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August/September 1995

Pen Lab Review

IBM ThinkPad 360PE

IBM remains committed to pen-enhanced notebooks.

Right upfront, kudos to IBM for not only sticking with its pen [computers](#), but continuing to enhance and improve the lines. Of course, we still believe that all ThinkPads should have pens, as that would make them even better machines for little more money (digitizer/pen/chip/software combos sell for as little as \$50 in quantity), but until that happens, the presence of the pen enhanced ThinkPad 360s is good news indeed. How did the new ThinkPad 360PE come to be? A little genetic history: when IBM replaced its successful 750 line of with the even more impressive 755 series last year, the company did include a pen version not in the upscale 755 series but in the more economy-minded 360 Series instead. The 360 P offered almost everything the old 750P had, plus a color screen and a better price. However, the 360P only had a 486SX/33 chip and didn't have the 750's sophisticated audio subsystem. Apparently, the lack of a floating point processor and audio capabilities left some IBMpen customers wanting: the 486SX/33 doesn't exactly set the world on fire and many pen aficionados are also interested in exploring voice recognition, an area IBM happens to be strong in. IBM listened to their customers and released the 360PE in early summer of 1995.

360PE:Deja vu all over again?

The 360P looks and feels identical to the 360P which it either complements or replaces, depending on whom you talk to. It has the same trade mark good looks, trust-inspiring construction, and excellent engineering. The unit still measures 11.7x8.3x2.1 inches and weighs almost seven lbs. with battery and floppy drive. The 360P's I/O ports placement remains unchanged, with serial, parallel, and VGA ports on its backside, hidden beneath a hood that contains a sliding door for access to a docking station/port replicator connector. The 360's two PCMCIA Type II (or one Type III) slots are still covered by that fingernail-busting hood, and the honest to goodness, non-butterflying keyboard is well laid out. For pen neophytes, there is IBM's TrackPoint II pointing device. Standard memory remains 4MB of RAM, expandable up to 20MB. However, the 360PE has a faster SL-enhanced Intel 486DE2/50 processor and the 750P's 16-bit audio subsystem is back.

Software galore

Like the ThinkPad 360P, the 360PE comes with IBM DOS 6.3, Microsoft Windows for Pen Computing, and PenDOS 2.2. It is also preloaded with a veritable wealth of software, including Prodigy, America Online, the OAG flight guide, an online ThinkPad User's Guide, a demo of all ThinkPad features, FollowFax and FaxWorks, Taxi, IBMThinkWrite, Triton Co/Session that allows IBM technicians to dial into your system and track down problems, Farallon's Replica viewer, Reuters MoneyNetwork, and Monologue for Windows to show off the 360PE's audio subsystem. There is also a slew of Lotus apps, including Organizer, cc:Mail, ScreenCam, and SmartText. Even if you don't use it all (some require signing up with a service), it is a great deal and a far cry from most notebooks who come with nothing more than the operating system.

n 360P vs. 360PE

As was to be expected, the 360PE's faster processor helps the newer model get slightly better performance than the 360P. The performance gap could have been even greater had it not been for the 360PE's slower video subsystem. We're not sure of the reason. All in all, we wish IBM had chosen a DX4/75 or 100 to update the system's performance more noticeably and bring the 360PE fully up-to-date in the processor department. Battery life is virtually unchanged.

Pricing

The 4MB IBM ThinkPad 360PE lists for \$3,699 for the 340 MB model, \$300 more than the 360P was. Not a bad deal at all considering what you get for your money: one of the finest notebooks in the world, with a faster processor than its predecessor, lots of software, and a fully integrated audio subsystem.

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