

Elonex Soliton ProWire/150-2

PRICE £799 (£939 inc VAT)

SUPPLIER Elonex 0870 780 1010

VERDICT Superbly built, powerful, packed with features and backed by a good warranty, the Elonex Soliton is the most well-rounded notebook we've seen for this price.

Elonex has recently hit a rich vein of form, collecting an armful of *PC Pro* awards, and the tradition remains unbroken this month thanks to the superb Soliton ProWire/150-2. Not only is this a stylish and attractive notebook, it's also well put together.

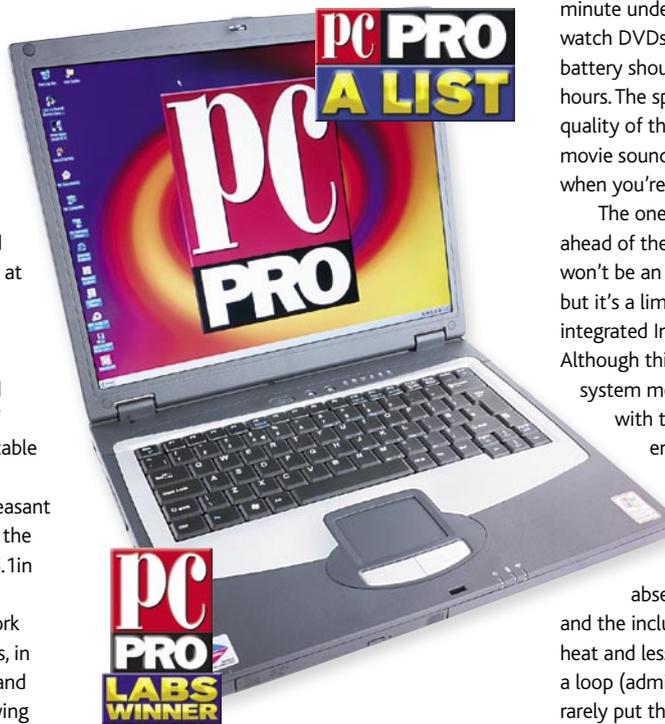
Pick it up and you'll feel the solid build quality and notice that there are no rattles at all. The keyboard is also one of the best on test – the Ctrl key is in the right place and there's a full-height Enter key, unlike the Evesham. Of course, you'll quickly get used to any layout, but it's the quiet firmness of the ProWire's keys that make it so comfortable to type on.

Even the touchpad and buttons are pleasant to use, but it takes a while to scroll around the large 1,400 x 1,050 resolution TFT. It's a 15.1in display and offers the full 4:3 aspect ratio, making this notebook more suitable for work and Internet browsing than watching DVDs, in contrast to the Evesham and HP. It's crisp and dazzling at full brightness, but vertical viewing angles aren't the best on show this month.

Hooking up an external display is no problem, thanks to VGA and S-Video outputs, while three USB 2 ports are also welcome. Mini-FireWire offers extra flexibility, while a handy SD/MMC card reader means the most popular of memory cards are supported. Connectivity continues with a Type II PC Card slot, a parallel port and an infrared receiver.

Other wireless technologies are more up to date, with 802.11b/g available at the flick of a useful switch on the side of the machine. You'll also find side-mounted headphone and microphone sockets, but note that, like most notebooks, there's no line-in jack. Unusually, there's a front-mounted optical drive, which we like a lot – it makes inserting discs much simpler when you're working on a desk.

The drive in question is a Toshiba DVD writer, capable of writing to DVD+/-R at 4x.



The Soliton offers a great combination of power and portability, with up to four hours' battery life.

Like the Evesham, it doesn't support dual-layer burning – only Asus, AJP and Mesh have this honour. At 80GB, the ProWire's hard disk has a 20GB advantage over the Evesham, although the Hitachi disk spins at 4,200rpm rather than the faster Western Digital Scorpio in the Voyager.

This didn't prove a disadvantage in our benchmarks. The ProWire scored a highly respectable 2.11 overall – a whisker ahead of the Evesham. And this is despite their completely dissimilar CPUs; the Elonex is a Centrino system using the stunningly fast 2GHz Pentium M 755, while Evesham goes down the desktop AMD route with the Athlon 64 3400+. Both systems have 512MB of RAM, but the ProWire boasts only PC2100 memory. There's a

free memory socket, though, so you can add more – a limitation with the Voyager, which doesn't allow you to add more RAM.

Despite the power-efficient Pentium M chip, the ProWire lasted just over one-and-a-half hours in our intensive-use test. Thankfully, it more than made up for this average performance by running for four hours, one minute under light use. Plus, if you want to watch DVDs on the move, you're in luck as the battery should last for almost two-and-a-half hours. The speakers aren't anywhere near the quality of the HP's, but they're loud enough for movie soundtracks and the odd music track when you're on the move.

The one area where the Evesham leaps ahead of the Elonex is 3D performance. This won't be an essential requirement for some, but it's a limitation of the ProWire with its integrated Intel Extreme Graphics 2.

Although this uses up 64MB of the main system memory, like the other notebooks with this chipset, it simply isn't powerful enough to run games such as Unreal Tournament 2004, even at 1,024 x 768. At this resolution, it managed only 5fps.

There are benefits to the absence of the Mobility Radeon 9700 and the inclusion of a mobile CPU, though: less heat and less noise. When we ran 3DMark03 on a loop (admittedly a slightly unfair test, as you'll rarely put this much strain on the ProWire), it reached only 32°C underneath. The single fan isn't too noisy when running and, from the front, we recorded only 32dBA. Under light use, though, the fans rarely spin, making the ProWire virtually inaudible.

Plus, Elonex bundles a carry case and Works Suite 2005, saving you the inconvenience and expense of these near-essential accessories. Although Evesham also includes the latter, it can't quite match Elonex's generous three-year, collect-and-return warranty. It's true that Evesham offers a year of on-site cover, but after this you'll have to pay to return the notebook should anything go wrong.

For many people, particularly those who want to watch DVDs and play games, the Evesham is the better machine. However, if you aren't interested in playing games and you want a notebook you can carry around without worrying about the battery running out, the ProWire is a great choice. One final bonus is that, if you order from Elonex's website, you can have the ProWire delivered for free. If you do order, though, make sure you use Elonex's e-web code: 05-PCP-150 in the boxes provided to ensure you get the correct configuration at this special price.



Rear view: the Soliton is slim at 30mm tall, but there's no shortage of ports.



Side view: wireless technologies include infrared and 802.11b/g. We particularly like the hardware switch.

PC PRO RATINGS	
PERFORMANCE	★★★★★
FEATURES & DESIGN	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★☆
OVERALL	★★★★★