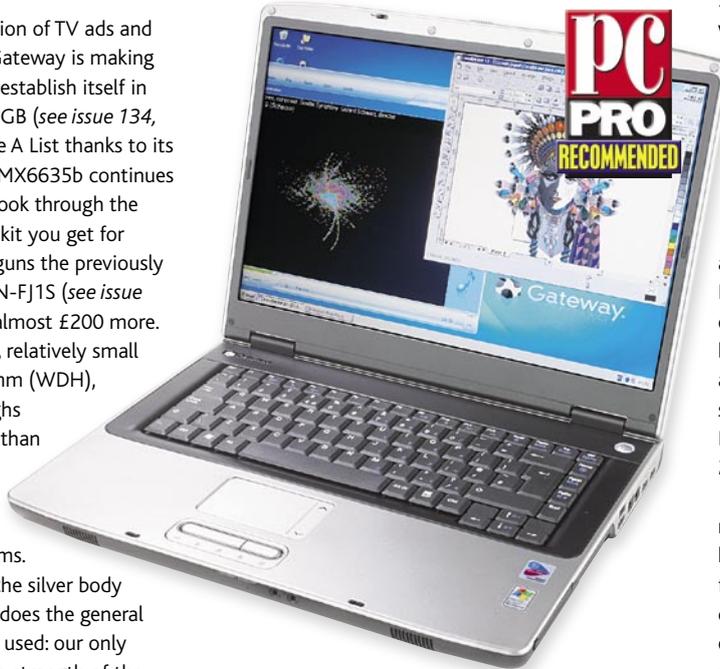
INTERNET www.uk.gateway.com

VERDICT Cheap and powerful would have been impressive enough, but this notebook also has a feel of quality about it, a 100GB hard disk and a widescreen TFT.

Through a combination of TV ads and aggressive prices, Gateway is making a huge effort to re-establish itself in the UK market. Its 8550GB (see issue 134, p61) took a place on the A List thanks to its cracking value, and the MX6635b continues in this vein: just take a look through the specs to see how much kit you get for your £600. It even out-guns the previously A-listed Sony VAIO VGN-FJ1S (see issue 135, p56), which costs almost £200 more.

It's certainly a neat, relatively small unit at 358 x 263 x 36mm (WDH), even if at 2.85kg it weighs around half a kilo more than the Sony. Battery life of almost four hours under light use also helps its portability claims. The black flourishes to the silver body add a touch of class, as does the general sturdiness of the plastic used: our only reservations are over the strength of the lid, so beware if taking it on your travels. Opening the lid reveals a large, accommodating keyboard that proved comfortable to type on with minimal rattle. The keys are full-sized – including a double-height Enter key – and arranged logically, with miscellaneous navigation and editing keys to the right.

The spacious keyboard is made possible by the widescreen 15.5in TFT. It matches the pixel count of the Sony's screen at 1,280 x 800. The electronics housed in the lid give a respectably good image; photos and films looked rich even if the darker areas lost some detail. The Desktop is clear, bright and crisp too. However, its vertical viewing angles aren't its strength: when moving from a square-on



Plenty of processing power and quality for just £595. It's a bargain.

typing position, we noticed colour distortion. Still, there are no problems when sat in front of the machine and no restrictions on the horizontal viewing angles.

Every other component is impressive for a notebook at this price. There's a speedy Pentium M 740 running at 1.73GHz and 1GB of RAM to hold disparate applications. This combination proved its worth in our benchmarks, with a great score of 0.77. By contrast, the Sony scored 0.70 and the Elonex ProWire/D (see issue 136, p103), which won our £599 notebooks group test last month, managed just 0.61.

There's also more storage capacity in this Gateway than in either the Elonex or the Sony. While 100GB instead of 80GB might not sound much, it does delay the dreaded archiving for a few more months at least. And should that day come a little sooner, there's a DVD writer that pops out of the left-hand side.

Further back on the left is the S-Video out, with D-SUB out and power connectors relegated to the rear. Just beware that most of your cables will snake out of the right-hand side. The four USB 2 ports are clumped towards the back, which could cause problems with wider USB flash drives blocking other ports. They're split into two blocks by the 10/100

LAN and modem ports, though. Moving down the right, towards the front, there's a slot for new ExpressCard/34 and a mini-FireWire port. There's also a slot for the Type I and II PC Cards. The Sony has a media card slot instead of the ExpressCard/34 format and favours a Type II/III PC Card slot, but otherwise both notebooks offer the same plugs and ports.

Both notebooks use the Sonoma generation of Centrino, and so share the 915G chipset as well as the 802.11b/g Intel wireless. Gateway offers a single year of collect-and-return warranty too, with Sony going for a weaker return-to-base policy. By this time, you may be wondering where Gateway has made the savings to sell this machine for £200 less than the Sony.

One area is the software bundle, with Sony offering some interesting and useful applications such as Adobe Photoshop Elements and Premiere Standard. Gateway only bundles Microsoft Works 8, a competent but not brilliant suite of spreadsheet, database and word processor. However, with the £200 saving, you could buy the bundle of Adobe Photoshop Elements 4 and Premiere Elements 2, and still have £100 left over.

The only problem with buying this machine is having to actually leave the house to visit a Staples store rather than wait for a courier to deliver the machine. The one consolation is that there's a good chance of finding a Staples near you, as a visit to www.staples.co.uk will reveal. And while Gateway UK is currently a relatively unknown quantity, the fact that its support lines are open every day, including Bank Holidays and weekends, gives us some reassurance that problems will be dealt with efficiently.

We have no serious qualms about the machine itself. Vertical viewing angles are fine for everyday work and, even if they're a touch narrow, you expect such compromises in a notebook costing a shade under £600. What you don't expect is for it to be faster than a notebook costing £200 more, or for it to have more storage and match that notebook in all the other significant departments. This Gateway notebook is a bargain.

CLIVE WEBSTER



Weighing 2.85kg and lasting for nearly four hours under light use, the MX6635b is well suited to life away from the mains.

RESULTS

BATTERY
1:31 (Intensive Test) 3:46 (Light-Use Test)
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
HOURS:MINUTES

2D SPEED
0.77
0 1 2 3 4
BETTER

OFFICE: 0.97 2D GRAPHICS: 0.82
ENCODING: 0.69 MULTITASKING: 0.60
An explanation of our new benchmarks can be found on the cover disc.

PC PRO RATINGS

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

SPECIFICATIONS 1.73GHz Pentium M 740; 1GB PC4200 SDRAM; 100GB hard disk; LG GWA-4082N DVD writer; 128MB (shared) Intel GMA 900 graphics; 15.5in 1,280 x 800 TFT; 56K modem; 10/100 Ethernet; 802.11b/g wireless; 4 x USB 2; mini-FireWire; Type II PC Card slot; ExpressCard/34 slot; D-SUB output; Microsoft Works 8; Windows XP Home SP 2; 1yr C&R warranty. Dimensions: 358 x 263 x 36mm (WDH). Weight: 2.85kg. Part code: MX6635b.