

# ACER TRAVELMATE 737 TLV



The Acer notebook is a high-end device and is designed to completely replace a desktop PC. This means you get two big but discrete loudspeakers which, when we listened carefully, we traced to a site under the stylish hump on the lid. This means the TravelMate produces sound for the person or people sitting opposite very well and is therefore ideal for presentations. One feature we liked on the one hand but found irritating on the other is the TV output. This is an SVHS-socket, designed to plug into a modern television or video, except that under Linux it would not work – irritating to say the least.

The notebook's design is truly individual, especially the hump already mentioned which is

located on the back of the 15-inch display. This makes the notebook fairly distinctive. The disk drive is permanently integrated into the notebook and the 8x-DVD-ROM sits in a drive slot and can be exchanged for a second battery, an additional hard drive or a CD-ROM. The facility for running drives externally is not provided with this model.

## Hot air

The cooling technology is of interest. Part of the airflow is conducted to the left lower side of the magnesium housing. This warms the underside very

nically and, therefore, the user's upper thigh. By far the majority of the excess heat is conducted away via ventilation slots under the display hinge which rise fore and aft of the lid.

The keyboard also gets warm although this is mainly in the back left corner. The keyboard has an offset cursor block but unfortunately no separate keys for Home and End – these can only be achieved by a combination of the [Fn] and scroll keys. In place of a mouse, the Acer TravelMate provides a Touchpad with two keys and a scrolling rocker. Installed as IntelliMouse (IMPS/2) the mouse went a little bananas in use so we returned to the PS/2-emulation, leaving the rocker pad unused.

## Irda

The infrared port is, as with the Fujitsu-Siemens Lifebook, placed handily on the side of the unit. It was installed under Linux after activating `CONFIG_SERIAL_DETECT` and recompiling the kernel. This was done without a hitch. Together with the Nokia 6210 it provided our first mobile Internet experience.

## Conservative equipment

Elsewhere the hardware supplied is fairly conservative. The integrated ATI Rage Mobility with 8 Mb of memory is pretty popular among other notebook manufacturers and was installed within YaST2 easily, as was the sound card ESS-1969 Solo-1. With the latter you should turn down the volume using the rotary wheel – the internal microphone is very close to the loudspeakers and produced severe feedback at the upper settings.

Like the Compaq, the TravelMate 737TLV Acer has both an Ethernet card (with an Intel Ether Express Pro 100 chip) and a Lucent LT winmodem, both on a single plug-in card. While the Ethernet card was detected and installed automatically, there is some manual work necessary with the winmodem.

## Quick out

The 17 Gb hard drive sits behind the cover in the middle of the front side and can be removed by loosening a screw. The hard drive slot can only take disks up to 12 mm thick. Smaller models can be fixed into place using the useful holding frames.

## Secretive keys

One big surprise came about when we tried a typical Linux keyboard combination – when changing from the X-console to the text console with [Ctrl]+[Alt]+[F4], the computer beeped once and the screen went dark. By chance, we saw after a few seconds that the 'Zz'-symbol had lit. There was no room for doubt – the TravelMate had fallen asleep!

The solution was revealed by the Toshiba notebooks where one can set, in the BIOS, whether on external keyboards the function key [Fn] should be

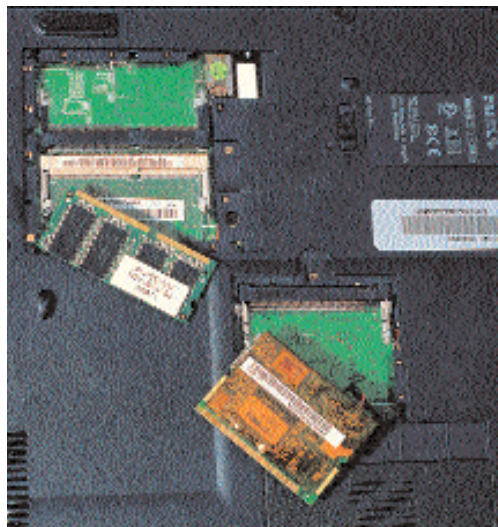
emulated by the combination of [Ctrl]+[Alt]. In the Acer TravelMate the sleep-function is activated when [Fn]+[F4] is pressed so we sent the device to sleep as the result of function key emulation. However, with the Acer this cannot be switched off in the BIOS.

There is a workaround, however. By pressing [Ctrl]+[Alt]+[F4] and then [F4] again you will finally end up where you want to be. No dangerous situations can arise as the result of using [Ctrl]+[Alt] since only the keys [F1], [F2], [F4] and [F5] are affected. Perhaps Acer takes care of the Linux users and implements a toggle function for the [Fn] key emulation in their next BIOS update.

All of which leaves the CardBus interface which has an O2 Micro 6832 controller. It initialised the Type III PCMCIA hard drive in two seconds and is thus one of the fastest tested here. But the slots, covered with spring shutters, unfortunately lie in the immediate vicinity of the side air outlet. At a temperature of almost 50 degrees at full load it gets very hot for the cards, which are only specified to work at temperatures of up to 55 degrees. Together with the heat the many expansion cards create on top of that, your PC Card devices might run the risk of getting damaged on hot Summer days.

## Conclusion

The Acer TravelMate 737 TLV was the notebook in this test where Linux worked best on. Apart from the SVHS output and the problems with the mouse not working in IntelliMouse mode, the TravelMate was completely without problems – Linux support for its hardware is already out there. We particularly liked the practical volume control wheel, the clever heat conduction and not least the lowest noise level. It is a shame that Acer did not seize this opportunity and offer the TravelMate with pre-installed Linux – we feel that this is the ideal Linux notebook. ■



Modem and network sit on a separate card, bottom left the two slots for commercially-available SD-RAM-soDIMMs can be seen.

### Acer TravelMate 737TLV

(+)	Hardware supported "out of the box"
(+)	very quiet
(+)	large display
(-)	TV-output not activated
(-)	CardBus-Slots too hot