Apple updates entry-level MacBook Air and Pro, discontinues MacBook

Enlarge / The 2018 MacBook Air is 10% thinner than the old MacBook Air and weighs 2.75lbs.

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Today, Apple refreshed much of its entry-level laptop lineup in time for a “Back to School” push that includes slashed prices for educators and students. The initiative some other perks, too, like a free pair of Beats headphones with certain Mac and iPad purchases. Additionally, the company discontinued the 12-inch MacBook and significantly cut prices of solid-state storage upgrade options across the Mac lineup, including in high-end models like the MacBook Pro and iMac Pro.

13-inch MacBook Pro updates

Previously, the 13-inch MacBook Pro lineup was divided into two categories: low-end, Touch Bar-free models, and higher-end models with Touch Bars. Now, every unit in the lineup is equipped with a Touch Bar, which brings into question some speculation by onlookers that Apple doesn’t want to further invest in the Touch Bar.

In today’s refreshes, only the entry-level, non-Touch Bar models have been replaced. The higher-performance models that

start with a 2.4GHz eighth-generation Intel CPU, 8GB of RAM, and a 256GB SSD—previously, "the Touch Bar models"—are unchanged, apart from pricing on storage upgrades, which we'll dive into shortly.

In addition to a Touch Bar, the bottom two configurations now include Touch ID, Apple's T2 security chip, and True Tone, a display technology that matches the white balance of the screen to the ambient environment to reduce eye strain and achieve a more naturalistic, albeit not as color-accurate, look.

One model starts at $1,299 and includes 128GB of solid-stage storage, and the next step up starts at $1,499 with 256GB.

Apple has also updated the CPUs in these models to 1.4GHz, 8th-gen, quad-core Intel Core i5 processors in the base configurations, or a 1.7GHz Core i7 for a $300 upgrade. Both CPU configurations come with the same integrated graphics solution—Intel Iris Plus Graphics 645.

Both models start at 8GB of 2133MHz LPDDR3 RAM, with an optional upgrade to 16GB for $200. Solid-state storage upgrades over the 128GB entry-level base configuration include 256GB for an additional $200, 512GB for an additional $400 over the base 128GB spec, 1TB for $600, and 2TB for $1,000.

MacBook Air updates

The MacBook Air saw a much more modest update. The only new addition is the aforementioned True Tone. Apple also lowered the price slightly; the MacBook Air now starts at $1,099. The specs and configurations remain the same, apart from changes to SSD upgrade options and pricing. Apple previously offered a 1.5TB storage option for this machine, but 1TB is now the top configuration.

- The updated MacBook Air looks like a hybrid between the

old Air and the 12-inch MacBook.
Valentina Palladino
- Apple finally brought its Retina display to the MacBook Air!
Valentina Palladino
- It also has the new butterfly key mechanism and an enormous force touch trackpad.
Valentina Palladino
- Touch ID makes an appearance as well, although without the full Touch Bar.
Valentina Palladino
- The left side has two Thunderbolt 3 ports.
Valentina Palladino
- The right side only has a headphone jack, making its connectivity options quite sparse.
Valentina Palladino
- The 2018 MacBook Air is 10% thinner than the old MacBook Air and weighs 2.75lbs.
- The 2018 MacBook Air starts at $1,199.
Valentina Palladino

Above: Our photos of the new MacBook Air from Apple's unveiling event last October.

Apple introduced a major MacBook Air refresh last October, so it's not necessarily a surprise that there wasn't a performance bump—but one may yet come later this year.

Goodbye, 12-inch MacBook

The 12-inch MacBook is no longer available through the online store, suggesting that the controversial laptop has been discontinued. The MacBook had last been updated more than two years ago.

The MacBook's unceremonious end isn't surprising; the laptop was always controversial. Its initial incarnation introduced the butterfly keyboard mechanism that is now common in Apple

laptops. Butterfly keyboards have proven divisive; some users love typing on them, others hate them. Regardless of which camp you fall into, there's no question that they felt *very* different from prior keyboards. And there's also no question that they have been enormously costly for Apple—not because of the different typing experience but because they have been prone to hardware failure, for which Apple has offered free repairs in a special service program.

- The Space Gray finish on the MacBook is pretty much identical to the iPad's, though the iPhone's finish looks a couple shades lighter.
  Andrew Cunningham
- Other MacBooks have an inset white logo lit up by the same backlight that's illuminating the screen.
  Andrew Cunningham
- The keyboard and trackpad. The stereo speakers are under the grille above the keyboard.
  Andrew Cunningham
- The single USB Type-C port on the left side.
  Andrew Cunningham
- The headphone jack on the right.
  Andrew Cunningham

Above: A photo gallery from our 2015 MacBook review.

The MacBook also ushered in the USB-C era with just one (really, yes, just one) USB-C port, and no other ports. This was not a laptop for everyone, even though it set new standards for portability and materials. The MacBook Air appears to now take its place in Apple's lineup as the entry-level Mac laptop, with the entry point to the Mac lineup costing a hefty $1,099.

Solid-state storage upgrade prices

have been slashed

New models at the low end are nice and all, but some power users will be most excited to learn that storage upgrades in the high-end machines aren’t priced quite as out of proportion to the market as they used to be.

SSD upgrade prices have been reduced across much of the Mac lineup. For example, the 1TB SSD upgrade over the high-end 15-inch MacBook Pro’s base 512GB used to cost $400 over the base price, but now it’s $200. Notably, the beefy 4TB option has been halved from $2,800 over the base price to $1,400.

The iMac, Mac mini, and iMac Pro also saw changes to SSD pricing, and the refreshed MacBook Air has dropped the previously offered 1.5TB configuration. But the 512GB and 1TB upgrades now cost $200 and $300, respectively.

Apple’s newest keyboard is now in every laptop

Each of the new laptops has Apple’s latest-generation butterfly keyboard, MacRumors confirmed, which Apple claims significantly reduces the likelihood that keyboards will need repairs. Nevertheless, all the new models are covered by Apple’s repair program for butterfly keyboards.

Previous generations of the butterfly keyboard, at least, have seen frequent failures requiring service from Apple or Apple-certified repair professionals. It’s too soon to say for sure how much the new design helps, but every laptop Apple is currently selling has that new design as of today.

Education promotions

As is now a yearly custom, Apple is offering a number of discounts and incentives for educators and students. The

above-mentioned Macs cost less for qualifying educational buyers. For example, the MacBook Air starts at $999 in education pricing rather than $1,099. Additionally, AppleCare is 20% off for students, and there are discounts on pro apps like Final Cut and Logic. And Apple will offer a free pair of Beats headphones along with certain Mac and iPad purchases.

The new MacBook refreshes were timed with these promotions, suggesting Apple sees the entry-level MacBook Air and MacBook Pro as, among other things, student machines, despite their high prices.

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