

## Dell Inspiron Mini Netbook 9 Review

At first glance, the Inspiron Mini 9, Dell's entry into [the mini-notebook category](#), looks like what you might get if you left a notebook from Dell's full-size [Studio line of laptops](#) in the dryer too long. But the Mini 9 carries a 1.6-GHz Intel Atom CPU, 1GB of RAM, and a solid-state drive, making it a good starter machine for basic computing at a reasonable price.



Our test configuration, included Windows XP Home and an 8GB solid-state drive; a 4GB version of the Mini 9 ships with Linux Ubuntu 8.04. The 8GB drive doesn't leave you much open space once the operating system and the preinstalled software (which includes Microsoft Works) are accommodated.

You can upgrade to a 16GB drive, at further cost. One feature that is missing here--but is present in [the Acer Aspire One](#)--is an additional SD slot to allow users to insert a second SD Card, format it, and use it as another hard disk.

Working without two SD Card slots, we found that our WorldBench 6 test suite required more space than the Inspiron Mini 9's drive could spare. Since we couldn't run our benchmark tests on the Mini 9, we can't directly compare its performance with that of competing mini-notebooks like [the MSI Wind NB U100](#). We do know that the Mini 9 loads Windows in about 30 seconds and fires up Microsoft Works in 8 seconds. Also, it can copy more than an album's worth of music (77MB) in about 7 seconds. In short, it falls in line with what we've seen from other mini-notebooks packing an Atom processor, 1GB of RAM, and Windows. We'll update this review when we obtain more-precise performance results.

The Mini 9 performed well in our battery life tests. Its four-cell battery ran for about 3 hours, 34 minutes--far better the three-cell battery of the MSI Wind, which lasted just 2 hours, 24 minutes.

As its name suggests, the Inspiron Mini 9 is tiny. It measures 1.07 by 9.13 by 6.77 inches--barely enough room to accommodate the 8.9-inch screen--and weighs about 2.28 pounds.

The glossy 1024-by-600-resolution display looks reasonably sharp and reproduces color extremely well. Unfortunately, if you don't view it from precisely the right angle, the screen looks a little dim. You can adjust the angle, but you may still find yourself contorting into ergonomic stress positions in order to get an optimal view.

All of the alphanumeric keys on the Mini 9's keyboard are large enough to make cranking out a document easy. But everything else either gets scrunched (as the Tab, Shift, and Caps Lock keys do) or assigned to an unfamiliar location. For instance, the apostrophe key slides down to a spot by the space bar, and the function keys disappear altogether, replaced by combos. An empty bit of real estate lies between the keyboard and the edge nearest the display, but Dell chose not to fill

it with shortcut keys. That said, if you can retrain your brain to know where a couple of wayward buttons are positioned, you'll find that the keyboard is quite good.

Similarly, the mousepad is set to just the right sensitivity, and the buttons are firmly in place.

The front-mounted speaker, located just below the display, came across as a little hollow. In this department, the Mini 9 falls behind Asus's Eee 1000H 80G XP.

The Mini 9 is otherwise packed with the usual arsenal of current mini-notebook specs: 802.11b/g Wi-Fi, three USB 2.0 ports, a VGA out, an ethernet jack, an SD Card slot, and headphone and mic jacks. Our test model had Bluetooth and a 1.3-megapixel Webcam; both are extra-cost options.

The Mini 9 includes two handy additions that make it stand above the competition. First, accessible through the Start menu, is Dell's Support Center--a one-stop app for system information and performance tweaking. When you're online the Support Center also serves as a glorified link hub to different parts of Dell's support site for manuals, patches, and quick fixes. Second is a free, base-level account (good for 2GB of storage) with Box.Net's online file storage service.

Dell has crafted a solid mini-laptop that's good for kids and has plenty to offer anyone looking for an on-the-go system. The Inspiron Mini 9 isn't perfect, but it does offer a terrific design and a good price. I would have a tough time choosing this over Acer's Aspire One, but Dell's first venture into the world of mini-notebooks has produced a worthy competitor.

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