

Phil Battrick, Managing Director of SITM offers a few pointers to help you choose the right laptop.

If you're thinking of buying a laptop here are a few things you should consider before parting with your hard-earned cash...

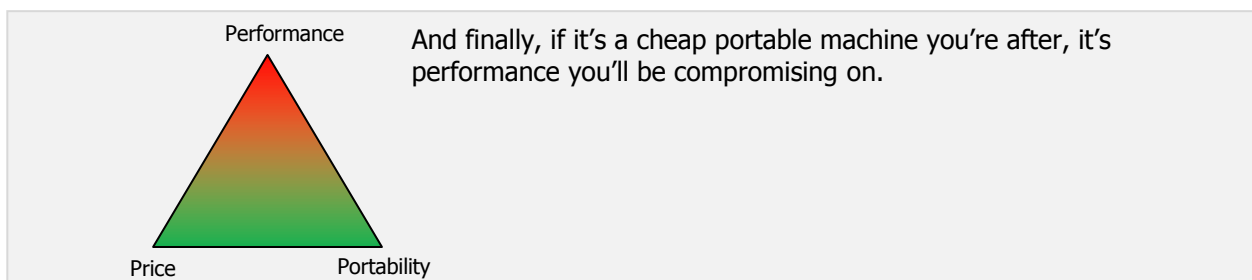
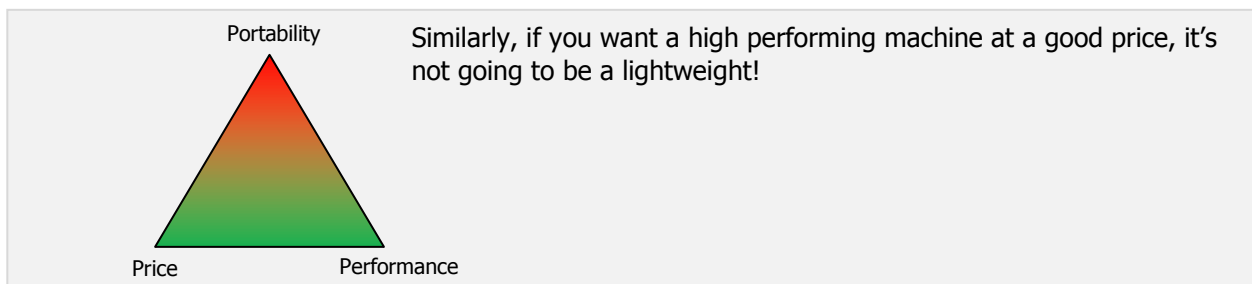
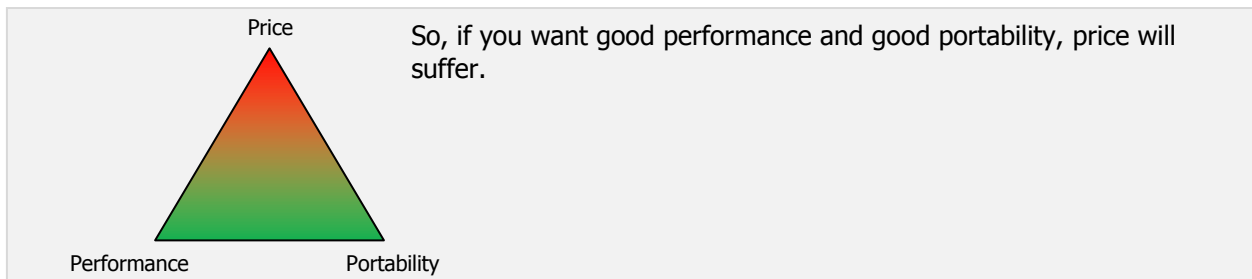
Do you really need a laptop? This may sound like a daft question, but think about it. Is it essential to have a portable system? If the answer is yes, that's fine, but you get more for your money by buying a desktop PC, and because of the proliferation of flat-screen monitors, there's no longer the same demand on desk space that there used to be for a desktop system.

What do you need the laptop to be able to do? If you need it to edit video and photographs, you'll need a different specification than would be required for browsing the internet, creating documents and picking up email.

In general there are three considerations when it comes to laptops :-

- Price
- Performance
- Portability

If you think of these three things as points of a triangle, you can have two of the three.



In general, if you're going to be using a laptop as your main machine, and will be spending protracted periods of time using it, it's the screen size that will be of most importance. The new breed of netbooks are fantastic as highly portable internet-connected systems that you can take anywhere, but the screens are too small to use for long periods of time. I would suggest that for regular use you don't look at anything much smaller than a 14" screen.

You should also consider the ergonomics of a laptop, and use a screen riser, preferably with an external keyboard and mouse (Logitech make a couple of extremely good products of this type). This helps you to get the screen to the correct height, and means that you can move the keyboard and mouse in relation to it.

Consider battery life within your specifications, and take manufacturers claims with a pinch of salt. Most laptops will manage no more than a few hours despite what the websites say, so consider a spare battery if you need to use it away from power of protracted periods of time. Oh, and you can reduce the battery life even more if you want to use a wireless network too.

Finally, spend some money on a good quality bag for your laptop if you do plan to carry it round with you. This will protect the laptop from damage, and should make it easier to carry. If you're after something well made but a bit nicer than standard black/grey vinyl, I'd suggest that you have a look at the Crumpler website, www.crumpler.co.uk.