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NEO by AlphaSmart Review

(From "Mobile Writers: Do You Really Need a Laptop?"
— By Eldon Sarte, Wordpreneur.com)

About the size of *half* a full laptop — just the keyboard half. It sports a full-size keyboard with an extra row of labeled special function keys, and a small 2"x7" LCD screen that takes up part of the unit's remaining space above the keyboard.

That's it. One unit. And a pretty dang sturdy one at that. Instant on — hit the on/off key and it's ready to go in about a second — makes it great for taking notes or sporadic, often brief, "opportunity" writing sessions. I am, in fact, typing these very words on a USAir flight from Charlotte, North Carolina to Miami, using a NEO on the small tray in front of me. Earlier paragraphs were pumped out literally on my NEO'd lap, waiting for my flight at Charlotte airport's Gate 44.

No problem; I know the NEO'll be up to the task and will easily endure being banged around caseless in my carry-on bag. It's also more than strong enough to get squeezed in and out of the tight and barely adequate gartered pocket of the seat in front of me on the flight. Exactly 14 hours before Charlotte's Gate 44, I flew in to DC's Reagan National from Brussels with — you guessed it — the NEO serving me the same exact trouble-free way on that flight... and the few days prior... not to mention the flight to Brussels to begin with.

The keyboard of this machine is incredible. It's a "real" keyboard in look, feel and sound. My writing zooms right along, as quickly as the words hit my fingertips. No feel compromises or smaller form factor adjustments here; this is the real thing.

Besides the keyboard, another thing you'll probably really love about the NEO is that "power" is about as trouble-free as it's going to get — three (3) penlight batteries (yup, you read that right, penlight, aka AA which stands for, at least to me, "Available Anywhere"). But that's not the half of it. Those three batteries represent — ta da! — *600+ hours* of NEO battery life. Thank the NEO's low power consumption LCD screen and electronic data storage (no hard disk moving parts to eat up precious AA juice). Heck, I haven't worried about my NEO's batteries in weeks.

The last thing I really love about the NEO is something I call a serendipitous feature: Since it isn't a laptop, there's nothing on it that will distract me from the *writing* that I need to do. No Solitaire, Hearts, Internet or any of the other infinite time sucker uppers on the typical PC that tease my short attention span. There are software "applets" you can load onto your NEO, but I've never cared enough to check them out. I got the NEO to *write*, and by jove, that's what I use it for.

At only \$219 direct, I think the NEO is the best and most convenient portable, full-sized keyboard word processing machine for *serious writers* available. AlphaSmart (NEO's maker) has a sure winner here.

Of course, there are a few things I wish the NEO had. Such as very basic Internet connectivity to let writers email or transmit plain text messages/files at the very least. Interestingly enough, I'm not interested in full email or Web capabilities — probably the worst time sink known to 21st century mankind.

Also, I'd probably like to see a larger screen. I think I just edit/review my writing better with one. The current small screen is more than adequate to write with, but maybe an optional larger flat screen attachment that could be affixed to the top of the unit, ala a laptop screen (meaning it would still be portable) would maybe be useful for users who want one and are not unwilling to pay a bit more for it. However, frankly I wouldn't trade away the NEO's bang it around sturdiness for this feature. If it's sturdy vs. larger screen, I'll go with the former any day.

Bottom line: If you're looking for a true writer's portable workhorse word processing machine, this is it boys and

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girls. My laptop's actually been spending a lot of time of late as my dining table "desktop" computer ever since the NEO entered my life, not to mention that I haven't seen nor do I even care to know where my Palm keyboard is (maybe I'll put it up on eBay when I do find it). Don't need a full laptop? Get this. *You'll love it.*

Eldon Sarte is a freelance writer and the editor/publisher of the popular Wordpreneur.com website.

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