

Title:

Gaming Laptops - The Five Essential Features To Consider When Buying A Gaming Laptop

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Summary:

Gone are the days when you would have been laughed at if you walked into an all-night LAN party carrying your trusty laptop and expecting to hang with the giant computer towers standing at everyone's feet. The gaming laptop computers of today sport huge, crisp LCD screens, cutting-edge video cards and full-size keyboards. Not only can these gaming laptop computers hang with the standard clunky computer tower, but they can also be ordered fully custom to meet the exact specifi...

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Article Body:

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Since there are so many customizable components in these laptops, a standard practice has been to create what some call a "system builder." This is the page where you get to add and subtract components through drop-down menus in order to create the best gaming laptop computer for your needs and your budget. This type of page can be overwhelming to someone just starting the gaming laptop shopping process, but it is very manageable if you take it just one component at a time.

The Gaming Laptop GPU

This is the heart of a gaming laptop computer. The GPU - graphics processing unit - is a component that will make or break your gaming experience. If your GPU isn't up to snuff, your games won't play.

Without getting into specific models since they change all the time, the key is that the graphics card not share resources with the computer. A gaming laptop video card must have its own memory on board. Generally speaking, standard off-the-shelf laptops will not have this feature. The two current makers of laptop video cards are NVIDIA and ATI.

Without the Screen, You Don't Have Much

What good is a gaming laptop without a screen that can actually render your games? Now certainly, you can connect an external monitor, but if you can't actually play on your gaming laptop without that external monitor, then your laptop isn't all that mobile.

While the technology and terminology for LCDs (liquid crystal displays) could take up an entire article in itself, there are a few key points to keep in mind when choosing from available LCD options for your new gaming laptop computer: native resolution, aspect ratio, rise and fall time, contrast, viewing angle, and size.

Native Resolution. The native resolution is simply the setting at which your screen will render the clearest images. Since games are constantly in motion, slightly soft edges may not bother most gamers, but keep in mind that while this is your gaming laptop, you will likely also use it for other things like surfing the Internet. If the resolution isn't comfortable, you aren't going to enjoy using it.

Aspect Ratio. As you probably know, a movie theater screen and a TV screen have different proportions. Likewise, there are widescreen format gaming laptops and there are laptops that have a standard aspect ratio - like that of a TV. A widescreen format gaming laptop has advantages and disadvantages. Many games today do not have a widescreen mode. This means that the game may stretch across the screen and become distorted or you may run it with black bars that fill in the sides. There are ways to get around this, but if you want an out of the box perfect experience, the widescreen format may not be for you.

That said, a widescreen LCD does offer plenty of screen real estate for web surfing and other type of computer activities, and a game played in a wide format setting offers an expansive field of view. For this reason, there are some very loyal widescreen-loving gamers out there.

Do your best to find a balance between current and future technology and what your computer habits are beyond gaming. Even with its limitations, the

widescreen format is found on most of the best gaming laptop computers.

Rise and Fall. The phrase 'rise and fall time' is used to describe how fast the LCD can respond to changes. In the past, LCDs have been plagued with the inability to render images as fast as computer games can spit them out. This presents a major problem for laptop gamers because if they can't see the images properly, they can't play the game properly. This lag can mean the difference between playing to win and barely playing.

Fortunately, gaming laptop LCDs have come a long way and they are only getting better. While once it was impossible to game on a laptop screen, the gaming laptop LCDs of today offer 25 milliseconds or less rise and fall time while generally off-the-shelf laptops have 40 milliseconds or less rise and fall time.

Contrast. If a gaming laptop LCD has poor contrast, that means that the black areas aren't quite as black as they should be and the white areas aren't quite as white. This is important to a laptop gamer because you have to see the game properly - as it was intended to be seen - in order to compete effectively. Look for a contrast ratio of 400:1 or higher in a custom gaming laptop computer.

Viewing Angle. This is an often-overlooked LCD feature, but it must be considered if you are building a gaming laptop computer. Many high quality LCDs on the market are difficult to see clearly at any angle other than straight on and at the right height. This can be a big drawback to gaming on a LCD screen because a screen with poor viewing angles won't allow others to watch the screen as you play and also hurts your view when doing something as simple as adjusting your seating, which can require you to then adjust to position of your laptop screen to see it properly again.

But gaming on a laptop does not mean that you are doomed to have poor viewing angles. There are LCDs on the market that have amazing viewing angles - up to 120 degrees. These screens not only allow gaming onlookers, but they also allow you to use that giant, crisp screen to do things like play movies and even make presentations.

Size. In a gaming laptop computer, size is everything. Most gaming laptops are large, robust pieces of electronics. Having a machine of this stature means you also get to have a large screen. The best gaming laptop computer LCD screens out there are at least 15 inches. A crowd favorite is a 17 inch widescreen (even with the challenges that widescreens present). Larger 19 inch laptop screens are just starting to be talked about with consumers expecting to see 19 inch or even larger models on the market in the near future.

The best way to really get a feel for what laptop LCDs are all about is to take

a trip to a local box store and play with the LCDs on the display laptops while keeping in mind what you have read here. While these laptops are not custom gaming laptops, you can see what the sizes really look like, what different resolutions look like, and what the viewing angles truly are so you can start to develop your own preferences.

The RAM - What Type and How Much?

The RAM (random access memory) found in laptops is called SODIMM (small outline dual inline memory module). The RAM is responsible for your processing power. If you are shopping for a custom gaming laptop, you will generally be offered DDR2 RAM with the choice of how much you want in your computer. Most high-end games being released today need 1GB of RAM for optimum, lag-free game play. Some people are going with 2GB to ensure that they can run multiple applications along with the game and not experience any slow down in response time. This is a large investment and you want to be able to use this gaming laptop for some time in the future. Most custom laptops are user upgradeable, but this should be left up to professionals.

The CPU - Not Just Mobile Technology

The CPUs (central processing units) found in many custom gaming laptops are identical to those found in desktops. These chips require a great deal of cooling power, which in turn can make your laptop louder than light weight, lower power ultra portables when the fans kick on and it can become somewhat warm to the touch. Don't be alarmed by this - it is normal. And with these desktop processors comes screaming power! Don't waste your money on the latest CPU release that likely has an inflated price tag (and that price will likely come down before long). Stick with a current CPU speed that is offered by a reputable custom gaming laptop reseller, and you really can't go wrong.

The Gaming Laptop Hard Drive

This is the final component to consider when building a gaming laptop. Laptop hard drives come in a variety of speeds and capacities ranging from 4200 to 7200 RPMs and 40 to over 100 GBs. For the most part, this is user preference. Whenever possible, go for a 7200 RPM hard drive, but if you need a capacity not offered in this speed, it's okay to go for the 5400 RPM drive. Take a look at your current computer, and buy your capacity based on this. Also keep in mind that with many custom gaming laptop manufacturers, you have the ability to upgrade or add another hard drive at a later date.

At the end of the day, gaming laptop computers are all about power. Don't expect

a twelve-pound notebook with a desktop processor, numerous fans, a giant heatsink, and independent video card to last on battery power all that long. But do make sure to enjoy the jawdrops that you'll get as you walk into your regular LAN party location with your new, screaming-fast gaming laptop computer. Crack that puppy open, fire it up, and stand clear of the drool as you take on your favorite game with fellow gamers gathered around to take in the action. Gaming is not just for desktops anymore!