

Dell Latitude D610

**PC PRO
A LIST**

PRICE £1,099 (£1,291 inc VAT)

SUPPLIER Dell 0870 907 4155

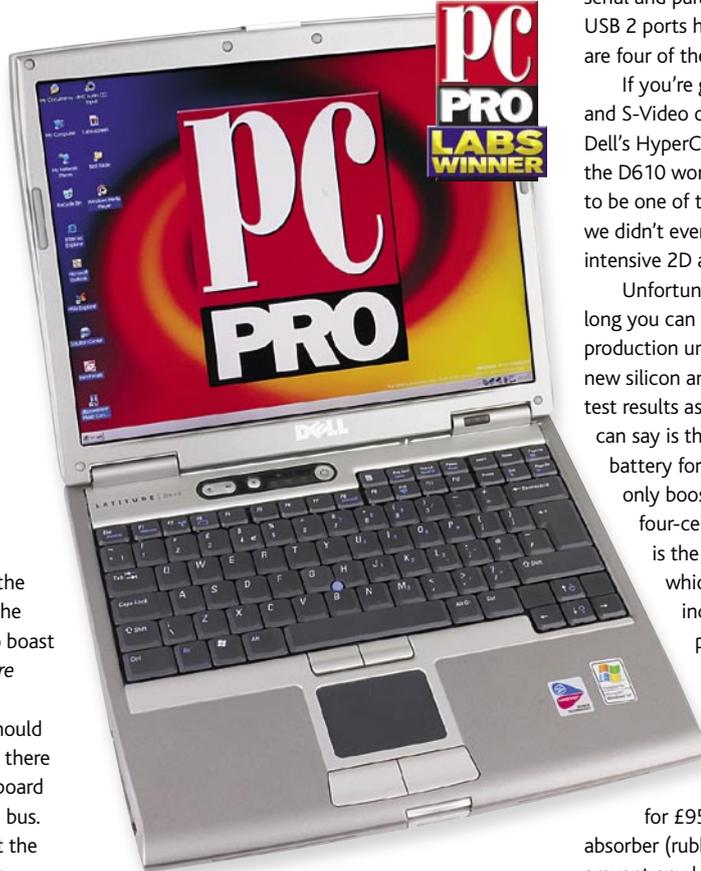
VERDICT The second most expensive notebook here, but it's well worth the money and there are cheaper configurations available. For business use, you won't go wrong with the D610.

The Latitude D600 was Dell's mainstream business notebook in 2004 (and the firm's most popular notebook ever), and here's its replacement: the D610. Sitting our pre-production review machine side-by-side with the old model, we were hard-pushed to tell much difference between them – they're both a similar shade of silvery grey and have the same dual trackpoint/touchpad pointers and great keyboard layout.

Some members of the *PC Pro* team weren't too convinced by the Latitude's styling, lambasting it as looking dated, while others weren't put off at all. Whatever your opinion, there's no denying that this is the most forward-looking notebook on test. And the reason why lies under the hood: this is the first notebook we've seen in the Labs to boast Intel's new Sonoma technology (for more details, see p54).

This is good, because PCI Express should eventually lead to lower cost – after all, there are lower pin counts and fewer motherboard traces to run compared to the older PCI bus.

The more immediate benefit is that the D610 on test here has a blistering 2GHz Pentium M CPU. This pushed the D610 to a chart-topping 2.06 in our benchmarks. The CPU runs on a faster 533MHz front side bus as opposed to the older 400MHz speed, which other laptops on test use. Memory is now DDR2 – using lower voltage than DDR1 – again at 533MHz. In this model, Dell installs 512MB



The D610 includes a smart card reader for enhanced data security.

of RAM and there's an easily accessible slot in the base of the system for adding more.

Perhaps of less benefit is the new Intel GMA (Graphics Media Accelerator) 900 integrated graphics (on the 915GM chipset only), which still lags behind ATI's Mobility Radeon 9700 when it comes to 3D performance. Don't get us wrong, you can still play the odd 3D game on the D610 – just be prepared to lower the detail levels and resolution. And, if you really need the 3D grunt, there's always the option of a Mobility Radeon X300, which is a great performer in mobile terms.

The 14.1in TFT has a higher resolution than we specified – 1,400 x 1,050 rather than 1,024 x 768. You don't have to reduce the resolution to make text easier to read, though – a quick trip into the display settings is all that's needed to increase the DPI to 120 from 96. The panel itself is noticeably brighter than others, and has great contrast. Horizontal viewing angles are no better, but this could at least prevent other people on trains reading your private data.

As you'd expect, 802.11b/g Wi-Fi is integrated, as is Bluetooth. Status lights for each are welcome, and it's simple to enable or disable Wi-Fi with a function key combination. Hardware volume controls will be appreciated too. Infrared is located on the left side along with headphone and microphone jacks, as well as a Type II PC Card slot. Surprisingly, there are serial and parallel ports, but the number of USB 2 ports hasn't been compromised – there are four of them, the most on test.

If you're giving a presentation, both VGA and S-Video outputs are present. Also, thanks to Dell's HyperCool system, which uses heatpipes, the D610 won't annoy your audience. It proved to be one of the quietest machines on test and we didn't even hear fan noise when running our intensive 2D application benchmarks.

Unfortunately, we can't tell you how long you can expect the battery to last. Final production units will feature an updated BIOS, new silicon and new drivers, so we will publish test results as soon as we have one. What we can say is that you should specify the six-cell battery for no extra cost when you order. It only boosts the weight from 2.5 (with the four-cell battery) to 2.6kg. A neat feature is the row of LEDs on each battery, which gives you an immediate indication of its charge state on pressing the button.

Storage comes courtesy of a huge 80GB hard disk, and there's a CD-RW/DVD-ROM drive for backing up data. You can upgrade to a DVD writer for £95. The dual 'StrikeZone' shock absorber (rubber feet on the underside) helps to prevent any loss of data from the hard disk. The hardware is rounded off with a V.92 modem and gigabit Ethernet – this is one fully-loaded laptop.

In some ways, the D610 is more powerful than most users will need, but this means it will last longer before needing to be replaced. And from a business perspective, the D610 makes a good case for itself. The warranty outstrips everything else on test – three years of on-site cover with next-business-day response. Plus, it covers accidental damage – a valuable addition for notebooks. Another plus is that Dell can offer the D610 in 34 languages.

With the bundled OpenManage and QuickSet software, and security in the form of a smart card reader, password protection and a Kensington lock slot, Dell has every business base covered. When you add the fact that Dell can provide other services such as bespoke disk images and network pre-configuration for £20 per unit, the D610



Dell realises that users need as many USB ports as possible – the D610 has four.

PC PRO RATINGS

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