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Longterm Review: Venom BlackBook Zero 14

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We've put Venom's ultraportable to the test all over the world. Does it stack up?

We've been seeing Venom laptops come across our labs testbench for a few years now, and we really like the company's commitment to useful specs and build quality. But we've never really doubled down to see what the company's laptops are like to use longterm.

Until now.

We reviewed Venom's BlackBook Zero 14 back in February (<https://web.archive.org/web/20180504234745/https://www.pcauthority.com.au/Review/451872,review-venom-blackbook-zero-14.aspx>), and we liked what we saw back then. It's a slim, yet sturdy, and remarkably versatile thanks to a replaceable battery and upgradeable SSD. But what's it like to actually take out on the

road?

Apples and Oranges

I travel a fair bit, and my usual go-to device when I'm on the road is an iPad Air paired with a Belkin keyboard case. It's very light, great for content creation – if I'm not writing for work, I'm writing for my own projects – and has an array of very functional apps and even games. Not that I play that much when I'm travelling; I'm either too busy working, or too busy seeing the sights!

I've often thought that this is just about the ideal device for travel, so was curious to see how a more fully-featured, proper laptop would stack up.

Generally, using the Zero 14 for the last six months has been a real pleasure. It's travelled from to Poland and Moscow on two separate long-haul trips, and been toted on a couple of bus-strips down to Canberra in that time, as well as lugged around Sydney itself to various work events - and the odd bar for some serious writing time. The slim 14mm chassis may be heavier not only than my usual iPad setup, but also many other ultraportables, but what it lacks in terms of thinness and lightness, it makes up in sheer durability. There simply isn't a single scratch on the Zero 14's alloy body.



The tapering shape of the notebook's also great for travellers constantly forced to remove their laptop for airport security checks, as it easily slides back into your luggage once you've passed

through. It's a little thing, but one I really appreciated.

Less cool, though, is the matte body's tendency to pick up fingerprints and other marks from use. It's better than a glossy finish, by a long-shot, but much harder to keep clean.

Content with creation

I've written tens of thousands of words on the Zero 14, and I have to say it's keyboard has been a real pleasure, accurate for touch-typing and responsive. The backlit keys make for easy typing in low-lit bars or darkened air-craft cabins, too, which is definitely a plus, and the matte-finish 1920 x 1080 display is as clear in the dark or even in daylight, making it easy to work no matter where you are. The colours are a little muted, but not in any way that detracts either from professional use, or watching videos. The speakers, though, are unsurprisingly not all useful – they make a good effort, but most people will happily switch over to headphones. And if you're on the go, anyway, that's pretty much the default usage scenario.

The touchpad does everything you'd expect, with one exception – it's placed a touch too far to the left, at least for the way I type, which means I commonly trigger the mouse with the heel of my left hand while typing, which is a touch annoying, but not exactly a deal breaker.



Also slightly annoying is the Zero 14's slightly dodgy wireless reception. It's mostly solid, but it does occasionally lose its connection for no reason, when other devices – my Galaxy smartphone

or iPad – has zero issues maintaining a connection. Given I work on Google Docs a lot when I travel, it can be a little frustrating if I haven't saved a file offline – which is an easy enough habit to get into.

On the upside, the laptop's battery is really quite solid. With heavy usage, I could get eight to ten hours out of the Zero 14, and multi-day uptime with irregular use and careful battery management. It's more than capable of lasting for most legs of an international flight, which is great if you're travelling on an aircraft without back-of-seat charging.

On top of that, the Zero 14 comes with two charging bricks, which means you can have one at home, and one at the office, or at least always have a backup if you do lose one while on the road. It's a nice touch.

About the only ongoing lack that I felt between my iPad and the Zero 14 was the touchscreen. If you'd told me a few years ago I would have come to rely upon tapping on the screen while creating or editing a document, I would have laughed, but here I am, still finding myself absently tapping away at the Zero's display, and spending a moment wondering why the cursor isn't responding. A touch display may be out of the question given the Zero 14's very competitive price point, but it was still something I missed.

Longterm Verdict

In a testing situation like this, about the best metric is this: would I keep using the product once the test is over?

Well, to put it simply, I'm not looking forward to packing up the Zero 14. It's been a reliable machine through a mess of air-miles. It's been great to work and write on, delivering a fine mix of sturdy reliability and the kind of style that means you feel a little proud pulling it out to work on in an airport bar.

Would I keep using the Zero 14? Absolutely.

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