



## HP Compaq EliteBook 6930p User Review

by Christopher Chua

The HP Compaq [EliteBook](#) 6930p is HP's latest 14" thin and light business notebook. It is part of HP's premium EliteBook range of business notebooks that emphasizes mobility, performance and durability.

The EliteBook range is mainly distinguished from [HP's](#) regular business notebooks by offering a unique aircraft-grade aluminum shell bonded with a magnesium alloy casing, resulting in a housing that is both rigid and durable. The anodized aluminum finishing means paint chips and scratches will be old news, even though HP's previous dust-coated 6910p and nc6400's have proven very durable too.



The 6930p is a direct replacement for the 6910p series [notebook](#). It maintains the same size, weight and dimensions as its predecessor, but otherwise offers a complete refresh internally and externally. The 6930p, being the best-seller among the models in the EliteBook range, is offered in a variety of configurations and my particular unit is configured with the following specifications:

- Intel Core 2 Duo T9400 Processor (2.53GHz, 6MB L2 cache, 1066MHz FSB)
- 2GB 800MHz DDR2 RAM
- 160GB Seagate 7200.2 HDD
- WXGA+ 1440x900 matte display
- ATI Mobility Radeon HD3450 256MB

- Integrated 2 megapixels webcam
- Keyboard light (HP Nightlight)
- Intel 5300 ABGN wireless
- Bluetooth 2.0
- Dual pointing devices with keyboard
- 6-cell battery
- UpgradeBay DVD+/-RW with Lightscribe
- Integrated Fingerprint reader
- Firewire 1394a
- HP 3D Driveguard HDD Protection
- VGA Connector
- Three USB Ports
- 3/3/3 Warranty
- MSRP: \$2600

## Build and Design

The first thing you'll notice about the 6930p is how good it looks, especially for a corporate notebook, which has traditionally been the last bastion of boring and staid designs. Despite the aluminum finishing, it has not lost its professional luster either. The EliteBook range has certainly redefined the stereotypical look of professional workstations.

The notebook is very well-assembled, like the previous nc6400 and 6910p I've used. It feels very sturdy and solid, but HP should definitely work on improving the weight as it is technically not the lightest 14" around these days. There are no creaks in the casing and it does not flex at all due to the strong aluminum finishing unlike carbon-fiber reinforced plastic used in many rival products. The battery does not wobble and fits snugly. There are no loose fitting parts at all. This is simply one of the most solidly constructed mainstream notebooks in the market.



The 6930p appears thicker than the nc6400 due to thicker rubber feet as can be seen in the picture below, but both chassis have similar dimensions otherwise.



The metal hinges have been redesigned and they are now extremely tight. They are in fact the tightest I've ever felt on a business notebook and I've tried just about every other major brand (Thinkpads, Latitudes, Tecras). The screen housing is equally rigid and does not flex nor distort the screen in any way. The screen bezel is attached firmly to the screen with no gaps that allow dust to build up.

The EliteBook range features HP's 3D DriveGuard hard disk protection system which is essentially an accelerometer embedded on the system board coupled with a hard disk enclosure design that prevents damage to the hard disk in a fall.



### Keyboard and Touchpad

The 6910p has an awesome keyboard, with no flex, quiet keys and adequate travel. It is one of the most ergonomically-comfortable keyboards. HP maintained the same keyboard design and construction in the 6930p. Although the keys are now less clicky than before, I find them as comfortable to use as its predecessor. Many have criticized HP's placement of the Home, Page Up, Page Down and End keys, but I do not find this to be a serious issue at all. In fact, I believe the proper placement of FN and CTRL keys are more important and HP has certainly designed this correctly.



The pointstick is responsive and it works, but it still pales in comparison to those found on Thinkpads mainly because the rubber caps are not as comfortable to use. HP changed the color of the rubber caps from blue to black, making them less distinctive than before. The Synaptics touchpad is very responsive and has excellent texture for comfortable usage. The rubber mouse buttons are a nice touch as they feel much better ergonomically than regular hard plastic buttons.



There are touch sensitive buttons along the top of the keyboard for HP Info centre, Wireless, Presentation, Mute and Volume buttons. Unlike the ones on the previous models, they are always lit which can get a little distracting in the dark.



A new feature adopted from the 2710p tablet PC is the HP NightLight feature, which is similar to Thinkpad's ThinkLight feature. However, HP's NightLight is neatly tucked into the screen bezel when not in use and a simple push of the button pops the bright white LED light out of the bezel to provide adequate keyboard lighting in the dark. The Nightlight is dimmer than the ThinkLight and as a result keyboard illumination is not as good in the dark.



## Display

The nc6400 and 6910p's displays suffered from a slight shimmering issue, but I'm glad to report that this is no longer the case with the 6930p. The matte AUO WXGA+ display is very bright, very clear and has no visible light leakage. Viewing angles are also excellent for a screen of this size. Colors are vivid and it is very bright and evenly-lit despite being a CCFL-backlit display. I really love this beautiful screen.



While I don't recommend the nc6400 nor the 6910p for graphics work, the 6930p certainly has a

screen and graphics card good enough to handle graphics tasks on the go.

## Speakers

The stereo speakers are located on the front of the notebook and like its predecessors, are not symmetrically placed but this has not proven to be an issue in regular usage. They are also loud and clear. Bass is poor as expected as in the majority of business notebooks, so it is not an issue here.



## Webcam and Microphones

HP offers an optional 2.0 mega pixel web cam with this notebook. It is a standard web cam which works well for video conferencing and is noisy in low light conditions.

The business card reader application bundled with the notebook is really cool and actually works, yielding almost accurate results when tested on a standard US/Australian business card (missing a space in job title "SoftwareDeveloper"). The concept is simple and the genius is in the OCR of the software. The application does not work on non-HP devices as it requires a matching camera hardware ID.

There are two microphones, which are located along the antenna cover strips. The placement isn't that great since they are not facing you when the screen is opened and can be slightly less sensitive.

## Performance and Benchmarks

The 6930p is powered by Intel's latest Montevina platform and the T9400 is one of the new 45nm Penryn CPUs with a 1066MHz FSB.

Unfortunately, HP has decided to stick to the older DDR2 for its RAM, hence effectively limiting the capabilities of the platform when other vendors have switched to DDR3 implementations. However, corporate IT departments may appreciate this as DDR3 modules are still more expensive and there should be more spare DDR2 modules available for easy upgrade in most IT departments.

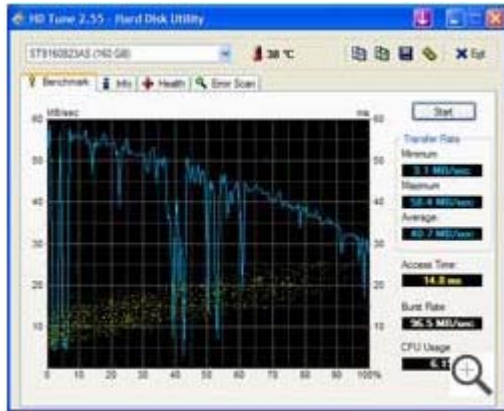
### *wPrime Benchmark*

wPrime is a multi-threaded CPU test that provides a more accurate benchmark for dual-core CPUs. Version 2.0 of the benchmark application is used.



The Seagate 7200rpm drive may not be the latest generation, but it performs adequately as the

HDTune v2.55 benchmarks show.



PCMark05 Score:



The ATI HD3450 graphics card in the 6930p is a pretty capable card, getting a pretty decent benchmark score on the stock HP drivers (ATI v8.479.1). Judging from benchmarks alone, this card is much faster (approximately 5-6 times) than the X1300 found on the nc6400 and it supports DirectX 10.1. The benchmarks are conducted in 1280x800 resolution. As this is a mainstream balanced notebook, HP should offer a hybrid graphics [solution](#) to provide more flexibility and improve battery life in situations when a discrete graphics card isn't required.



## Operating System and Software

HP delivered this notebook with Windows XP SP2 pre-installed (not even SP3!), with a Vista Business COA but no Recovery DVDs nor an option to create one unlike their previous models where they ship with both. It looks like whoever prepared the build image for Windows XP simply forgot to install this as there was no recovery partition on it either. HP has since advised customers to request the DVDs from their technical support, so they are aware of this issue.

There is no bloatware installed, not even a Norton Security Suite. This is pretty much as basic as it gets and it certainly shows when the notebook performs as well as a clean install would on first boot. If you so desire, there is an HP Software Setup utility for you to begin loading bloatware (and some useful apps like Live Messenger, PDF reader and WMP11) on it to your heart's content.

The HP ProtectTools security suite is as good as before, offering a comprehensive set of security solution that other vendors rarely offer for free, namely disk encryption, device access restrictions and biometric identification all using the TPM hardware. There is also a useful BIOS configuration utility that allows one to configure the BIOS settings from Windows. This is definitely one of the most mature enterprise hardware management tools bundled in corporate grade notebooks.

## Battery and Power

The 6930p uses the same 6-cell battery as that found on the nc6400 and 6910p. Although the batteries look similar, there is a 2-3mm difference in width which means you can't use the nc6400 or 6910p's battery in the 6930p. The standard 6-cell battery lasts about 3.5 hours on light to moderate loads using the Portable/Laptop power profile under Windows XP. HP still uses the same proprietary secondary battery connector, so all previous travel and extended batteries which attaches to the bottom of the notebook will still work. HP offers an optional 8-cell travel battery and 12-cell extended life battery.

The included 90W adaptor (65W for Intel integrated graphics models) is the same HP standard AC adaptor. HP is one of the better vendors when it comes to proprietary connectors as they strive to maintain consistency across product life cycles, hence the power connector, docking station connector and battery connectors remain unchanged. There is no need to buy new accessories when you upgrade as they remain compatible.

## Ports and Features

The 6930p includes an array of I/O ports. There are three USB 2.0 ports, a Firewire 1394a port, standard modem and Gigabit Ethernet. The only video out connector is a VGA port. It should be about time HP introduces digital video interfaces on its smaller business notebooks.



HP has finally upgraded the PC slot cards in the 6910p with an ExpressCard 54 slot which was one of my criticisms since the nc6400 days. The integrated memory card reader on the front only reads SD and MMC cards, but it accepts SDHC cards just fine.

Like its predecessors, the extended battery and docking station connector resides on the bottom of the notebook. There are two RAM slots one easily accessible on the bottom and the other underneath the keyboard which requires the removal of the keyboard in order to access it. If a single RAM module is configured during purchase, it will be installed in the slot underneath the keyboard, so there is little need to open up the notebook. Similarly, one can easily upgrade the hard disk, also accessible from the bottom.



HP changed the interface for the modular bay device from the MultiBay II found in the nc6400 and 6910p series to the UpgradeBay, which is essentially a SATA interface. Previous MultiBay devices are no longer compatible and the new bay only supports either a SATA hard disk drive or an optical drive. The new interface supports RAID configurations.

The UpgradeBay is also more difficult to remove than the MultiBay which has a spring loaded mechanism. It requires you to remove a spring loaded screw which holds the device in place and push on a little tab with a pointed device like a screwdriver as it is not spring loaded. It looks like it isn't designed to allow for hotswapping.







## Heat and Noise

After using a Macbook, you'll realize how quiet notebooks can get. The 6930p is certainly not in the extremely quiet category. Under light to moderate use, it is silent, but the fans are still spinning. The fans tend to rev up on higher loads and they are clearly audible. The vents are located on the underside and left side of the notebook.

The notebook is cool to the touch and does not get excessively hot under high loads. Similar to its predecessors, the fans stop spinning or slow down considerably once it is run on battery, hence making the notebook very silent again.

## Warranty and Support

All HP EliteBooks have a 3-year global warranty as standard. This particular configuration has onsite coverage as standard. From my experience, HP's business notebook support is excellent. They respond to an issue within the specified timeframe and provide an excellent online utility which allow customers to submit and track support cases 24/7 remotely. The online ITRC utility is by far the most efficient way to submit and document support cases as it avoids miscommunication over the phone when dealing with overseas support techs. The support reps that I've dealt with are very professional in their conduct and seem knowledgeable about their products.

## Conclusion

The Elitebook 6930p is a very capable, no-nonsense business notebook. HP has listened to feedback from its nc6400 and 6910p notebooks and addressed the problems in the 6930p. HP's Elitebook are excellent well-designed business machine considering it includes HP's excellent 3-year global onsite warranty services as well as build quality, unique materials and a balanced feature set that meet the needs of most corporate users. The 6930p deserves to be on the list for those considering a balanced notebook that means business as it is really that good.

### Pros:

- Solid and durable scratch-resistant construction
- Attractive professional design
- Gorgeous display
- Excellent keyboard
- Cool and relatively quiet
- Excellent card reader software
- Comprehensive built-in security solutions

### Cons:

Annoying bright lights on touch sensitive buttons  
Analog video connector in 2008  
UpgradeBay not modular enough  
No hybrid graphics option  
Dim keyboard light