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By Cisco Cheng

Fully rugged [laptops](#) are built for one purpose: to endure all kinds of weather conditions and survive rough terrain and outdoor environments that generally aren't friendly to electronic equipment. The GETAC B300 (\$3,470 street) is built like a tank and can withstand practically anything thrown at it. Because it's fully rugged, it meets MIL-SPEC-810F specifications—a list of military testing protocols that aren't for the squeamish. These laptops might not be as well known in mainstream circles as Panasonic Toughbooks, but technically they're as complete as feature-filled as any mainstream laptop. The B300 has a terrific keyboard, plenty of connectivity options, and insanely long battery life. As with many rugged laptops, though, to afford it you'd need pockets as deep as the government's.

The B300 has its hard-as-nails design down to a science, following common rugged design principles while adding some of its own touches. Its frame is completely wrapped in magnesium alloy—not the kind touted in some business laptops but a thicker blend of metallic alloys that doesn't bend when you press hard on it. The corners are protected by hard rubber, and every side port is shielded by a durable cover. The hard drive, optical drive, and battery bay have the same durable covers as well as locking mechanisms that keep them from accidentally popping out. And the GETAC B300 wouldn't be complete without its signature briefcase handle, similar to the one on the [Panasonic Toughbook CF-52](#).

The B300's full-size keyboard delivers a typing experience as close to perfect as you can get. In my opinion, the keyboard is better than the ones on the [Dell Latitude ATG D620](#) and the Panasonic CF-52. Though the touchpad was a little small for my taste, the rubber mouse buttons were responsive and a pleasure to click. With all the heavy metals surrounding it, the B300 weighs in at 8.4 pounds, heavier than the CF-52 by a pound and the [Dell](#) ATG D620 by 2 pounds. Then again, the [Dell](#) and [Panasonic](#) are semi-rugged laptops, not fully rugged. I'll address the differences in a bit.

Many laptops, including the B300, now come with 13-inch widescreens, which I believe offer the best combination of weight and viewing experience. If a bigger screen is your cup of tea, the Dell has a 14-inch and the Panasonic a 15.4-inch, both widescreens. For outdoor use, the B300 even has an option for a display with a luminance of 1,200 cd/m2. To give you an idea of how bright that is, typical laptop displays range from 100 to 200 cd/m2. The resolution, however, could have been higher than 1,024-by-768; that of the Panasonic CF-52 goes up to 1,920-by-1,200.

The term *fully rugged* means that a device has successfully passed a series of environmental tests issued by the United States military, called the MIL-SPEC-810F. *Semi-rugged* laptops are required to pass only a handful of these tests. Then there are *business-rugged systems*, like the [Panasonic CF-Y7](#), which undergo a series of modified MIL-SPEC tests but aren't actually certified for any of them. The B300 gets its bragging rights from having been certified for all the tests, including those for altitude, vibration, temperature, rain and dust, humidity, cold storage, shock, and drop.

All the ports are sealed, and they're plentiful from a mainstream standpoint. The B300 has three USB ports, one less than the Dell and Panasonic. A FireWire port, an SD slot, and a 120GB hard drive are also consistent with other rugged laptops in its class. Anytime you're dealing with government or military-issue devices, there will be legacy connectors for older or versions. The B300 has two serial ports, a VGA-out, and twin PC Card slots. You can

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also get the optional PC Card expansion module for ExpressCards and SmartCard technologies.

As for [wireless technologies](#), the B300 is fully stacked. Every 3G wireless capability—EV-DO, HSDPA, UMTS, EDGE—is available as an option, as well as a GPS module with an internal antenna visible from the right-hand side. Standard support for Wi-Fi 802.11n and Bluetooth 2.0 is included as well. One feature that both the B300 and the CF-52 lack, however, is a webcam. With videoconferencing picking up momentum, a built-in webcam—such as the 1.3-megapixel webcam on the Dell ATG D620—would seem an ideal addition for a rugged laptop meant to be used in remote places.

The B300's 1.6-GHz Intel Core 2 Duo L7500 processor is a low-voltage model that ranks below the Dell's and Panasonic's in performance speed. GETAC went with it for a reason, however. Since it doesn't take a lot of horsepower to run midrange applications like MS Office, mapping software, and video and photo editors, the company was willing to eschew Dell's and Panasonic's standard-voltage processors in favor of gaining battery life. And boy, does the B300 dominate in that area! MobileMark 2007 tests generated a score of 6 hours 45 minutes, blowing away a previous best set by the Panasonic's 5 hours 15 minutes. Both the B300 and the CF-52 used 85-plus Wh batteries. If you're running professional video-editing programs, CAD software, or 3D-intensive mapping software, the faster processors in the Dell and Panasonic units might be a better fit. Both come with graphics cards that are more suitable for 3D applications than the B300's integrated graphics, as well.

The GETAC B300 caters to a select group of people. As the street price is well above \$3,000 and the protection against the elements is extreme, it's not for your average businessperson. Nor is it available direct, so you have to head over to a third-party e-tailer like GroupMobile.com. That said, this is one of the best and most complete fully rugged laptops in the business, even if it isn't as famous as its Toughbook counterparts.

Benchmark Test Results

Check out the [GETAC B300's test scores](#).

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