HP Chromebook 14 review: One of the first AMD Chromebooks, tested

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AMD wants in on the Chromebook craze. A few OEMs, including HP, Acer, and Lenovo, announced AMD-powered Chromebooks at CES this year, and those devices are just starting to become available. Intel processors power most Chromebooks available today, but now individual customers and businesses will be able to choose from a small, but growing, pool of AMD-powered devices.

Unsurprisingly, HP’s Chromebook 14 with AMD processors and integrated Radeon graphics appeals to the largest group in the Chromebook market—those who want a low-powered Chrome OS device for home or school use. Starting at $269, this Chromebook is not meant to compete with Google’s Pixelbook or the fancier Chromebooks toward which professionals gravitate. Since the new Chromebook 14 borrows a lot from previous models, we tested it out to see the gains (if any) an AMD-powered Chromebook provides over Intel-powered devices.

Look and feel

Manufacturers have been elevating the look and feel of their Chrome OS devices for the past couple of years as the stripped-down operating system gained popularity outside of the education system. However, HP's Chromebook 14 is one of the most traditionally "Chromebook-y" Chromebooks I've ever used. It's a not-too-big, not-too-small plastic hunk that will fit into most family living rooms well enough. At about 3.5 pounds, it's not the lightest Chromebook ever, but it feels similar to other low-cost Chromebooks in thickness and weight. I do appreciate that HP made this machine fanless, allowing it to remain quiet even when running our most challenging benchmark tests.

Specs at a glance: HP Chromebook 14 (AMD, as reviewed)	
Screen	14-inch 1920×1080 WLED backlit touchscreen
OS	Chrome OS
CPU	AMD A4-9120C APU
RAM	4GB
HDD	32GB
GPU	Integrated Radeon R4 graphics
Networking	Qualcomm Atheros QCA6174A-5 802.11a/b/g/ac 2×2 Wi-Fi, Bluetooth® 4.2

Ports	2 x USB-C 3.1 Gen 1 (Charging, power delivery, video, data), 2 x USB-A 2.0 Gen 1, 1 x headphone/mic combo
Size	13.27×8.93×0.72 inches
Weight	3.4 pounds
Battery	2-cell, 47.36Whr
Starting price	$269
Price as reviewed	$329

The keyboard and palm-rest area sport a smooth, metal panel that gives the machine a bump up in terms of quality, but I wish the entire Chromebook was made out of such material like Acer's Chromebook 14 is. The AMD models come in white, black, and midnight blue—we received a review unit in the latter color, and I appreciated the level of sophistication it added to the design.

Aside from the keyboard and trackpad, only the thin speaker grille sits above the keys on the metal portion of the device, under which lie Bang and Olufsen speakers. Most of HP's laptops have B&O speakers, and these are just suitable enough for having a tiny desk concert while working—they aren't loud enough to fill more than a small room, and they aren't high-quality enough for you to want to entertain others with them.

The Chromebook's hinge tilts back 180 degrees, which could come in handy if parents and kids need to collaborate on school projects or homework. Customers have the option of 14-inch HD or FHD panels that come in touch and non-touch

variants. A touchscreen isn’t as necessary on this device as it would be on a convertible Chromebook, but it will be useful if you plan to tilt that screen back often to physically share it with others. Unless you value affordability over everything else, I wouldn’t recommend choosing an HD panel because—considering FHD has become standard on most laptops, monitors, and televisions—you will likely notice the difference immediately.

It’s also puzzling to offer HD panel options with an AMD-powered machine. We’ll discuss this more in upcoming sections, but HP didn’t provide a clear answer as to why it decided to make AMD Chromebooks. Other than the “it’s about time” sentiment, HP representatives told me back at the Chromebook 14’s launch that AMD’s CPU/GPU combinations would produce better graphics performance that would result in better video viewing and editing experiences. If that’s true, I’d want a display panel that can properly render the work that AMD’s APUs are producing. That just wouldn’t be an HD panel.

Our review unit had a 14-inch FHD touchscreen that was as responsive to touch input as you’d expect. It has a glossy coating, so it won’t be the best to use in direct sunlight, though. An HD webcam sits above the display, and a dual-mic array helps your voice come through clearly when video chatting.

Inside the Chromebook 14, in addition to AMD’s APU, is 4GB of RAM and 32GB of eMMC storage (it can be configured to gold up to 64GB). HP stuck a decent number of ports on the edges of the Chromebook 14: there are two USB-A ports, two USB-C ports that support power, data transfer, and charging, a microSD card, a headphone jack, and a lock slot.

- HP’s new Chromebook 14 with AMD processors looks similar to other low-cost Chromebooks.
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- It measures 18.35mm thick and weighs about 3.5 pounds—pretty normal for a budget device.
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- One edge has a lock slot, one USB-C port, and one USB-A port.
  Valentina Palladino
- The other side includes a headphone jack and a microSD card. Both USB-C ports on the machine support power, data transfer, and charging.
  Valentina Palladino
- The keyboard is one of the best I've used on an affordable Chromebook. The trackpad is a tad narrow.
  Valentina Palladino
- Bang and Olufsen speakers inside the machine are just OK—decent enough for tiny desk concerts.
  Valentina Palladino
- HP's device is one of the first Chromebooks with AMD APUs to hit the market.
  Valentina Palladino

Keyboard and trackpad

A 14-inch laptop has more than enough space for a comfortable keyboard, and HP made sure to put one on this Chromebook. The keyboard on the Chromeboook 14 is one of my favorites I've used—its clicky keys have good travel, and spacing between them is just right. The keycaps could stand to be a hair stiffer, but they require an average of 58g of force to actuate, so you won't accidentally press unwanted keys.

I particularly like that the keycaps match the color of the laptop so the entire machine has a cohesive look to it. As someone who spends hours each day typing, I could have easily made the Chromebook 14 my main machine for its keyboard alone. I only wish the keyboard had a backlight—the lack of one makes it much less useful when working in dark environments.

The trackpad, however, is just sufficient. It’s a bit too narrow for my liking, but it’s spacious enough that my fingers didn’t slide off of it. Whereas the keyboard isn’t fancy but feels quite good, the trackpad emits audible, hollow clicks when you press on it. I didn’t expect much different from a budget Chromebook, but it will feel noticeably different if you’re used to the slick, glass trackpads found on most Ultrabooks.

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