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## Tablet PCs: HP Compaq Tablet PC TC1000

Slate with detachable [keyboard](#) and dock offers unmatched flexibility  
(December 2002 issue)

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Of all the [Tablet PCs](#) in this lineup, the HP Compaq TC1000 may be the most innovative and, in several ways, the most daring. Unlike any other product previewed here, the TC100 is neither a "pure" slate nor a notebook convertible. It is something unique, closer to a slate than a notebook, but still offering more notebook functionality than any other slate with an add-on keyboard. The TC1000 is also completely different from the prototype HP (then still Compaq) showed over the past year, the one that looked like a giant iPAQ Pocket PC. Compaq had always said that prototype was just that, something to fuel the imagination and perhaps build on the iPAQ's popularity and design recognition.

So what is the TC1000? It is a very compact slate computer with a keyboard that attaches to the slate to provide notebook functionality without actually making the TC1000 a notebook. By itself, the TC1000 has a footprint of just 10.8 x 8.5 inches, almost as small as the diminutive Acer TravelMate. However, being a slate, the TC1000 is thinner than the Acer by three tenths of an inch (0.8 vs. 1.1 inches) and lighter, too (3.0 vs. 3.2 pounds). In tablet mode, the TC1000 is thus an ultra-compact, sleek and elegant slate with that's big enough to let you hold it in your hands without obscuring the 10.4-inch display, but small enough to look tight and neat and efficient.

The big difference between the Compaq and any other product in this lineup is the keyboard and the way it is implemented. Having the exact same footprint as the slate part, the keyboard snaps onto the bottom edge of the TC1000. It contains a swivel mechanism that lets you either lay the keyboard flat against the backside of the slate, or have the slate part be on top so that the combo can be used just like a notebook. The swivel is engineered so that the bottom hinge is not at the end of the keyboard where it would be in a standard notebook, but just behind the keys, about 40% away from the back edge of the keyboard. This means that the combo sits securely and is never in danger of tipping over, despite the light weight of the keyboard part. Very, very clever. The arrangement also means you can use the keyboard as a stand when you're running presentations on the display. The one thing I had to get used to is that I instinctively tried to twist the keyboard over the display side of the slate as if it were a standard notebook, when in fact it folds down over the backside. I would have preferred that transformation actually, but it would have precluded the clever mid-mounting of the hinge, so it was a design decision I can live with. I also liked the fact that the keyboard securely fastens to the backside of the TC1000 when you use it as a slate. No rattling there.



The keyboard itself has its pros and cons. On the plus side, apart from being an ingenious solution, it feels good and

provides good tactile feedback. It also has a pointing stick navigation knob that I much prefer to any touchpad. And there are the traditional left and right mouse-click tabs. On the minus side, the design does not allow for a wrist rest and, as a non-touch typist who needs to look at the keyboard, I found the thick white numeric keypad markings too prominent, making the keys look cluttered. Also, while the ever-important QWERTY part of the keyboard is 95%-scale, it could easily have been made a much more satisfying full size by reducing the width of ancillary keys--a common sin committed by Asian keyboard designers.



Innovative overall design, however, is not the only area that separates the TC1000 from the crowd. Alone among this initial lineup of Tablet PCs, HP chose a Transmeta processor and the FinePoint digitizer. The 1GHz Crusoe TM5800 "code morphing" chip goes about its business in an entirely different way than the competition from Intel and AMD. In essence, it uses a hardware/software approach to reduce the number of steps required to get the work done, thus also reducing transistors, power, and heat. Transmeta and its supporters claim that this approach results in real world performance similar to that of Intel processors, but with significantly longer battery life. In our hands-on, the TC1000 felt quick and definitely not slower than the Intel-powered competition. And Hewlett Packard does claim over five hours of typical use (with wireless off).

The second difference is the FinePoint digitizer instead of the Wacom system used by the others. FinePoint supporters claim significantly less noise and more accurate cursor control, especially along the edge of the display. On the other hand, the FinePoint pen requires its own AAAA battery which lasts over a year even when the computer is used a full shift every day. The FinePoint pen is thicker than the Wacom pens, but I definitely liked the very steady "feel" of the pen/digitizer combo. Another neat thing is a sheet of tempered glass that covers both the digitizer and the bezel. On the connectivity and onboard peripheral front, HP managed to pack an amazing amount of functionality into a slate as small and light as this one. A flap on the top (or left if used in landscape mode) covers two USB ports, LAN and modem ports, and a standard VGA connector for an external monitor. Next to that are, stacked on top of one another, a Type II PC Card slot and a Type II/III CF card slot. Beside that is the bay for the pen. The CF slot dummy insert is actually part of the edge design, so make sure you don't misplace it when using a CF card. Along the right top there is the power switch with a built-in power/standby light, an "Email launch" button, an Escape and a Tab button, a "Q menu" button that brings up a very handy on-screen master configuration utility, and a Pocket PC-style jog dial. Hidden between the Tab and Escape keys is the Ctl/Alt/Del "security button" that can only be triggered with a paper clip or something similar. Along the bottom there is a microphone jack and both a stereo-out and a headphone jack. Absent are IR and Firewire. I should mention that HP also implemented three silk-screened touch areas that launch the Input Panel, Journal, and rotate the display.

For those who intend to use the TC1000 as a desktop replacement at least part of the time, Compaq offers a heavy docking station that adds your choice of optical drive plus an additional three USB ports, and its own LAN, VGA and audio ports. The dock can accommodate the TC1000 both with and without its keyboard attached to it. If the dock is too much and all you need is an optional external MultiBay that can accommodate a variety of drives.



Overall, it's hard not to be impressed with this machine. For once, a big company went all out with a new design and different technologies instead of simply playing it safe. Despite the Acer and the Toshiba's versatile convertible hinge designs, the TC1000 is easily the most innovative design of the bunch and it offers unmatched flexibility. In addition, it looks great and it works well, and it comes from one of the biggest computer companies in the world. The various hinges and connections don't always twist and turn the way I would have expected (and wanted), but the TC1000 is a very compelling design. Hewlett Packard deserves a big pat on its corporate back. -

HP/Compaq: [www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com) Hewlett Packard: [www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com) -

- [Conrad H. Blickenstorfer](#)

<b>Type</b>	Slate with detachable keyboard that rotates and folds flat onto back
<b>Processor</b>	1.0GHz Transmeta Crusoe TM5800
<b>OS</b>	Windows XP <a href="#">Tablet PC</a> Edition
<b>Memory</b>	256MB PC133 expandable to 768MB via one expansion slot
<b>Display</b>	10.4" SVGA TFT
<b>Digitizer/Pens</b>	FinePoint/1
<b>Keyboard</b>	95%-scale, 83-keys
<b>Storage</b>	Shock mounted 30/40/60 GB hard disk * CD-ROM drive in optional dock
<b>Size</b>	10.8" x 8.5" x 0.8"

<b>Weight</b>	
<b>Power</b>	Lithium-Ion, 40WHr ("over 5 hours")
<b>Communication</b>	10/100base-T, 56K V.92 Modem, internal 802.11b wireless LAN radio (opt.)
<b>Interface</b>	2 USB 2.0, audio/mic, RJ-11, RJ-45, VGA, 1 PC Card Type II, 1 CF Card Type II/III
<b>Options</b>	Multi-Bay, PC Dock, Carry Cases
<b>Price</b>	From US\$1,699
<b>Contact</b>	Hewlett Packard <a href="http://www.hp.com">www.hp.com</a>