AMD scores a big marketing win with Ryzen-powered Microsoft Surface



Enlarge / The new line of 15-inch Surface laptops is powered exclusively with AMD Ryzen APUs.

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Today, Microsoft and AMD announced a new line of 15-inch ultraslim Surface laptops based on AMD Ryzen CPUs. These devices are still Zen 1 mobile parts, not the much-anticipated 7nm Zen 2—but their inclusion in such a high-profile and slim form-factor laptop goes a long way toward answering lingering questions about AMD's ability to compete strongly in the higher end of the mobile CPU space.

Microsoft's press release claims that the Surface 3 with a Ryzen 5 3580U CPU will have a battery life of up to 11.5 hours

based on “typical Surface usage.” Microsoft goes on to state that the Ryzen-powered Surface 3 is the fastest laptop in its class. This stat, unfortunately, gets less impressive when you read the fine print and discover that the “class” only includes other 15W TDP Ryzen processors.

We still expect the Ryzen Surface Edition to be a very good performer in the ultralight class, where the integrated GPU is a large factor in system responsiveness. Radeon Vega 8 already performed at roughly the same level as the new Iris Plus GPU in Intel’s 10th-generation Ice Lake mobile processors, and while we don’t have any benchmarks for the Vega 9 graphics used in the Ryzen 5 3580U, we do know it has one extra graphics compute unit compared to previously available mobile Ryzen CPUs.

AMD describes the Ryzen-powered Surface Laptop 3 models as the product of a “significant, multi-year co-engineering program between AMD and Microsoft.” AMD compares the collaboration to the one that produced the Xbox One X and Xbox One S. This timeframe also underscores how late Intel has been in delivering Ice Lake, which otherwise might have competed well for the Surface. The first Ryzen mobile APUs were officially released two years ago, and October 2017’s Ryzen 5 2500U already offered 1126.4 GPU GFLOPS, more than twice as fast as Intel’s then-current HD Graphics 630.

We’ll have hands-on reporting on the Surface 15-inch laptop shortly.

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