y: Phillip Grey

Product: Apple eMate 300
Version: Newton OS 2.1e
Manufacturer: Apple Comuter, Inc.
List Price: $799, discounts available for education, etc.
Contact Info: http://www.newton.apple.com/

The first thing anyone is bound to notice about the eMate 300 is the odd-looking shape of the mobile computer. However, the eMate 300 packs more than a green shell, as this review will reveal.

Hardware

The eMate 300, as mentioned above, is a strange sight to behold. Children and adults alike, however, find it attractive and "want one" immediately. With a green-tinted clamshell shape, it certainly isn't your typical Personal Digital Assistant (PDA). It houses a variety of features, listed below.
• ARM 32-bit RISC processor
• 8MB ROM and 3MB RAM (1 DRAM, 2 Flash)
• 480 x 320 pixel LCD with 16-shade grey and backlight
• integrated "almost lifesize" keyboard
• AC Power adapter
• two serial ports (Mac/PC and Newton inter-connect)
• Nickel-metal-hydride (NiMH) battery
• Infrared port and 1 PCMCIA PC Card slot
• Internal RAM/Flash upgrade slot
• Newton OS and software package

s you can see, that's quite a host of features, all packed into this cute 12" x 11.4" bundle.

Realistically, I found the eMate a pleasure to work with. The slightly undersized keyboard was a little difficult to get used to, but I adapted within about four or five hours of use. Children love the keyboard as it fits their hands much better than the regular "adult-sized" keyboards I've no doubt become accustomed to.

The PCMCIA slot is pictured here.

The RAM and ROM are limitations, of course. For example, after loading all of the productivity software I wanted to test, I couldn't install Majhongg (a game) onto the eMate because it was out of storage space. However, one can increase storage space via either the internal RAM/Flash slot or by using a PC Card. The PC card slot, pictured above, accepts low-power 5v PCMCIA PC cards and can be used for a modem, ethernet, extra RAM, or many of the other features already found in PC cards today.

The other hardware aspects of the eMate lived up to or surpassed my expectations. On the keyboard and above the number keys lie a row of "special keys" including scroll, close, dock, undo, power, backlight, and others. These keys greatly aided in my navigation through the Newton OS. An integrated non-slip handle fits hands of all sizes. The total weight of 4 pounds is not a heavy burden, even for the smallest child. The screen is easily read and written on, swiveling a whole 180˚ from the closed position to provide a flat writing surface. The battery lasts up to 24 hours and recharges in 1 to 2 hours. Realistically, it lasted about 20 hours, or 12 with the backlight on. Devices such as a printer are easily connected to the eMate 300. The hardware, as I see it, could not be improved by much. It is a joy to work with.

Software

The eMate 300 tested in this review shipped with Newton Educational OS 2.1e. One thing to bear in mind is that the Newton OS is NOT the MacOS. They're completely different critters. However, I found the Newton OS as easy or easier to use than the MacOS. Children easily adapt to the Newton OS, quickly navigating through folders and applications.

The first time you turn an eMate 300 on, it walks you through an easy, one-time setup procedure that allows you to set your name, address, time, date, password, and other simple things. After that, you're left to explore the simple world of Newton software. Included with the eMate 300 are word processing, spreadsheet, and drawing programs. A graphing calculator, web

browser, address book, note pad, calendar, and other useful applications are also available and included. Another neat feature: closing and opening the lid turns the eMate on and off instantly, saving all work in progress. A user will not be sitting there staring at little extensions marching across the bottom of the screen, that's for sure!

Compatibility is not an issue. It just works. Connecting the eMate 300 to a PC or a Mac is a breeze. Okay, it's a bit harder with a PC (I had to actually read the manual), but overall there's nothing to it. After installing the software that comes on the accompanying CD-ROM, I could install, remove, or back up files and programs. In fact, I wrote this eMate 300 review on the eMate and then transferred the file to DOCMaker on my Mac. Printing is also easy. The eMate 300 is compatible with a variety of MacOS- and Windows-based printers (both PostScript and non-PostScript), including the Apple StyleWriter and other serial, parallel, and network printers. I printed to both a StyleWriter 2400 and a LaserWriter II with no problems whatsoever - they just required a simple change in preferences, and the pages started wheeling out.

The software serves a purpose as well. The eMate is billed to be the sole computer a young student really needs and as an adults' computer accessory. It functions as both. Some children that I gave the eMate to went through "lessons" that I had arranged to test the classroom practicality of the eMate 300, and all children responded with positive results and feedback. The adults, myself included, found the eMate 300 to be a great desktop computer companion. I typed this review on the eMate 300 while riding in the back of a car to a teacher conference. It was difficult only because all of the other adults in the car kept asking to play with it!

The Stylin' Stylus

The stylus, a little pen, is a great feature that I have, up until now, neglected to mention. Why? It deserves a spot of its own. The stylus, in conjunction with the Newton OS, is a great tool. I set the preferences correctly and it recognized my handwriting with very few mistakes (I would estimate 90% accuracy). I added many of the commonly misinterpreted words to the eMate 300's compendium so that it recognized them correctly in the future. The stylus also allowed me advanced editing features. Everything that could be done via the keyboard (and more) could be done with the stylus. I could use it to scroll, for example. If I held the stylus in one place until I heard a certain sound, then moved it over words, graphics, etc., it would select them for me to edit. Scribbling out a word or graphic resulted in a puff of smoke and the disappearance of the scrubbed-out item(s). These are things that don't happen on a desktop computer, and I was pleasantly surprised. The stylus made working with the eMate 300 even easier and more fun.

Extras

When I first read that I would be able to surf the internet on the eMate 300, I thought to myself "yeah, we'll see about that." The eMate 300 surprised me again. I plugged an external 33.6 Global Village fax modem into the serial port on the left-hand side of the eMate 300 and was on the internet in minutes. I also tested it with a 56k PC Card modem. Granted, graphics in 16-shade grey are sometimes a little hard to distinguish, but overall surfing was a pleasant experience. I found the information I needed in as clear a fashion as I would have on my desktop computer — maybe even less so, as animated GIFs weren't supported by the web browser I used :-). Sending and receiving email on the eMate 300 is easy as well. The eMate 300 I tested didn't come with an email client, though I downloaded and installed a beta version of a third-party program from the internet. It worked beautifully.

One last thing I want to mention that everyone should play with is the trash can. When you're in a document, clicking on the send button on-screen (appropriately represented by a little envelope icon) and choosing the "delete" option results in the document being crumpled up and pitched into a trash can, sound effects and all. It's almost worth the price of admission itself!

Summary

The eMate 300 is not a child's toy. It is a powerful companion to a desktop computer — easy, fun, and productive. It is also perfect for the classroom setting, enabling students to communicate ideas in methods previously impossible to obtain. The price tag of $799 may be a sticking point (discounts available for group or educational purposes), but the eMate 300 is a great tool for a lot of people. Besides, your green little friend will certainly garner a lot of envious glances, and that's the real reason anyone buys stuff nowadays, right?

URLs for the info-thirsty:

http://www.newton.apple.com/ - General Newton information, from MessagePad 2000 to eMate 300 to the operating system itself.

http://www.newton.apple.com/product_info/devices/emate300/eMateSolutions.html - eMate 300 programs, hardware, and other devices, gadgets and, well, solutions!

http://www.newton.apple.com/product_info/devices/emate300/eMate300.html - General eMate 300 page with information for you

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