Lenovo ThinkPad P40 Yoga Review

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Lenovo's ThinkPad P40 Yoga wants to be everything that most designers and artists would want from a creative computer you take with you: a full-spec laptop that can run all of your usual desktop apps – from Photoshop and InDesign to After Effects and Maya – that's also a tablet you can draw on.

The P40 Yoga is the most powerful tablet/laptop hybrid we've seen – but not by much and it has some major flaws too, and not just that it has an aesthetic only an accountant could love. But if you're on a budget, this could be exactly what you're looking for.

Lenovo ThinkPad P40 Yoga Review: Design

When closed, the ThinkPad P40 Yoga looks like just another laptop – an unassuming black block.

Open it up and it's a 14-inch laptop that you couldn't tell apart from the other brutalist-styled Lenovo models I see people in suits using on the train in the morning, all

alighting for the financial firms of the City of London.



Keep pushing the screen and body around the hinge though and it becomes a tablet, with the keyboard neatly receding into the body to protect it



You pop a small stylus out of the side of the P40 Yoga and can sketch, draw, paint or edit anything from a line drawing to a

photo to video to a 3D model.



The P40 Yoga's nearest competitor is Microsoft's Surface Book, which has a 13.1-inch screen. The P40 is much thicker and heavier (ok, and uglier) – but it has a larger screen, a proper keyboard and (more importantly) is a lot more powerful. Another potential rival is Lenovo's own Yoga Book – which shows that the company can combine real design innovation and glorious aesthetics if it puts its mind to it. But the Yoga Book has an Intel Atom processor – while you'll need a a Core i5 or i7 if you want to run creative tools from Photoshop and Illustrator to Painter, Maya, Sketch or Premiere Pro. From what we saw at the IFA trade show this year, the Yoga Book is to the P40 Yoga what the iPad Pro is to a MacBook Pro – great for sketching and painting, but not for more intensive creativity.

Lenovo ThinkPad P40 Yoga Review: Pen

The P40 Yoga's ThinkPad Pro Pen is probably best described as

a stylus – much as a the Surface's Pen is a biro, a Wacom pen is an oversized pen and Apple's Pencil is, er, a pretty great facsimile of a pencil.



Compared to those other stylii, the Pro Pen is smaller and less comfortable to draw with – but whether it's usable is kinda personal to you. We gave a bunch of artists and designers a chance to play with it at a gallery opening in London recently and comment ranged from 'it's alright' to 'it's like drawing with a toothpick'.

Created in collaboration with Wacom – who also produced the pen tech for the Yoga Book – this pen has the same 2,048 levels of pressure sensitivity as those other pens – and you can tilt it for side-shading effects and the like.

However, the pen does slide neatly into the side of the P40, so you're less likely to lose it – as I may have done with an Apple Pencil. The P40 also charges the pen when it's inside, through two metal connectors on the side of the pen – which is a neat piece of design.

If the provided Pen is too small for you, you can get a larger

stylus that’s approximately the same size as the Surface’s (ie biro or Rotring-sized). Confusingly, this is also called the ThinkPad Pro Pen. We didn’t receive one of these with our review unit of the P40 Yoga, so can’t comment on how it feels to use – beyond saying that it’s likely to be a must-have for anyone who wants to do a lot of drawing or painting on this laptop/tablet hybrid.

Lenovo ThinkPad P40 Yoga Review: Screen

The P40 Yoga’s screen is it’s main real flaw. It’s an HD screen with a resolution of 1,920 x 1,080 – a quarter of the resolution of the Ultra HD, 3,840 x 2,160 resolution of the best 15-inch laptops (Dell’s Precision 5510 and HP’s ZBook Studio). It also almost a third the resolution of of the smaller Surface Book (which has a 13.1-inch, 3,000 x 2,000 display). It feels fuzzy and lacking in detail even compared to the ageing MacBook Pro.



Testing the screen’s ability with colour using a DataColor

Spyder, the P40 Yoga proved to be less accurate and has a smaller gamut than either its bigger or smaller rivals. This may be less important to designers using CAD to model real products or architects – but for those of us producing art, graphics, video, or animation we expect more.

Lenovo ThinkPad P40 Yoga Review: Performance

The 14.1-inch P40 Yoga sits between halfway the 13.1-inch Surface Book and 15-inch models like the Dell Precision 5510 and HP ZBook Studio in terms of size, but its performance is nearer to that of the Surface Book. Our review unit had an Intel Core i7-6500U (2 core, 2.5GHz) processor, 16GB of RAM, a 512GB SSD and an Nvidia Quadro 500M graphics card with 2GB of its own RAM.

Here's how the ThinkPad P40 did our tests.

Cinebench

Cinebench's real-time 3D test runs a relatively simple animated 3D scene in Maxon's Cinema 4D modelling, animation and rendering software. Results are in frames-per-second, so longer bars are better.

Cinebench's rendering test outputs a static scene. Results are in Cinebench's proprietary units, and longer bars are better.

After Effects CC 2015.3

Our After Effects tests are based around two comps that include multiple layers of video with effects applied to them, moving in 3D space with lights and a camera. One also includes a 3D model created in Cinema 4D and added to the scene using the CineWare plugin.

Each scene was output using the standard rendering engine, and

then with the raytraced render – which can be accelerated using NVidia's graphics chips but not AMDs.

Results are in minutes, so shorter bars are better.

Each test was completed three times from a restart, and an average taken.

SPECwpc

SPECwpc is a Windows-only benchmark based around creative tools such as Maya and Blender, as well as the IOmeter hard drive speed testing tool. It provides a good overall guide to the performance of a laptop or workstation for video editing, animation or VFX creation.

Results are in SPECwpc's proprietary units, and longer bars are better.

Overall, the P40 Yoga did little better than the Surface Book -and the difference between those and the larger laptops that have quad-core chips is marked.

Lenovo ThinkPad P40 Yoga Review: Price

Price is one area where the ThinkPad P40 Yoga is a clear winner – as it costs around two-thirds the price of the competition. Our review unit comes in at around £1,280 plus VAT – while a decently specced Surface Book, Dell Precision 5510 or HP ZBook would cost you over £1,800.

With the price difference, we can forgive the P40 Yoga a lot more appealing for those looking for a computer that's nearer to a grand than two.

Lenovo ThinkPad P40 Yoga Review: Keyboard/Trackpad

With a heritage of making laptops for office workers that goes back to the days when the Thinkpad brand was owned by IBM, Lenovo knows how to make a good keyboard. It’s exceptionally comfortable to type on, even for hours – better even than the larger laptops’. And the innovative mechanism behind it that pulls it in when you’re using it as a tablet doesn’t seem to have affected its comfort either.





Another sign of ThinkPad's history is the inclusion of the bright red pointer in the middle of the keyboard. I don't think I've seen anyone use one of these for over a decade, and the buttons below it for left- and right-clicking eat into space that could have allowed a larger trackpad. This is one part of he ThinkPad's legacy that should stay in the past.

Lenovo ThinkPad P40 Yoga Review: Ports

Smaller laptops can be a bit short on the ports you need, but the P40 has three USB 3.0, miniDisplayPort, HDMI and an SD card slot.





The power connector is weirdly ugly though.



Lenovo ThinkPad P40 Yoga Review: Conclusion

The P40 Yoga is a marvellous piece of product design – despite the aesthetics letting it down. It’s not a rival to truly full-spec laptops – but if you want a tablet/laptop hybrid but baulk at the price of the Surface Book, this is a great choice.

https://www.digitalartsonline.co.uk/reviews/laptops/lenovo-thinkpad-p40-yoga-review/