

Sony VAIO PCG-TR2A

Small, fast, and comfortable—this is laptop computing the way we like it!

Weighing a mere three pounds with an optical drive, Sony's TR2A is a joy to transport. Granted, Fujitsu paved the way for the innovation when it dramatically transformed the design of its Lifebook P-series, but the TR2A is a respectable knockoff. In fact, the TR2A compares favorably with the Lifebook P5020D, which received a 9 verdict and a Kick Ass award when we reviewed it in the February issue.

Like the P5020D, the TR2A uses a 1GHz Intel Pentium M, also known as Centrino. The Ultra Low Voltage designator on the chip signifies its ability to efficiently provide usable processor power without generating much

heat. Like the P5020D, the TR2A races circles around Transmeta's TMS800 Crusoe chip, which typically powers such small notebooks. Admittedly, the Crusoe is a last-generation part—we have yet to get hands-on experience with Transmeta's upcoming Efficcon.

Performance-wise, the TR2A stacks up nicely against the Fujitsu P5020D. It scores just a hair behind the P5020D in our *SYSmark2002* and *Premiere 6* tests and slightly better than its competitor in *Photoshop*. This isn't much of a surprise considering that both notebooks pack the same amount of RAM, as well as identical CPUs and core logic chipsets. Both mini-laptops were unable to run our *Quake III* demo at 1280x1024 because their displays don't support vertical resolutions higher than 768.

Where the TR2A clearly excels is in audio extraction. The laptop's Matshita optical drive ripped audio 100 seconds faster than the P5020D's Toshiba drive. On the other hand, despite having nearly the same battery capacity (4400mAh vs. 4300mAh in the TR2A), the P5020D ran our test DVD almost 50 minutes longer than Sony's TR2A managed. (It's quite possible the TR2A's XBrite panel consumes more power, or that our test notebook's battery was in less-than-ideal shape.)

Aesthetically, the TR2A has the edge. We like the classy magnesium finish, and Sony's choice of display is similarly impressive. Instead of the typical anti-glare coating most notebooks use, the TR2A features a



Stylish and classy, Sony's VAIO mini-notebook also boasts blazing fast speeds.

reflective glossy-like finish that makes DVDs appear vibrant and appealing. However, under some lighting conditions and during long stretches at the keyboard, we've found that this coating can increase eye strain.

The TR2A's keyboard requires no harnesses, candles, or paddles to use. While it feels slightly spongy, we'll take it over Fujitsu's contortionist keyboard any day. Oddly enough, Sony's signature feature in the VAIO laptop series—the scroll wheel next to the touchpad—is absent.

Sony scores points for including a full-size video-out port so the TR2A can be connected to an external monitor. Using the video port, the TR2A was able to drive an external CRT at 1600x1200 without any problems. Finally, in a nod to the PictureBook VAIOs of yesteryear, the TR2A includes a camera mounted to the frame of the display that can capture still or video images in VGA resolutions.

Would we pick Sony's TR2A over Fujitsu's P5020D? We hate ties, but each notebook has merits that balance the scales of our opinion. The TR2A has a better keyboard, better-looking magnesium case, and a handy VGA port. However, the Fujitsu's extended battery options (you can run two at once), scroll stick, and anti-reflective screen are equally strong.

—GORDON MAH UNG

UNDER THE HOOD

THE BRAINS

CPU	1GHz Pentium M (1MB L2) using Intel 855GM chipset
RAM	512MB DDR266
I/O ports	One CardBus PC Card, head-phone, mic-in, Memory Stick Pro slot, two USB, four-pin FireWire 400 plus DC-out, video out
Modem	V.92
LAN	Intel Pro/100 VE Fast Ethernet, Intel Pro/Wireless LAN 2100 802.11b

DISPLAY

Video	Integrated Intel Graphics
Display	10.5-inch (1280x768@32-bit) using Intel 855GM chipset

STORAGE

Hard drive	Toshiba MK4004GAH
CD-RW/DVD-ROM	Matshita UJDA755

SOUND

Audio chip	Sigmatel AC97
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OTHER

VGA camera built into panel, and a zoom button

TIPPING THE SCALES

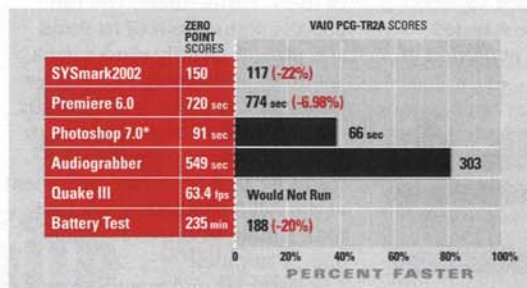
Lap weight: 3.1
Carry weight: 3.3

BUNDLE

Microsoft Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works, Intervideo WinDVD 4.0, Netscape 7.1, Quicken New User, Microsoft Age of Empires II, Money 2004, Works 7.0, SonicStage

BOOT: 49 sec.

DOWN: 18 sec.



Our zero-point notebook is a Dell Dimension 8200, and includes a 1.7GHz P-4M CPU, 256MB DDR266, a 64MB 128-bit DDR GeForce4 Go graphics chipset, and a 5400rpm IBM Travelstar 60H hard drive. *Our notebook Photoshop 7.0 test differs from our new desktop Photoshop test.

MAXIMUM PC VERDICT 9

TATTOO

Good power, fair battery life, and a decent keyboard.

MINI ME

No scroll wheel?

\$2,100, www.sony.com