ThinkPad X1 Carbon 7th-gen mini-review: Minor updates made to a stellar machine

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There are some people who would never buy a ThinkPad, and there are others who flock to Lenovo's flagship business family every time the company makes an update. The latest release will be no exception, even if the updates it brings are relatively small. The seventh-generation ThinkPad X1 Carbon will look familiar to ThinkPad fans, and in this case, familiarity is a good thing.

Most of the improvements and updates come in optional add-ons or internal changes that make the laptop even better than it was before. We spent about a week using it to get a feel for the updates and see which (if any) are worth spending at least $1,400 to get this upgrade.

What's new

Lenovo has typically gone against the grain with the design of the ThinkPad X1 Carbon. The X1 Carbon doesn't look like any other premium Windows notebook, much less any of the flagship laptops that are vying for your attention and dollars with fancy, ultra-slim profiles. The fundamentals of the X1 haven't

changed, but Lenovo did make it nearly one millimeter thinner, which is a feat considering the previous model was already a svelte 15.95mm. It’s also still a MIL-SPEC tested machine, so it will take up less space in your bag, but it won’t crack or bend easily if that bag has an accident.

Only small cosmetic changes dot the rest of the X1 Carbon if you get the black version. Lenovo now offers a “carbon fiber weave” model with a textured pattern on the lid. That style is currently only offered on an otherwise specced-out model of the X1 Carbon, however, so you’ll pay over $2,000 for it.

Lenovo ThinkPad X1 Carbon 7th Gen

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The X1 Carbon still has two USB 3.1 ports, two Thunderbolt ports, an HDMI port, a microSD card reader, a headphone/mic combo jack, and a lock slot. But the headphone jack now sits on the left edge instead of the right. The right edge also now holds the power button next to one of its USB-A ports, a change from the previous model’s power button, which sat just above the top row of keys.

One of the Thunderbolt 3 ports is built into Lenovo’s proprietary dock connector, which also works as the only Ethernet connectivity on the X1 Carbon. Instead of a full-sized Ethernet port, this laptop requires you to buy a proprietary adapter if you want to use hardwired Internet. While that’s likely more reliable than the drop-jaw Ethernet ports found on many ultra-thin laptops, it will frustrate users who want nothing less than to buy yet another adapter for their PC.

The webcam looks slightly different as well, now with its

physical shutter totally separate from the camera itself. The mechanism works the same, though, allowing you to cover the webcam at any time—or if you're like me, at all times when you're not actively video chatting. The biggest bummer about this is that if you choose an X1 Carbon with a webcam shutter, you can't also get an IR camera for Windows Hello. Every X1 Carbon model has a fingerprint reader right next to the trackpad, so you'll have one method of biometric authentication regardless. But Lenovo continues to make users choose between privacy and login convenience, and it's disappointing considering other manufacturers have found ways to incorporate both features into laptops.

Lenovo already offered a number of display-panel choices for the X1 Carbon, but it recently added a 4K IPS panel option that supports Dolby Vision and HDR400. This panel will be ideal for those in creative fields or those who plan on frequently consuming photo and video content with the X1 Carbon. But with a powerful screen comes sacrifices in battery life, so you'll have to be comfortable with that trade-off.

Our review unit came with a more conservative panel: a 14-inch, FHD, non-touch, low-power panel that reaches up to 400 nits of brightness. You can get an FHD touchscreen panel or a non-touch panel with PrivacyGuard, which is Lenovo's privacy screen technology that helps prevent strangers from spying on the information on your screen. There's a QHD panel option as well, which makes a total of five displays that you can choose from.

- The thinner, lighter ThinkPad X1 Carbon 7th-gen.
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- You can choose from five display options, including a 4K panel, a display with PrivacyGuard, and a low-power FHD panel.
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- The stellar keyboard remains mostly untouched (because

Lenovo knows it’s one of the best things about this laptop).
Valentina Palladino

- TrackPoint fans will rejoice to see that Lenovo hasn’t removed their favorite input method.
  Valentina Palladino
- The carbon-fiber chassis is just as light as it is durable.
  Valentina Palladino
- The odd-looking dual port next to the Thunderbolt 3 port connects to Lenovo’s proprietary dock and Ethernet adapter.
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- The power button now sits on the side of the device.
  Valentina Palladino
- The matte black exterior holds on to fingerprints, so you’ll have to clean it every so often.
  Valentina Palladino

I was happy with the low-power panel for my daily use—a 4K panel, while lovely, is overkill for a writer like myself, and I rarely use touchscreens when working on a standard laptop. I would have liked to try PrivacyGuard to see how it compares to HP’s SureView, and in general I find privacy-screen technology very handy because I often work from various non-secure locations.

However, the low-power display truly shows off the X1 Carbon’s battery chops. Lenovo claims this updated laptop will last up to 18.5 hours on a single charge, and my review unit lasted an average of 1,045 minutes (17.5 hours) on our default test and 677 minutes (or about 11.3 hours) on our graphics-intensive test.

That’s quite an improvement over the last X1 Carbon model we tested in 2018, which lasted about 12 hours and six hours on our default and WebGL tests, respectively. For someone like me who spends most of her working time online writing,

researching, and doing light photo editing, this could be the best new feature of the updated X1 Carbon. It means I won’t have to bring a power cord or charger with me when I work from my local coffee shop or bookstore.

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