Dell XPS 13 two-in-one review: Lots to flex, few weaknesses

Valentina Palladino

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If the changes brought to the Dell XPS 13 earlier this year intrigued you, you may be even more excited for the XPS 13 two-in-one. Dell updated its flagship convertible even more than it updated its laptop. The company changed up the two-in-one's screen, hinge, keyboard, and internals—including new Ice Lake processors.

A lot of laptop diehards are out there, but the improved XPS 13 two-in-one may convince some of them to embrace a more flexible life. However, the XPS 13 two-in-one has to compete with devices like HP's Spectre x360 13 and Lenovo's ThinkPad X1 Yoga. And when pitted against the others, Dell's machine may not satisfy every user's needs.

Look and feel

Specs at a glance: Dell XPS 13 two-in-one (2019)			
Worst	**Best**	**As reviewed**	

Screen	13.3-inch FHD+ (1920 x 1200) touchscreen	13.3-inch UHD+ (3840 x 2400) touchscreen	13.3-inch FHD+ (1920 x 1200) touchscreen
OS	Windows 10 Home, 64 bit		
CPU	Intel Core i3-1005G1	Intel Core i7-1065G7	Intel Core i7-1065G7
RAM	4GB LPDDR3	32GB LPDDR3	16GB LPDDR3
HDD	256GB PCIe SSD	1TB PCIe SSD	512GB PCIe SSD
GPU	Intel Iris+ Graphics		
Networking	Killer Wi-Fi 6 AX1650 (2×2), Bluetooth 5.0		
Ports	2 Thunderbolt 3 ports, 1 x 3.5mm headphone jack, 1 x microSD card slot		
Size	11.6 x 8.2 x 0.51 in (296 x 207 x 13 mm)		
Weight	2.9 pounds		
Battery	51Whr 4-cell		
Warranty	1 year		
Price	$999	$2,649	$1,597
Other perks	Fingerprint sensor on power button, dual array digital mics (Cortana use), Dell Cinema (Color, Sound, Stream), Dolby Vision support		

Dell XPS 13 7390 2-in-1

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Since the XPS 13 is our current favorite Windows Ultrabook, I was not surprised to find that the two-in-one version has the same stellar build quality. Its CNC aluminum chassis weighs 2.9 pounds, and our review unit's white fiberglass interior complemented its silver edges nicely. There's little to no flex to this laptop, so while it's not a MIL-SPEC certified machine, it should be able to hold its own in your bag surrounded by all your other essentials.

With its variable torque, the new sequential hinge lifts the chassis slightly when you open the lid and gives the entire machine a better angle for viewing and typing. The new hinge also makes opening the machine easier—which is an improvement over last year's model, since the two-in-one was so thin, prying the lid away from the chassis could be difficult when opening the device. The new hinge makes this a one-handed endeavor.

Inside the hinge, the rest of the chassis has an improved thermal management system throughout that uses twin fans, a vapor cooling chamber, hidden exhaust venting, and GORE thermal insulation to maximize air flow and heat rejection. Making the new fans out of dual carbon liquid-crystal polymer allowed Dell to make their blades thinner, so it could then use more than one and spread them out in the chassis. Thinner fans—plus the use of the new vapor cooling chamber instead of traditional heat pipes—kept the XPS 13 two-in-one's chassis as thin as Dell could get it.

But—as we've seen in many consumer electronics—thin doesn't always mean best. Sure, the 13mm thickness on the XPS 13 two-in-one makes it an easy travel companion and a slick device, but it limits the convertible's ports drastically. Like its laptop counterpart, the XPS 13 two-in-one only has two Thunderbolt 3 ports, one on either side of the chassis. There's also a 3.5mm headphone jack and a microSD card reader as well. But you'll find no USB-A ports here, and you won't find HDMI, DisplayPort, or Ethernet ports, either.

Plenty of users would rather sacrifice a few millimeters of thickness in order to get just one handy USB-A port. I know I would—I use a MacBook Pro as my personal laptop, and I often reach for one of many dongles or hubs in order to connect USB-A accessories. While I can often rely on Bluetooth for some of these accessories, not every USB-A accessory supports Bluetooth. Both HP's new Spectre x360 13 and Lenovo's fourth-gen ThinkPad X1 Yoga have at least one USB-A port, and those convertibles will excel over the XPS 13 two-in-one for that reason alone in the minds of many users.

But other users will rejoice when they see the new screen and panel options on the XPS 13 two-in-one. The 13.4-inch display comes in two options: an FHD+ (1920 x 1200) touchscreen is standard, or you can opt for the UHD+ (3200 x 2400) panel with HDR-400 certification. Both include EyeSafe technology, which reduces blue light automatically while maintaining color integrity, and both are 16:10 aspect ratio panels.

The latter will likely excite many users who have been calling for a 16:10 (or 3:2) display on Dell's flagships. Even the XPS 13 laptop doesn't have this slightly taller screen yet, and you can see the difference between it and its convertible counterpart immediately. While the laptop still has a relatively large chin under the display with the Dell logo on it, the XPS 13 two-in-one barely has a chin at all. Its top edge is similarly thin, holding only the 2.25mm webcam that the laptop model also holds.

By giving you more screen space to scroll, this aspect ratio makes most tasks—like writing long documents, reading articles, and the like—easier. Since I test so many laptops and convertibles, I'm accustomed to working with different types of display aspect ratios. I don't demand a 16:10 panel all the time, but I can see and feel the difference when I do use one. While going from 16:9 to 16:10 may be a small change on paper, it will make all the difference for those who detest using widescreen panels on smaller notebooks.

Finally, the XPS 13 two-in-one's chassis has some magnetic portions so you can keep track of its active pen, should you buy it. Unlike the HP Spectre x360 13 that includes a stylus in the box, you'll have to buy Dell's active pen separately if you want to use it with Windows' inking abilities on this machine. Admittedly, not every user who wants a convertible has use for an active pen, but including it in the box would be a great perk that artists and note-takers alike would have appreciated.

- The redesigned Dell XPS 13 two-in-one.
  Valentina Palladino
- It measures 13mm at its widest point and weighs 2.9 pounds.
  Valentina Palladino
- The new sequential hinge lifts the chassis slightly when in laptop mode, which should make for better viewing and typing.
  Valentina Palladino
- The hinge also has variable torque, making the laptop easier to open when it's closed.
  Valentina Palladino
- The MagLev keyboard is similar to Apple's butterfly keys—a polarizing feature.
  Valentina Palladino
- Its 1920 x 1200 touchscreen is a tiny step up from regular FHD. If you have a discerning eye, you can tell the difference.
  Valentina Palladino
- Inside are 10th-generation Ice Lake CPUs that bring minor performance improvements, features like Wi-Fi 6 support, and extended battery life.
  Valentina Palladino
- One of two Thunderbolt 3 ports and the headphone jack.
  Valentina Palladino
- Dell continues to go for slimness and refuses to make

> the XPS thick enough to include one USB-A port.
> Valentina Palladino

Keyboard and trackpad

The second-generation MagLev keyboard on the XPS 13 two-in-one will nod too much to the butterfly keyboard on the MacBook Pro for some users. I like the new layout that extends the keyboard to the left and right edges of the chassis, and I like the larger, rounded square keycaps. The key travel is shallow, though, and will not fly for those who hate Apple's butterfly keys and those who crave more depth to their typing experience.

What the keys lack in clicky-ness, they make up for in quietness: the XPS 13 two-in-one is one of the best machines I've used if you're looking for a keyboard that makes little noise. Since I'm used to the MacBook Pro's keyboard, the updated MagLev keyboard didn't bother me, and I was able to type at my normal speed. But even users coming from last year's XPS laptop or two-in-one will feel the difference in this keyboard—it's likely to be one of the most polarizing things about the XPS 13 two-in-one.

All of the keys are positioned normally, and Dell included a power button with a fingerprint reader at the top-right corner. Instead of a separated, round button, this one blends into the top row of keys with its rounded rectangular frame. You'll have to use the fingerprint reader to log in if you want to do so with biometrics because the XPS 13 two-in-one doesn't have an IR camera.

The redesigned keyboard also allowed Dell to increase the size of the Precision touchpad by 19%. The change is welcome, especially for those accustomed to incredibly large trackpads on laptops. While not too massive, it's a step up from the often too-narrow trackpads on flagship Windows laptops.

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