

CRN Review: Panasonic's Toughest Kid On The Block

Panasonic's ToughBook notebooks are built for some of the most demanding environments and the latest iteration of the CF-52 is no exception.

With a street price of about \$2,500, the CF-52 offers a lot of bang for the buck.

Keeping up with the Joneses has always been a challenge to notebook manufacturers: As soon as they introduce a new model, the competition comes out with one with more bells and whistles.

For Panasonic, its ToughBook series of ruggedized notebooks has been somewhat immune to the competition's whims, as most specialized products are. Be that as it may, Panasonic still keeps an eye on the market to make sure it can deliver the performance that a mobile worker needs, especially if that mobile worker is a soldier, law enforcement officer or even an ordinary field representative.

Designed as the replacement for the CF-51, the CF-52 brings more muscle and style to the table (or foxhole). VARs will find the unit is powered by an Intel Centrino Duo T7300 2GHz processor, backed with 1 Gbyte of Ram and a 120-Gbyte hard disk drive.

Also worth noting is the new 15.4-inch WUXGA display, which offers crisp resolution of 1920 x 1200. Performance is further enhanced with a discrete graphics processor from ATI.

That combination of hardware allowed the unit to garner an overall rating of 553.8 on Passmark's PerformanceTest 6.1.

While the CF-52's score doesn't approach Lenovo T61P's score of 661.3 (for a machine that also uses the Intel Santa Rosa chipset), it is doubtful that the Lenovo unit would survive a downpour or a fall from 3 feet onto concrete.

What makes the ToughBook so tough is the overall construction of the unit. The case is constructed of magnesium alloy and covered with impact-resistant plastic. The hard drive and display are shock mounted, and the keyboard is spill resistant. Most of the ports, and there is quite a few, are covered by dust-resistant doors. Of course all of those features add weight to the unit. A travel weight of roughly 8 pounds makes the unit more of a luggable than a portable.

Mobile workers will appreciate the wireless options included with the unit, such as 802.11 a/b/g, Bluetooth and a choice of embedded wireless broadband radios (EV-DO or UMTS/HSDPA). An 85-watt battery promises as much as 6 hours of use with all of the unit's power saving features enabled.

The CF-52 is far from an inexpensive notebook, but for users that need a system that is anything but delicate, the price seems reasonable. For added peace of mind, Panasonic backs the CF-52 with a 3 year warranty.

VARs will find Panasonic's channel program as palatable as the CF-52. The company offers decent margins, enhanced support offerings and marketing tools to authorized partners, along with a fast turn around on repairs.

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