Tadpole No Wimp

Tadpole Technology made its name selling almost indestructible portable workstations. Lately, though, the market and consequently this British firm have fallen on hard times. The Tadpole P1300 is the company's attempt to survive by going mainstream.

The Pentium-based P1300 is built like a tank and feels like it – it weighs a hefty 7.5 pounds. Its magnesium casing is more durable than plastic and designed to dissipate the heat of the processor. Plus, there are impressive features under the hood.

The P1300 is based on Tadpole's Advanced Notebook Architecture format. I like the removable hard disk (available in sizes from 340 Mbytes to 1.2 Gbytes). The SCSI can be swapped out to run the box with different operating systems. The screen is stunning – 800 by 600 pixels in a day when most laptops are still 640 by 480. There's even 16-bit stereo sound.

The Sherman tank of laptops.

The P1300 is also loaded with ports. There's a connector on the back for a mini docking station that gives you a SCSI-2 connector, an external keyboard, and a serial port. The unit features a full-size Lexmark keyboard with excellent feel and an integrated pointing stick. And, of course, there's a 133-MHz Pentium processor driving the bus.

But the P1300 betrays Tadpole's workstation roots. This box is much more comfortable running Solaris or Linux than using Windows 95. The 1.5-hour internal battery charge Tadpole promises is great for Unix, but pretty pathetic for a Windows-based PC. (You can get up to six hours with Tadpole's external battery pack.) That's also why there's no sleep mode: Unix doesn't support it.

I like the P1300. It's a stylish box, and it's just the thing for rough road trips. But not light enough to make its way into my backpack. *– Simson Garfinkel*