‘Flexgate’ might be Apple’s next MacBook Pro problem

Apple might be in for another MacBook Pro hardware controversy. A report from *iFixit* highlights an issue with the laptop’s backlights failing, causing the lighting at the bottom of the screen to appear spotted and uneven. An enterprising user has already dubbed the problem “flexgate.”

Flexgate is here
The issue seems to arise because of a cable that is used to connect the MacBook’s display to a control board in the base of the computer, *iFixit* explains. Starting with the 2016 MacBook Pro, Apple has used a pair of flexible ribbon cables that are pulled tight every time you open the lid on the computer. That may be damaging them over time.

As the cable breaks down, it can cause an odd “stage light” effect at the bottom of the display when the lid is fully opened. As more damage is caused over time, it can cause the screen to completely fail to function if the lid is opened more than halfway.

The “stage light effect.”
Photo: /
Apple’s MacBook Pros have had their fair share of controversy since they were redesigned in 2016, which have largely centered on the butterfly keyboards on the first two generations. (They had a bad habit of sticking and breaking.) Apple largely seemed to fix the problem with an updated design last year.

It’s not clear how widespread the new hardware issue is
Before anyone rushes for a pitchfork, it’s not clear how

widespread the new hardware issue is. Unlike the keyboard problem that plagued earlier models of the MacBook Pro, the display issues develop gradually, so they're not quite as apparent. The Flexgate website has a series of videos and support threads documenting the issue, but as with many of these cases, it's hard to tell whether this is currently a rampant problem or just a few vocal but relatively isolated users.

The issue with "flexgate" is that, per *iFixit*'s report, the damage to the cables happens slowly over time — so while your computer might be fine today, the compounded stress could come back to haunt users as their laptop gets older. By that point, they may be out of warranty.

An expensive fix

Adding to the issue is that, as *iFixit* notes, the cables for the modern MacBook Pros are directly integrated into the screen, meaning that if they do fail, afflicted users have to get the whole screen replaced. That's especially frustrating since older models of the MacBook Pro that had display connector problems could simply get the $6 cords (which threaded through the hinge, instead of around it) replaced without having to get the entire screen assembly replaced.

According to *iFixit*, the issue is only affecting the 2016 era and onward MacBook Pro models, so older models should be fine. It's still too early to tell whether Apple's new MacBook Air will have the same issues, as it has a different but similarly arranged display setup, which could put it at risk for similar problems down the line.

The Verge has reached out to Apple for comment. As of publication time, Apple hasn't formally acknowledged the issue. But if you're a MacBook Pro owner — especially of an

older device from 2016 – it might be something that you'll want to keep an eye out for should it turn out that the problem is more widespread. Apple eventually offered an extended warranty for the MacBook Pro's keyboard issues.

https://www.theverge.com/circuitbreaker/2019/1/22/18193120/apple-macbook-pro-lighting-screen-flexgate