Roku Netflix Player Offers Simple Streaming

ON-DEMAND VIDEO is not new, and neither is delivering video to your television via the Internet. But Roku’s $100 Netflix Player unites those two ideas in one device that streams standard-definition video to your TV.

Setup went smoothly. The Netflix Player sits between your TV and your Internet connection (wired or wireless). To activate the player, I had to log in to my Netflix account on my PC (you must subscribe to access movies) and enter the provided activation code.

Roku says that for simplicity’s sake the Netflix Player lets you browse titles only in your Netflix Instant Queue. (Netflix offers over 10,000 movies and television shows for immediate viewing.)

Navigating through my Instant Queue choices was easy: The left-right directional arrows on the included remote let me scroll quickly. Roku recommends having at least a 1.5-mbps connection to ensure image quality.

ROKU’S NETFLIX PLAYER will fit in nicely with the other gadgets in your living room.

It looked mediocre to me, but not much worse than my digital cable at home.

One neat addition: Roku and Netflix developed a way to mimic fast-forwarding and chapter marks on a DVD. Netflix took still frames every 10 seconds of every video it has; as I fast-forwarded through a film, I could swiftly scan frames to find a desired spot.

As is, the Roku Netflix Player may be a great device for a living room, den, or bedroom—if you already subscribe to Netflix. If Roku can add a few more tricks to the player, the device’s usefulness will increase manifold.

—Melissa J. Perenson

Asus’s Eee PC Mini-Notebook Adds Multitouch Pad

LATE LAST YEAR, Asus shook up the mini-notebook category with the small (8.9 by 6.5 by 1.4 inches), light (2 pounds), and affordable ($399) Linux-based Eee PC 4G. Since that time, we’ve seen a refreshed model that offers Windows XP (the Eee PC 4G XP). And now, we have the Eee PC 900.

The latest version introduces a large, crisp 1024-by-600-pixel display without adding much to the device’s overall size—and it’s one of the first Windows laptops to have a multitouch pad. Though the latest Eee remains saddled with a miniature keyboard suitable for a hobbit to type on, the small touchpad is simple and very effective.

You move two fingers downward to scroll a window; you spread two fingers apart to zoom in; or you scrunch them together to zoom out. If those motions sound familiar, it’s because various Apple products, like the iPhone, incorporate them.

Inside the Eee PC 900 are a 900-MHz Intel CPU and a 4GB internal hard drive (you also get an 8GB SD Card). The hard-drive space was too meager for our lab to drop in our WorldBench 6 test suite to evaluate the unit’s performance. Informally, I gauged the PC’s boot and program startup times; I found that both were a hair faster than on the 4G model running XP—not a surprising result, given that the new model carries 1GB of DDR2 RAM, versus its predecessor’s 512MB.

Though I dig the new touchpad and the larger display, the Eee PC 900 isn’t a must-buy laptop—at least not at its $549 asking price. The Eee PC 900 is still a good deal, but the HP 2133 (with models selling for between $500 and $750) looks great in comparison.

—Darren Gladstone

Eee PC 900 | Asus

Asus delivers a bargain-basement laptop with a tiny keyboard but a usable multitouch pad. List: $549

find.pcworld.com/60956

83

VERY GOOD

Netflix Player | Roku

A worthy companion if you already have a Netflix account. List: $100

find.pcworld.com/60955

71

GOOD

Eee PC 900 | Asus